

Your pain may be linked to weather

Like a lot of people, I check the weather in the morning. But, unlike most people, I have a different reason to do so. I want to see how my patients will be feeling, especially the older ones and patients with chronic inflammation such as fibromyalgia.

When I was new in practice, I noticed several patients would have a "bad day" at the same time. At first, I wasn't clear about why. Were they all overdoing it? Perhaps a viral infection was going around. Was it my last treatment?



MICHAEL NOONAN

It turns out the answer is simpler than all that. It's not just an "old wives' tale." Patients with chronic pain tend to have more of it when a storm is coming. There is some research to support this. One study of 62 rheumatic patients showed definite spikes of pain with weather changes.

For some, there is one specific area they feel when the weather is bad. For others, the weather affects their whole body. They ache "all over." There may be a headache and even fatigue and mental fogging. Sinus pressure also can be affected by an oncoming storm. It isn't always consistent. Some storms bother patients more than others, and some patients, despite being in pain, are not affected by the weather at all.

Most weather-sensitive people notice the pain starts about a day before the storm hits. This lead to the theory that it is the changing barometric pressure that increases the pain. We've all heard the weatherman say, "the barometer is falling." This means the air pressure is dropping, usually because of an approaching storm. And because a hallmark of inflammation is swelling, the drop in air pressure allows the swollen tissues to expand even more.

Another weather-related health effect I see in the spring and fall is acute stiff necks, which is what prompted this topic. I must have seen five or six cases last week alone. Typically the patient wakes with it, but they can't remember any injury that would have caused it. They assume they just "slept wrong." For most patients, the problem resolves itself after a few days. But if there is an underlying problem, it can turn chronic and will not go away without treatment. For whatever reason,
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Turning the page

Indie bookstore owners prepare to pass the torch

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

Mainers love their local bookstores. The small neighborhood and downtown shops stock a choice selection of new and classic titles, reflecting the literary tastes of the owners as well as the buying habits of regular customers. Multiple generations patronize the local bookshop, as parents and grandparents introduce the younger set to the pleasures of a leisurely browse among the quiet shelves and the satisfaction of going home with an enticing new read.

Book shops have weathered big changes in recent years, but booksellers say trends are working in their favor and business is steady. Even so, no one expects to get rich in this low-margin business. Most owners admit they have a secondary source of income and are content if their stores break even at the end of the month.

"There's a sense of happiness that comes with this business. It's not just about the income," said Bangor resident Gibran Graham, 42, who is poised to purchase an iconic downtown store next year. "Happiness is at least half the payback."

It's hard to say just how many independent bookstores there are in Maine — probably somewhere around 40, though many gift shops, antique stores and other retailers also feature a selection of new or used books. However, this much is true: Maine's community bookshops are in transition as the current generation of owners prepares to pass the torch to someone new. The good news is that bookstores have established a beloved presence in Maine's downtowns, and eager new owners are not hard to find.

Weathering the storm

For years, small booksellers have struggled against Goliath-sized forces, including the emergence of big-box retailers such as Borders, which is now defunct, Books-A-Million and Barnes & Noble, the popularity of eBook readers such as the Kindle and the unbeatable inventory and doorstep delivery systems of Amazon and other online stores. But those challenges have largely plateaued, and the local bookstore is reclaiming its cachet and its customer base, according to Josh Christie, a buyer for Sherman's Books & Stationery — which



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Cathy Anderson (top) soon will be retiring from The Briar Patch children's bookstore in Bangor. Longtime employee Gibran Graham will be taking the keys.

boasts six Maine locations, including its Bar Harbor flagship — and a former board member of the New England Independent Booksellers Association.

"The strength of the buy-local movement has really helped," Christie said. In addition, he said, the improving national economy and the decline of the big chain stores are supporting a smooth transition in Maine bookstores that augurs well for the next generation of readers and browsers.

Independent booksellers work hard to build a base of dedicated customers who see value in supporting a local business. In addition to offering breadth and depth in their inventories, bookshops often pro-

vide comfortable seating and good lighting to encourage lingering. They may offer coffee, tea and a light menu of snacks for the peckish. They host children's story hours, book signings and launch parties for new publications. They cheerfully order any volume they don't have on their own shelves. Some offer after-hours reading clubs, poetry slams, literacy groups, cooking classes and craft sessions, all aimed at building customer loyalty and selling a few more copies of a featured book.

In Bangor, Cathy Anderson, 63, is planning her exit strategy as the longtime owner of The Briar Patch, one of just a few
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Biker activist among 'Remember Me' honorees

Maine Health Care Association plans award ceremony to recognize long-term residents

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

In the early 1980s, Paul Vestal was the feisty, free-spirited, outspoken warden at the old Maine State Prison in Thomaston who advocated for inmates to learn practical skills and engage in meaningful work during their incarceration. He led a review panel for juvenile offenders whose crimes were linked to substance abuse and then went to work for Catholic Charities. In 1990, he was named chairman of the Maine Human Rights Commission by then-Gov. John McKernan, a panel he served until his retirement in 2014.

A lifelong motorcycle enthusiast, Vestal joined the United Bikers of Maine in 1978 and became its president in 1982, serving seven consecutive terms as the group lobbied — successfully — to prevent Maine from requiring motorcyclists 18 and over to wear helmets. It was Vestal who persuaded three Maine governors — John McKernan, Angus King and John Baldacci — to personally participate in the UBM's high-visibility Toys for Tots collection for underprivileged children.

He served on the board of the Motorcycle Rights Foundation, and in 2008 was inducted into the Freedom Fighters Hall of Fame in Sturgis, South Dakota, which honors those who protect the rights of

motorcyclists through the political process and through grassroots organization.

These days, at 69, Vestal lives at the Maine Veterans Home in Bangor. He has Alzheimer's disease. Even in its early stages, the disease, which runs in his family, has made it impossible to live safely on his own.

"He's very aware of what is happening to him," said his ex-wife, Marjory Russakoff, who recently reconnected with Vestal after learning that he was struggling with the disease.

On April 5, Paul Vestal will be one of about 30 long-term care residents honored at the annual "Remember Me" event at the Augusta Civic Center, hosted by the Maine Health Care Association. Russakoff, who has remarried, worked with facility staff to nominate Vestal for the honor.

Her colorful ex-husband "always keyed into the needs of the underdog," she said. And though he adopted the dress and style of the biker culture he rode with, Russakoff said he developed into a skilled negotiator who was comfortable interacting across social boundaries of income, education and power.

"It is very wonderful that the



Vestal



BDN FILE

Paul Vestal poses with his Harley-Davidson motorcycle in 2008.

people of this great state are coming to honor him," she said.

Now in its 14th year, "Remember Me" aims to put a human face on the lives of Maine residents in long-term care, according to Nadine Grosso, spokesperson for MHCA.

"We have this wonderful opportunity each year to remind the public and our lawmakers that the residents of our facilities are whole people, individuals with long lives and histories, not just numbers or beds," Grosso said. Each year in January, MHCA

invites its member facilities, approximately 225 nursing and assisted living centers, to submit a brief biography of one resident.

"We're looking for someone with a historically significant background, who has overcome big challenges, who knew someone famous, who is a pioneer or a pillar of the community," Grosso said. Out of about 60 responses each year, about 30 individuals are selected to honor.

That honor includes a professional photo session, inclusion in
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Stages? My grief flows through seasons

My late husband Jim and I enjoyed looking for the first signs of spring together. It was almost a contest between us.

The first new green blade of grass. A crocus. Pussywillows. Melting frost percolating to the surface of the driveway, making one end of it a muddy sluiceway.

Tom turkeys strutting their stuff in front of the flocks of hens obliviously eating in the yard. The raiding of bird feeders by the bear just awakened from his den behind our house.

Discussions turning toward getting ready for spring dog events and camp.

The first signs of life trying to take over after the death of winter injects a lightness in our spirits and gives us hope for longer and warmer days that we can fill with all sorts of activities and occasions with family and friends — and dogs.

It is a time of renewal.
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JULIE HARRIS