

Figuring out how the pieces fit

I have books everywhere. I am one of those dinosaurs who has not graduated to electronic books and still considers turning paper pages a comforting and enjoyable process. I love getting new books and have trouble parting with books I have read but will never read again and really am not even fond of, because they are books. But every once in awhile, I grit my teeth and



JULIE HARRIS

load up a box for somebody's charity sale. I also have several books going at the same time. There are a couple of books I am reading upstairs in my bedroom. Which one I read on a given night depends on my mood and ability to concentrate. I have one I am reading downstairs near my recliner. I have one in my crochet bag that I take with me when I'm on the road. And I have one in my van. The other night I was looking through my shelves, in search of books by a specific author, when I realized what a mess the bookshelves are. The bookcases themselves are sturdy and solid, yet books are stuffed in them randomly and every which way. Books by the same author are scattered. Some books are upright so their binders can be read; others are flat on top of other books or shelves. Some are even backward. There is no rhyme nor reason. No order.

My books were organized at one time. Books by a single author were together. Textbooks and reference books, which tended to be bulkier and heavier, were on the bottom shelves, and the lighter paperbacks on the top shelves. I had inherited a few of the old books my maternal grandmother used to collect and read. I grew up reading some of them. They aren't worth money as they are beaten up rather badly for the most part, but they are priceless to me. They were all together at one time; now they are tucked all over the place.

Mysteries, intrigue, nonfiction, human interest, historical fiction and nonfiction, religious, botanical and horticultural books of all shapes and sizes are crammed wherever there is a nook. Dog training books are everywhere, and nothing seems to have a real "home" anymore. Appalled at the lack of care of some of my most prized possessions, I have put rearranging the bookcases on my priority list. I look forward to seeing what I have and finding each book's special place.

The messy bookcases are kind of metaphoric for my life as it has been since my husband, Jim, died of pancreatic cancer in December 2010.

When Jim was alive, my life was busy but ordered and somewhat predictable. The pieces may have had chips in them occasionally, but they easily had fit into place. I knew what to expect; where things were, where the pieces belonged, where I belonged.

Since Jim's death, lots of the pieces of my life have been stuffed in every which way to get me by until I could rearrange things into a reorganized existence.

I really was oblivious to the disarray until recently. I now see the pieces sticking out here and there. Not quite fitting. Not in sync with the person I was before Jim died, or even with the person I am now.

And I want to rearrange them into some kind of order.

Taking each piece out of its temporary place and either finding the right fit or discarding it all together will take me awhile. But I am willing to do it, and I am eager to take on the task.

Now that I see the ill-fitting pieces. Now that I can take some control over my life again.

As for the bookcases? That project will be a piece of cake!

As a longtime employee of the Bangor Daily News, Julie Harris has served many roles over the years, but she now has her dream job as community editor. She lives in Hermon with her four Brittany dogs: Sassy, Bullet, Thistle and Quincy, who keep her busy in various dog sports. She was widowed at age 51 when her husband, Jim, died of pancreatic cancer. Follow her blog at curves.bangordailynews.com.



MEG HASKELL | BDN

Dr. Ralph Siewers, a retired physician from Sedgwick, settles in with a jigsaw puzzle at The Vicarage by the Sea in South Harpswell.

Help without hindrance

Home offers normalcy to people with dementia

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

The Vicarage by the Sea lies at the end of a winding lane near the coastal village of South Harpswell. Tucked into the deep woods and overlooking the waters of Casco Bay, the former bed and breakfast now provides a safe, home-like environment for eight adults affected by memory loss and progressive dementia.

Don't be looking here for locked doors, over-sedated residents and mandatory bingo games. Instead, The Vicarage aims to keep residents meaningfully engaged in their world as long as possible — mentally, emotionally and physically — and to meet their changing needs on a day-by-day basis with flexible care plans, regular group and individual outings and a high staff-to-resident ratio that promotes security, spontaneity and personal interaction.

For Pam Siewers of Sedgwick, The Vicarage seems to be the solution to a deep dilemma. The decision to place her husband, Ralph, in a memory care facility was wrenching. A retired pediatric heart surgeon, he developed early signs of dementia about eight years ago. His disease progressed relentlessly to the point that he could not be left alone at all.

"He really can't do anything now without supervision," she said. Even with some outside help, her own well-being was deteriorating under the stress of being his longtime primary caregiver. When, reluctantly, she started shopping around for another solution, she discovered that most memory-care units lock their doors to prevent residents from wandering.

"He would have ended up in a locked unit somewhere, walking around in circles," Pam said. She couldn't imagine her lively, sociable husband, who loved gardening, golfing and nature, in a setting like that.

At her therapist's urging, she visited The Vicarage and was immediately drawn to the home's small size, informal staff and individualized approach to caring for residents. Unlike every other facility she had visited, "I could see him there," she said. He moved in about four weeks ago, she said, and seems to be thriving.



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Johanna Wigg, co-founder of The Vicarage by the Sea in South Harpswell, pauses on the Freedom Trail, a wheelchair-accessible pathway through the woods.

Normalizing dementia

A private, for-profit facility founded in 1998 and licensed by the state as an Adult Family Care Home, The Vicarage aims to "normalize" the loss of cognitive function caused by Alzheimer's disease and other progressive disorders, according to co-founder Johanna Wigg. That means separating memory loss and dementia from the more institutional approach, adopted by larger, more mainstream nursing facilities — a model that evolved largely to maximize efficiency and hold down costs — and instead provide a "person-centered" home that treats each resident as a valued member of the family.

"People feel trapped by the medical system. They're looking for a more palliative model of care for their loved ones — a good quality of

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Inside
Lifelong member of
Grace church to receive
award **C4**

Capturing summer sweetness for winter

Last week, I emptied out the little chest freezer in the basement, which was still harboring bags of kale, tubs of pesto and a few packets of deer meat from last fall.



MEG HASKELL

I carried all the food up to the kitchen freezer so we will eat it up. Then I unplugged the freezer in the basement, wiped it down with a bleach solution and left it with the lid propped open, figuring to give it a rest before this year's garden harvest starts in earnest.

Turns out, I was being overly optimistic. Because a couple days later, my friend Noelle posted a photo to her Facebook page that sent me marching right back down cellar to plug the freezer in again. Her picture showed a



colander of fresh raspberries on her kitchen counter. Another quart box of berries, red and juicy, sat beside it. "The season begins," she wrote.

I knew that Noelle's photo was code, the cue for Douglas and me to retrieve our stack of green cardboard boxes from the barn and head over to the raspberry patch that she and Dan generously invite us to pick each summer.

This is no ordinary berry patch; it's huge, wild and rambling. It grows high on an open hillside, with views of the river and the mountains beyond stretching off to the horizon. It's a pretty sweet place to spend an hour or two, alone or in quiet company, contemplating the passage of time and the changing of the season. Or not contemplating anything at all.

This year, the berries are especially big, juicy and prolific. The first afternoon we visited, we came away with 10 boxes. The next day I worked late in the newsroom, but Douglas picked nine quarts on his own before I came home. A couple of evenings later, we staggered off with 11 more boxes. Last night, another nine boxes were lined up on our counter.

As you can imagine, it's all we can do to deal with this bounty. There's no time right now for pies or tarts, jams or jellies, even if we were so inclined. We simply spread the berries in a single layer on a couple of cookie sheets and slide them into the upstairs freezer, which can accommodate two cookie sheets at a time. In two hours, the individual berries are frozen solid, as hard as little red marbles.

We use a spatula to slide them into ziplock bags, suck the air out and seal them tight. Then we carry them downstairs to the little chest freezer, where they are stacking up now like cordwood.

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Homesteader, activist, writer: Mort Mather

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

On a recent sunny morning, Mort Mather, wearing a grubby white T-shirt, dungarees and a tattered broad-brim hat, stood barefoot under a pear tree in his backyard, contentedly washing a pile of fresh-picked lettuce from his garden.

He gave the colorful mix of oak leaf, buttercrunch and romaine a preliminary rinse in a plastic tub on the wooden table, then a second, more detailed washing in a second tub before transferring it in batches to a large spinner. He tucked the table-ready lettuce into clear plastic bags ready for delivery later that day to his upscale restaurant, Joshua's — where his son, Josh, is the chef — on busy Route 1 in Wells.

Mather, 78, has been washing lettuce in Maine for a long time. He was at the forefront of the wave of idealistic, young out-of-staters who moved to Maine in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The back-to-the-landers saw in Maine the potential to live a simpler, more rural life and reclaim an element of independence from the growing influence of corporations and the politics of Vietnam War-era America.

"We didn't know we were part of a movement," Mather said of those early days. "We were just living our lives."

Just living his life is what Mather does. He claims he seldom engages in long-term planning and avoids decisions whenever possible. But though he still grows a bountiful organic garden and raises a few chickens at the antique, backroad farmhouse he bought back in 1969, Mather has stayed in community-building mode during the long and change-filled decades he and his wife, Barbara, have called Maine home.

An early member and two-term president of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Mather also is widely credited with spearheading the derailment of a proposed oil re-



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN

Mort Mather sits in the shade in his back yard in Wells talking about his philosophy of life and the hereafter. Mather is a Coast Guard veteran, writer and organic farmer.

finery in the nearby town of Sanford and the successful effort to save a historic coastal farm from commercial development. His newspaper columns and magazine articles on organic gardening and healthy eating have in-

spired two generations of young farmers, cooks and gardeners. He is the author of several books, including a seminal back-to-the-land volume on organic gardening, an explication of his person-

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