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written by: **Jennifer Wheatley**

Lauren Nash, a member of the session (leadership council) at First Presbyterian Church in Paris, also serves as chair of the Mission/Outreach Committee. She sent an email to the congregation earlier this year announcing that the church would be participating in Shepherd's Table, which began at the Huntingdon Presbyterian Church, where they served meals "as a way to bring connection, love and fellowship with people in their community." She also said "Serving God is one of the most important principles of the Christian faith....He calls us His hands and feet in a hurting world and He call us to DO SOMETHING."

Alsey Wheatley, a church member who studied at the Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in Boston, Massachusetts, and is now a stay at home mom in Big Sandy, volunteered to head up the kitchen staff. The volunteer crew, which included Betsy Callicott, Linda Johnsonius, Jim and Pat Ross, Tedra Gee, Reverend Tommy and Christianne Taylor, John Wambles, Tony Wheatley and Andrew

Wheatley, cooked and served the congregation a drive-thru only meal due to Covid restrictions. The rehearsal night included pouring rain, but over 40 people, including the downtown Paris firefighters, enjoyed a homemade meal.

The group brainstormed after the meal and figured out how to keep food hot and still serve each car as it arrived, without knowing if the request would be for one meal or five. The answer was a big cooler on the street that stores nine meals, loaned to the project by the Rosses. (Jim and Pat Ross are long-time Boy Scout leaders. They know a thing or two about feeding people.) The volunteers devised a cell phone relay system to keep everyone aware of waiting cars. Inside the kitchen, the process of wrapping desserts, keeping leaky juices to a minimum and serving from a series of crock pots was perfected. Lauren sent out an email summing up the evening, saying "love was shown, shared and sent out to others."

The first Thursday in May was the official debut of the mission in Paris. There was no rain. Cooking times, logistics and a prep staff with multiple tasks contributed to a smooth process. Alsey's former employer, Cindy Snyder, and co-worker, Becky Page, came to the kitchen and helped assemble lasagna for fifty. Alsey had made her own pasta, cheese and sauce to create the main course. She used a semolina flour that she likes to make the pasta and made sure there was some spinach in the meat sauce, just to sneak in a little more goodness. There were also roasted vegetables, garlic bread and homemade cookies packed into each plate and then wrapped again. The young chef is committed to serving quality food to anyone who wants to enjoy it. She is also serious about using her craft to serve people and was adamant that there be no restrictions as to the recipients. A young family just too tired to cook is just as welcome as someone who needs a hot meal and does not have the means to prepare one.

The meal was free to anyone who drove or walked by to pick it up. Each serving was relayed from kitchen to car by a team of volunteers that included John Wambles, our official curbside greeter, and Lauren Nash, along with Tedra Gee, Mitzi Parrish, Reverend Tommy Taylor, Tony Wheatley and Andrew Wheatley. Pat Ross donated dessert.

Special helpers were Claire Nash, 4, and Will Wheatley, 2, because every big project needs a couple of pre-schoolers to keep all of the adults focused. Claire loved running the wrapped plates outside through the playground. Will just loved the playground.

Reverend Taylor made special deliveries to the medical staff at the Blood Mobile parked at First United Methodist Church. A friend of Shepherd's Kitchen made a donation and then delivered five plates to friends in her neighborhood as a gesture of kindness. A second trip to the Paris Fire Department was also well received.

The process will be repeated the first Thursday of every month, 4:30 – 6:30 pm, or until the food runs out. Community donations helped fund the initial outings for Shepherd's Table and support is always welcome. Stop by to enjoy a meal. Make a donation if you can. Checks can be mailed to First Presbyterian Church, 105 South Market, Paris, Tennessee, 38242.

Lauren's message to the congregation applies to the community too, when she said "Thank you for your support, prayers and help as we get this mission of love started!"

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# Stewart County CASA

## *A Shelter in the Storm*



written by: **Bonnie Lill**

Jesus said, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me..." Luke 8:48a.

Which child was He talking about?

Answer: All children. And especially those caught up in abuse or neglect.

Thankfully, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Stewart County is making rapid inroads on that Biblical mandate, much to the relief of Stewart County Juvenile Court Judge Andy Brigham.

"These cases are so heartbreaking and so trying that to have another person involved with the child's interests in the forefront is invaluable," Brigham wrote in a Facebook comment for Volunteer Appreciation Week posted by Sydney Myers, Volunteer and Development Coordinator for CASA of Stewart County.

### *What is a CASA?*

No, it is not a Spanish word for house, at least not in this instance, although it does connote shelter of sorts.

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A Court Appointed Special Advocate is an individual appointed by the Juvenile Court in some cases where the children are in foster care, whose role is to gather information and make recommendations to the court that are in the best interests of the child, keeping the child's personal wishes in mind.

CASAs are volunteers from within the community. They are over 18 years of age, may be male or female; and they come from any walk of life. They undergo extensive training and background checks and have continuing education each year they serve.

Most of all, CASAs have a heart for children.

Myers tries to get a good fit for which CASA should be assigned to which child. For example, if the case involves medical issues, a CASA with experience in that field is generally assigned.

Some CASAs are more comfortable with teens; others prefer working with small children. That is all taken into account. Each CASA's background is also considered so they might not demonstrate an inadvertent bias in the case.

CASAs are not there to take sides with either the court or the family; they are simply there to advocate for the child and what is best for him or her.

In court, CASAs have "standing;" that is, they are listened

to with the same level of authority as are the parents and lawyers.

## *Why have CASAs?*

The Juvenile Court Judge assigns a CASA when he or she wants another set of eyes on the case.

In the Facebook post mentioned earlier, Brigham wrote, "So often the court is unsure of the correct path to take. CASA's role is to assist in guiding the case to a successful conclusion."

"Child welfare litigation is incredibly important; it is therefore equally important for the judicial result to be the best it can be."

A good result is simply what is best for the child.



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CASA volunteers insure that the process itself is also good for the child.

“We want to be the constant in the child’s life,” said CASA Board Chairman Mary Lou Easter, who has a master’s degree in social work and who worked with Depart-

ment of Children’s Services (DCS) in Indiana for 15 years. “DCS caseworkers can change, but once a CASA is assigned, he or she follows it through until the end,” Easter said. Some cases carry on for more than a year, so stability is crucial for the well-being of the child.

Easter added that each trained volunteer, after he or she is sworn in, signs a one-year agreement, in order to facilitate this continuity.

The procedure is the same regardless of how far away the child is physically residing.

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## The Court Report

Central to the program is the CASA court report, a comprehensive overview of everything about the case, including what the child feels about it.

“Judge Brigham takes them seriously,” said Myers, who has a bachelor’s degree in social work.

In order to pull the report together, CASAs conduct a “fact-finding mission” for each case. They may receive medical reports and may talk to anyone who might have a bearing on the case: parents, siblings, other relatives, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, doctors, counselors, teachers, pastors – in short, anyone who might have been significant in this child’s life.

It is different than a police investigation in that the CASA simply listens to everyone; he or she does not assign blame or develop a theory about the case. The CASA simply pulls it all together and “tells it like it is,” including the child’s feelings.

Of course, it is easier to determine the child’s feelings when they can tell you what they think, so the child’s age is also a factor in the report.

## Funding

Currently, Stewart County has six CASAs, with five others completing training and a third training to begin June 8.

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As with so many other things in Stewart County, good volunteers are willing to step up to the plate.

The main issue is funding.

By definition, volunteers are unpaid, but office space and utilities and the Coordinator position require underwriting, as do liability insurance, taxes, and myriad memberships in which CASA of Stewart County is obliged to belong.

CASA of Stewart County is under the auspices of CASA of Dickson County, which has been very supportive and instrumental in helping give Stewart County a leg up, but still, \$10,000 was required to be raised to cover expenses before a grant could be awarded.

The grant doesn't cover all expenses, and fundraisers are in the works.

Stay tuned...

## History and future

Judge Brigham has wanted a CASA team for over a decade, since he took office.

The idea really took hold in the last few years, coming to fruition in June of 2019. Myers, who had been on the board, was hired as coordinator in September of 2019, and she began organizing and recruiting in October of that year.

The first volunteers completed training in January of 2020 – and then a couple months later, the pandemic struck.

Not to be deterred, the group began accepting cases, and continued doing so, throughout the pandemic.

“They found ways to make it work,” said Easter, who added that learning Zoom and Facetime-type technology really helped.



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Judge Brigham is thoroughly pleased with how the program is working out.

"CASA volunteers have already proven that they are up to the job, that they are involved only for the child's sake," he posted. "I stand back in deep appreciation, and gratitude, of the volunteers' willingness to step into the breach for a child. I am beyond excited to have CASA on board for our children's sake."

Myers is equally passionate about the program.

"I like to feel like I am making a difference in the future of Stewart County," she said. "I feel like the moment I stop caring is the moment I should quit. It can be tough, but it's also a meaningful and rewarding job."

*Want to know more?*

CASA of Stewart County is on Facebook – look them up!

Board members include Easter, Daniel Perigo, Laurisa Anglin, Karen Bumpus, Gwynn Jones, David Cheatham, Eric Watkins, and Aubrea Crockarell. Myers is the Volunteer Coordinator.

If you are interested in finding out more about being a CASA, contact Myers via Facebook, or call her at 502-396-1578.



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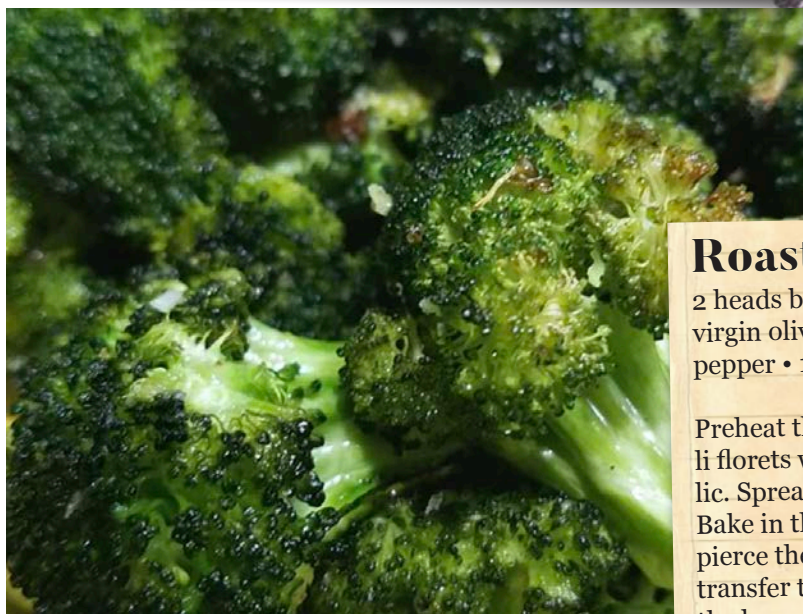
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# Down Home Cooking Recipes

## Country Ribs

2 1/2 pounds pork spareribs • 2 (18 ounce) bottles barbecue sauce • 1 onion, quartered • 1 teaspoon salt • 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

Place spareribs in a large stock pot with barbecue sauce, onion, salt, and pepper. Pour in enough water to cover. Bring to a low boil, and cook approximately 40 minutes. Preheat grill for high heat. Lightly oil grate. Remove spareribs from the stock pot, and place on the prepared grill. Use the barbecue sauce in the saucepan to baste ribs while cooking. Grill ribs, basting and turning frequently, for 20 minutes, or until nicely browned.



## Roasted Garlic Lemon Broccoli

2 heads broccoli, separated into florets • 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil • 1 teaspoon sea salt • 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper • 1 clove garlic, minced • 1/2 teaspoon lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. In a large bowl, toss broccoli florets with the extra virgin olive oil, sea salt, pepper and garlic. Spread the broccoli out in an even layer on a baking sheet. Bake in the preheated oven until florets are tender enough to pierce the stems with a fork, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove and transfer to a serving platter. Squeeze lemon juice liberally over the broccoli before serving for a refreshing, tangy finish.

## Grilled Bacon Jalapeño Wraps

6 fresh jalapeño peppers, halved lengthwise and seeded • 1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese • 12 slices bacon

Preheat an outdoor grill for high heat. Spread cream cheese to fill jalapeño halves. Wrap with bacon. Secure with a toothpick. Place on the grill, and cook until bacon is crispy.



## Georgia Peach Ice Cream

2 1/2 pounds fresh peaches - peeled, pitted and chopped • 1/2 cup white sugar • 1 pint half-and-half cream • 1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk • 1 (12 fluid ounce) can evaporated milk • 1 teaspoon vanilla extract • 2 cups whole milk, or as needed

Puree peaches with the sugar and half-and-half in batches in a blender or food processor. In a gallon ice cream freezer container, mix together the peach mixture, sweetened condensed milk, evaporated milk, and vanilla. Pour in enough whole milk to fill the container to the fill line, about 2 cups. Follow the manufacturer's instructions to freeze the ice cream.



## Cucumber Sandwich

2 tablespoons cream cheese, softened • 6 slices cucumber • 2 tablespoons alfalfa sprouts • 1 teaspoon olive oil • 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar • 1 tomato, sliced • 1 leaf lettuce • 1 ounce pepperoncini, sliced • 1/2 avocado, mashed

Spread each slice of bread with 1 tablespoon cream cheese. On one slice of bread, arrange cucumber slices in a single layer. Cover with sprouts, then sprinkle with oil and vinegar. Layer tomato slices, lettuce, and pepperoncini. Spread other slice of bread with mashed avocado. Close sandwich and serve immediately.

## Lemon Lush

1 cup butter, softened • 2 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese • 1 cup white sugar • 2 (3.4 ounce) packages instant lemon pudding mix • 3 1/2 cups milk • 1 (12 ounce) container frozen whipped topping, thawed

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a medium bowl, combine the flour and butter using a pastry cutter until a ball forms. Press into the bottom of a 9x13 inch baking dish. Bake for 25 minutes in the preheated oven, or until lightly golden. Remove from oven and allow to cool completely. In a medium bowl, beat the cream cheese and sugar together until smooth and well blended. Spread evenly over the cooled crust. In another bowl, whisk together the lemon pudding mix and milk for 3 to 5 minutes. Spread over the cream cheese layer. Chill until set, then top with whipped topping.



## Watermelon Lemonade Slush

1 cup cubed seeded watermelon • 1 1/4 cups water • 3 tablespoons sweetened strawberry lemonade drink mix

Place the watermelon pieces onto a plastic-wrapped baking sheet, and freeze until solid, about 45 minutes. Lace the frozen watermelon, water, and strawberry lemonade drink mix in a blender; blend until slushy.

# Nothing Feeds FAMILY TIME Like HOMEMADE ICE CREAM

written by: Alsey Gwynn Wheatley

My sister and I were rambunctious children. During the school year we were well occupied with our lessons, and lining up, and recess. But come summer break and the suspension of all those distractions, and we were young and bored enough to get into all sorts of trouble. My mother's job and, later, her post-grad degree program didn't stop just because the two of us were home from school. My sister and I were too young to be left entirely to our own devices, and so our grandma volunteered to look after us.

The two of us knew the rules at our grandma's house. There was to be no wastefulness - you ate the whole orange if you peeled it, didn't dilly-dally in the shower and run up the water bill, closed the door firmly when you went outside to play. Beyond that we had the run of the house, backyard, and cul-de-sac, always provided we didn't ride our bikes down the busy street a few blocks over with the neighbor boys.

Grandma watched her soaps in the mornings, and if my sister and I hadn't caused too much of

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a ruckus by the time they were finished then we would often do some sort of activity after lunch. Grandma would take us to the bowling alley or skating rink to wile away our afternoons and work out enough of our energy to make bedtime easier on our mom. However, our favorite thing to do was go to the park.

It wasn't an especially grand park. The playground equipment wasn't new for all that it was well used. One slide that I remember in particular was made of metal and burned the back of my



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thighs more than once when I was too careless to go down without remembering to not let my skin touch it. There were brambles in the grass, little ones that would cling to your socks if you ran through them and were devilish to pluck out of your palms and knees. My mother called them 'stickers' and to this day I have no idea what their proper name is, but they live in every patch of Texas grass I ever stepped on as a child. The merry-go-round creaked and the water fountains were rusted, but it was our favorite outing for a reason; it always ended with a stop for ice cream.

My major downfall was always in selecting my flavor. It was an extremely serious endeavor for ten-year-old me to pick between cookie dough and cookies 'n cream. I know I exasperated my sister as I stood there waffling while she waited to get her rainbow sherbert. These days instead of going for ice cream I tend to make it. Although it's not easier than going down to the store for a pint of Ben and Jerry's or pulling through the Dairy Delight, it gives me all the control over my flavors and mix-ins that a fancy ice cream shop does.

It's certainly not a simple process, but it's a very easy one to pull off with the right equipment. Some sort of churner is of course required to whip air into the frozen ice cream base, and you'll probably want a container to put the finished product in. For the base itself all you'll need is a large pot, a bowl, whisk, thermometer, and a fine mesh strainer. Beyond that, there is only one real secret to great homemade ice cream; eggs. More specifically, it's the egg yolks. They add a richness that is simply unachievable without them, and although it will feel like a lot when you read it the following recipe would be worthless without them..

#### Ingredients:

- 1 pint heavy cream
- 1 pint whole milk
- 1 ½ tsp vanilla extract
- A pinch of salt
- 8oz or 1 lg cup of sugar
- 14 egg yolks

Combine the first four ingredients in a pot and heat them to 175 degrees Fahrenheit. In a separate container or the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the last two ingredients and whip until light and thick as mayonnaise, around five to eight minutes. Temper the hot cream into the egg mixture and return to the stove. Heat the whole thing slowly back up to 175 degrees Fahrenheit, being very careful to stir constantly so that the eggs don't curdle. Strain through a fine mesh sieve into a convenient pouring device and let cool before churning.



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written by: Lydia Perts • forward by: John Wambles

# A YOUNG WOMAN'S Imagination EARNS HER THE TOP PRIZE

Er blickte nieder auf ihren Fuß und sah, wie das Blut aus dem Schuh quoll und an den weißen Strümpfen ganz rot heraufgestiegen war. Da wendete er sein Pferd und brachte die falsche Braut wieder nach

en und wurden bleich vor Arger: er aber nahm Aschenputtel aufs Pferd und ritt mit ihm fort. Als sie an dem Haselbäumchen vorbeikamen, riefen die zwei weißen Täubchen

*Alive Magazine was fortunate to be a part of this year's Short Story Writing Contest sponsored by the Paris – Henry County Arts Council. It was encouraging to see the overwhelming response they received. The entries were as eclectic as each of the writer's themselves. Alive Magazine was proud to sponsor a prize for the winner and even more proud to share her work with you in this issue.*

## PROUDLY PRESENTING: "Julia's Book"

The days are cold, but the nights are freezing at a concentration camp called Ravensbruck. I snuggle as close as I possibly can to my Mother for warmth. On my other side my younger sister Hanna moves closer to me. I arrived here at Ravensbruck with seven family members -- three aunts, two sisters, a cousin and my mother -- now, my mother, sister and I are the only ones left. My father and my brother Leon could be any-

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where. . . we were separated long before I arrived at Ravensbruck. I hope they're somewhere better than here. My aunt Helena, her daughter Emilia, and my sister Elena were transferred somewhere else shortly after arriving here. I can only pray that they're alive. My aunts Anna and Izabella are dead.

I've been here for almost a year now. It's been a year since I last saw my father and brother. A year since I last saw my home in Poland. A year since I was allowed to live like an actual human. And it's been nine months since I received my book.

It was May in 1942. The weather was lovely but after three months in Ravensbruck I barely cared or noticed. I wanted to die. I couldn't believe the injustice that was taking place in our world. How can humans treat other humans like animals? Like nothing? I was starting to give up. My aunt, cousin, and sister had already left and I was starting to let go of life. I might never see them again. That night, though, a stranger came up to me in the washroom and silently gave me some-

thing hard. I hid it in my dress as best I could. It's a miracle no one heard my heart beating as I walked as calmly as I could to my bunk. When I was sure everyone was asleep I looked at what she gave me. It was a book! The title and the whole book was in German. I was able to make out the title:

German Fairy Tales.

When I was younger, each of us children studied a foreign language. Elena chose French, Leon chose English and Hanna and I chose German. We had made plans to visit Germany together when we grew up. I don't think either of us wants to any-more.

Over the past few months, I read the book whenever I could. I was able to get by with the little German I had studied.

I'm almost done with it now. I'm on the last story, which is Cinderella. I haven't told Mother about the book. She has been through so much and I



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don't want to worry her. Getting caught with a book is something that could get you sent to the punishment block. Or killed, if the officers are having a bad day. I told Hanna, though. We've always been the closest. I suggested that we read it together but she said no. She said we were less likely to get caught if we read it separately. So when I finish it, Hanna will be able to escape into the stories too.

I jolt awake to the blaring siren. We're provided very little time to use the bathroom and eat before we are forced to stand in the cold for roll call. We can't talk or sit during the endless amount of time we're forced to stand here. My whole body is numb by the time roll call is done.

Today I'm assigned to retrieve from their bunks those who died during the night, which is a horrible, unimaginable, scarred-for-life sort of task. The first time I did this, it took getting whipped for me to persevere through the job. Over time though, it has gotten not easier. Not bearable. Just less unbearable. The trick is to not look at



who you're taking away, and to always keep your mind blank. Or, if you're me, full. Full of stories. Full of fantasy. When I get out of here and graduate from highschool, I'm going to start writing. I'm going to write fantasy books with as little reality as possible.

Whenever life here is unbearable I go to my head. I go to all the fairy tales from my book. I go to my own imagined worlds.

It's the closest I have gotten to escaping.

"Julia?" Hanna asks one night, pulling me out of Cinderella. I've gotten better at reading German. Quicker, too. I just have a few pages left.

"What?" I close the book. She sounds worried.

"I think mother is sick," she says, barely audible.

"What? Are you sure?"

"No. I don't know, Julia . . . she just seems strange. She keeps coughing but she tries to keep it quiet all the time. And she's tired all the time too. I asked if she was ok, and she just said she was fine and then kept working on the soldiers'

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socks. She wouldn't look me in the eyes, Julia."

Sick. No. No no no. She can't be sick. I've already lost too many people, I can't lose her too.

"When did you notice?" I ask hoarsely.

"I don't know." She starts to cry softly. "At first I thought it was a cold or she was just tired. I mean, everyone's tired. But a few days ago she just kept coughing and coughing. I wasn't sure if she would stop. And she's hiding something, Julia. I-I don't want her to die."

"She's not going to die," I say. But who am I to decide.

The days pass and mother does not improve. I can clearly see the

signs of disease now. Typhus or tuberculosis. Maybe pneumonia. I don't know much about diseases. What I do know is that she's sick. And she may not get better. I feel so utterly helpless.

If we were home, we could take her to the hospital and she would get better. But here, she will be taken away from us and we will probably never see her again if the officers find out how sick she is. The doctors here don't actually care about anyone. As much as I want her to get treatment and help, I know she won't receive anything of the sort if the officers take her away.

I haven't read any more since Hanna told me her suspicion.

I've been too worried. Maybe I should tell mother about the book.

I don't want to keep anything from her even if the book might worry her.

"Mother," I say one night.

"Yes?" I have to strain to hear her.

"I have something to tell you, but you have to promise not to worry." She nods. "Well, about ten months ago an old lady gave me a book. It has so many fairy tales in it. It has helped me live when I want to stop. It's the only thing that keeps me sane here. I could tell you one of the stories if you'd like?" I wait for her to say something

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but she's quiet. My heart starts to speed up. Finally, she speaks and I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding.

"Keep reading, Julia. Keep living. Keep dreaming. Do you promise?"

"I promise."

\*\*\*

The room is full of beating hearts  
The room is full of breath  
A single heartbeat stops beating  
And a mother draws her final breath


\*\*\*

She's just asleep. Just asleep.

It takes very much coaxing from mother's friends to get me out of bed. They keep saying "Sorry," and "It will be ok," but Hanna's tears and arms around my neck is the thing that brings reality crashing down on me. Not asleep. Dead.

The days go by in a haze. I'm numb. My food is tasteless, my sleep soundless, my book un-

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touched. Mother's words keep coming back to me. "Keep living, keep living, keep living," I have to try to live for her.

It's finally spring and I still haven't touched my book. I'm not ready to feel that much. It's easier to feel as little as possible. Hanna and I stand together silently one morning during roll call. I wonder where my father is. I wonder if he's even alive.

Hanna nudges me. I look up. She gestures to the sky. The sunrise is brilliant. It's so beautiful it momentarily takes my breath away. It looks like someone has splashed soft paints into the sky. Reds, oranges, yellows, pinks, and even blues and purples paint the sky. It's been so long since I have seen something beautiful. Silent tears are streaming down my face and I quickly wipe them away before a soldier can see.

When night arrives, I pull my book from its hiding place and for the first time since Hanna confided in me about mother, I open it. It feels like I am arriving home from a long time away. I read page after page until I have one left. I pause, close my eyes, and then I finish the rest of the story.

*Lydia is a homeschooler in ninth grade who enjoys reading, cake decorating, horseback riding, and playing with her cat in her spare time. She has also acted in "After Hours" and "Little Women" at KPAC. She has drawn inspiration from reading numerous works of historical fiction and nonfiction set during WWII and the Holocaust.*

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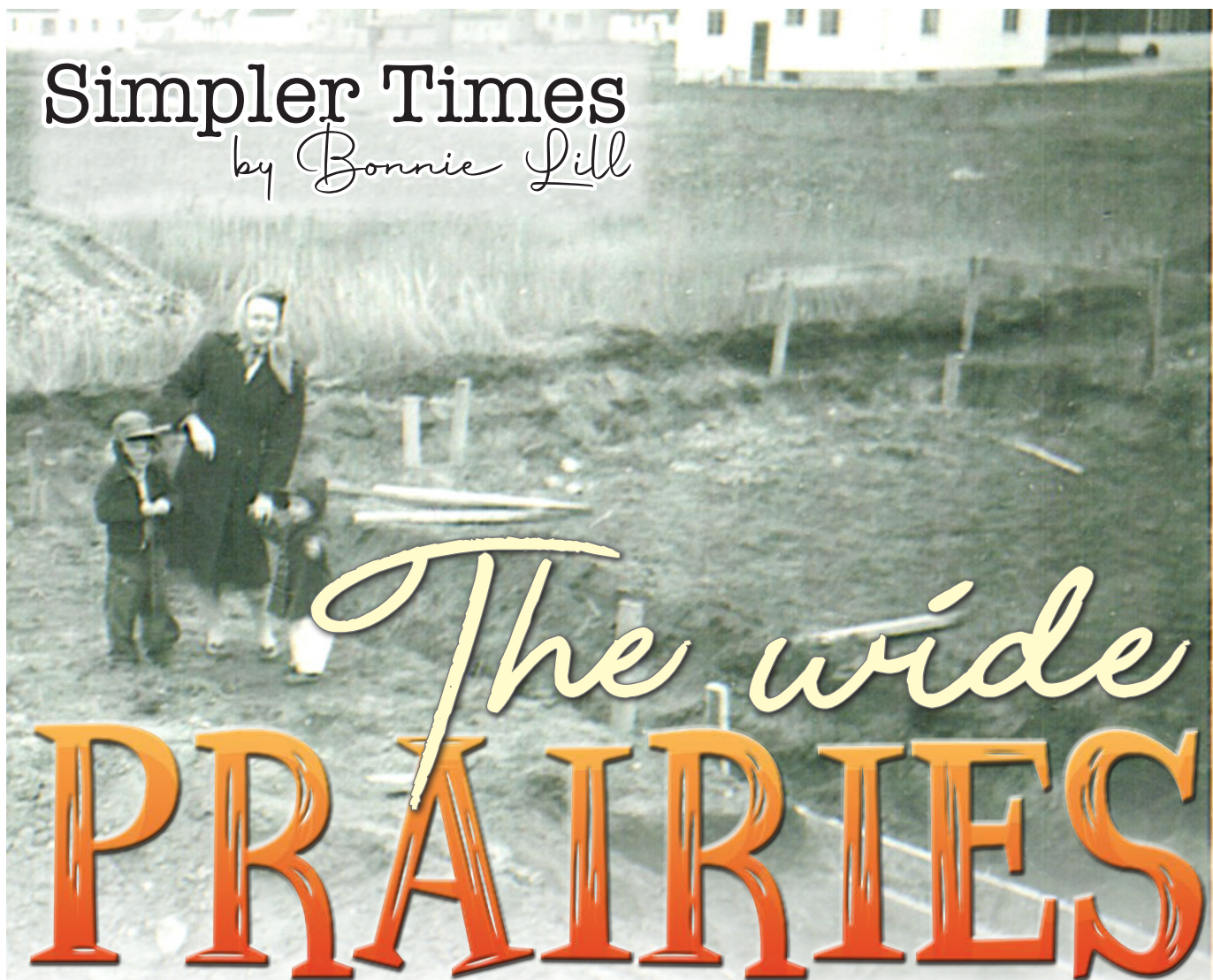
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# Simpler Times

by Bonnie Lill



The term prairie conjures up visions of endless acres of waving grasses, wheat and wildflowers, with nary a human in sight. You can just imagine seeing the prairie inhabitants: birds and bugs, apex predators like wolf and coyote, itty bitty prey like chipmunks and ground squirrels. Some of my best childhood memories were of the prairies of Hazel Crest, Illinois.

They were just like the prairies of the Great Plains - minus the waving wheat and the endless acres, that is. But there were plenty of critters – just most of them had exoskeletons.

Prairies, referred to as empty lots by the uninformed, or perhaps unimaginative, grown-

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A child's love for exploring never dies

ups of my childhood, were full of tall weeds and wildflowers, each with a distinctive and sometimes pungent summertime aroma. Paths wound through the chest-high (to an 8-year-old) foliage, beckoning children to enter, hide out, play army, go on hikes, explore and more.

The best prairie was across the street and several houses south, just north of my best friend Jeanne's house. It was safe and sunny and fun, with a main defined path that ran from the street in front to the alley in back. It was full of wildflowers, which the grownups called weeds – but when we gathered some to bring inside, our moms would always put them in a vase on the table.

Butterflies abounded, and we spent hours watching them as they sipped nectar from blooms or searched our arms for salt with their tickly tongues. We picked up every caterpillar we could find and made up stories about which ones we thought were poisonous and what they would turn into. We picked weeds and pretended it was

food, making up stories about that, too. Various types of birds flew over us and around us, scoping out the mealtime buffet of seeds, berries and insects and noisily announcing their presence.

Sometimes that same prairie would morph into an exotic land where we could lead expeditions for hours on end.

The other main prairie was on our side of the street, at the south corner of Anthony Avenue and 169th street. It was a somewhat tired-looking prairie. With us kids trampling much of the greenery as we played ball or army there, its foliage was beaten and dusty, and there were a few bare spots where the flora just couldn't hold out any longer.


At the center of that prairie was a "fort," consisting of a hole in the ground perhaps a foot-and-a-half deep and two feet in diameter, covered by a scrap fragment of plywood and a couple of old pieces of board. The boys launched attacks from this position and defended it against their foes on a regular basis, when it wasn't acting as home plate.

By the late 1950s, we had a phone in our home, and my mother would make a weekly long-distance call to her Southern Ohio parents. We would be allowed to talk briefly, and my sister, brother and I would regale them with our adventures in the prairies.

It wasn't until many years later that Mom told us how surprised her parents were when they visited, and we showed them the prairies.

Expecting the Great Plains, they were met with a couple of empty lots. She said they got a good laugh out of it. They never dissuaded us, though, from thinking the prairies were the biggest and best places in the world.

Today, allowing children to run and romp and explore is called free-range parenting, and it is frowned upon, especially on other people's property.



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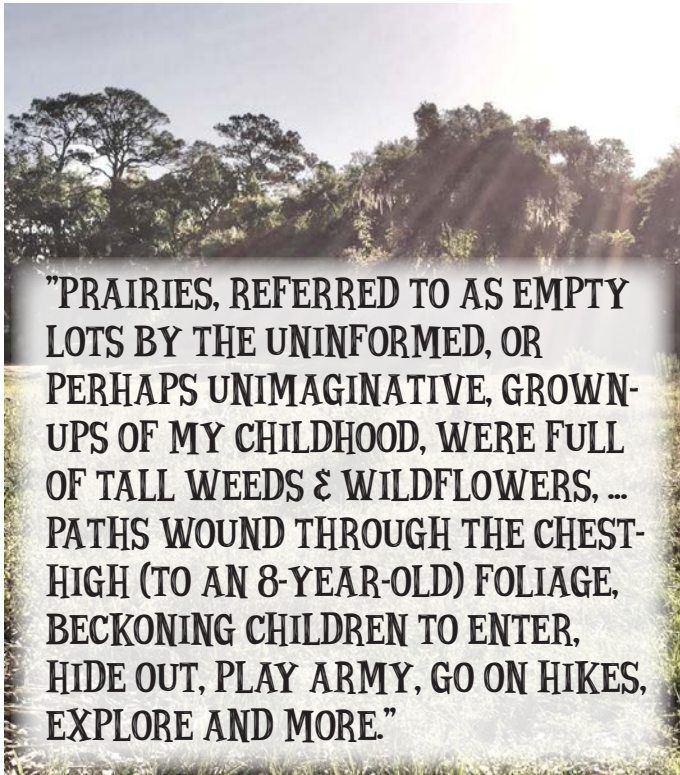
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But I wonder if our current crop of stressed-out kiddos would be more relaxed and sometimes less disruptive if they had the opportunity to stretch their imaginations and take all the time they needed to examine a woolly worm or a butterfly or a bird.

We can't go back to a simpler time, but we can recreate the best parts of it. So let's slather our littles up with repellent and sunscreen and find our own prairie – in the backyard, in a park, by the creek. And then let's give them the time to let their imaginations run wild as they explore a whole new world.

Yep – kiddos today definitely need a prairie.



"PRAIRIES, REFERRED TO AS EMPTY LOTS BY THE UNINFORMED, OR PERHAPS UNIMAGINATIVE, GROWN-UPS OF MY CHILDHOOD, WERE FULL OF TALL WEEDS & WILDFLOWERS, ... PATHS WOUND THROUGH THE CHEST-HIGH (TO AN 8-YEAR-OLD) FOLIAGE, BECKONING CHILDREN TO ENTER, HIDE OUT, PLAY ARMY, GO ON HIKES, EXPLORE AND MORE."

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# A Summer Garden Must Have

written by: **Alsey Gwynn Wheatley**

Few things say summer like biting into a crisp wedge of watermelon. From barbecues to beach trips, watermelons are must-have additions to everyone's coolers. As the weather warms and the spring rains lessen, now is the perfect time for gardeners to start their own watermelon crops. Though the fruit is uni-

versally enjoyable, there are a few considerations to take into account before starting your own vines.

There's no point in planting out your watermelons until it's time to break out your shades and sunscreen. Though they won't outright die at lower temperatures, watermelons need the heat of summer to really thrive. The vines may sur-

vive during nights that dip down into the sixties, but your melons won't ripen unless they can live comfortably in at least the seventies. Watermelons are native to Africa after all, they love to be hot.

Watermelons can also be real garden hogs. They need to be spaced a good five feet apart, which to me always feels like a tremendous amount of room to give a single plant. It's very necessary to give

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them their space, however. Their long vines can trail across the ground a good twenty feet, with large leaves branching off of them. Even though the plants start out looking over spaced, they won't stay that way for long. The last thing you want to have to spend time messing around with is methodically separating heavy, over crowded vines to keep them from choking each other out.

Unlike other vining plants like pumpkins, watermelons will not send out extra roots along their stems where they touch the soil. This means that all they are able to draw from is the ground around the base of their vines. With only that root system to rely on, gardeners should go out of their way to help it become the best it can be. That starts with the soil itself. Watermelons like well draining, slightly sandy soil that is easy to root into. It's much simpler to plant them in mounded up soil rather than trying to amend your garden beds too deeply; the mounds will pull double duty in keeping the warmth of the sun close to the roots and keeping the vines from sitting in wet earth.

As long as gardeners are already amending their soil, they should also look to fertilizers. Watermelons are heavy nitrogen feeders, requiring at least two good feedings per season. Blood meal is an excellent option for early feeding, but once flowering begins it is best to ease off the nitrogen level to encourage fruit production. Any well rounded fertilizer or good compost application will go a long way towards getting a good crop of melons as the vines go into bloom.

A huge key to growing watermelons is right there in their name. Consuming one to two inches of water a week, these plants do best in soil that is wet, but not waterlogged. Watermelons like to be damp in general, so keeping their roots from drying out is a crucial step. Making sure the vines are well watered at their base from the time they're planted until fruit begins to form is the only way to get them to put out crisp, juicy melons. Drip irrigation is the easiest way, but hand watering works just as well provided the vines themselves are kept mostly dry. Once fruit begins to form they can be watered less frequently.

Because they like to be so heavily watered, watermelons are extremely prone to powdery mildew. This fungal disease can affect a wide range of plants, spreading best in warm and humid conditions. It can be identified by the white spots that form and spread across leaves, making them look like they're dusted in flour. There are a few options for preventing the spread, but the best practice for infected plants is pulling them up and either burning them or throwing them away before they can spread their fungus. Other pests like aphids, vine borers, and cucumber beetles can also prey on watermelon vines.

Though it can be a lot to keep in mind, knowledge is always a gardener's best tool. With this overview your family will be enjoying your home-grown watermelons in no time at all, making memories together for years to come.





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