

# Mather

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al philosophy of compassion and happiness, and a recently released novel, "A Stone's Throw: Orvie's Stories," which is grounded in his own growing-up years.

These days, along with Barbara and Josh, Mather works behind the scenes at the restaurant. His daughter, Caitlin, visits regularly from Maryland with her husband and two children. But clearly, although Mather has sought and found much satisfaction in his noncorporate lifestyle, he has never been one to sit on the sidelines.

## Putting down roots

An only child, Mather was born in Manhattan and raised on his family's farm in rural New Jersey. His father left when Mather was 13, a wrenching episode that figures prominently in his new novel.

He graduated from a public high school in 1956 and went on to earn a degree in theater from the University of Wisconsin. In 1968, Mather came to Maine to work the summer season at the Ogunquit Playhouse.

The following season he returned to the playhouse, in part because he had met Barbara there the summer before and wanted to see her again. He found an old farm for sale on a hilly back road. It included a battered, early-1800s Cape Cod house, the remains of an old barn and 100 acres of fields and woods. He took out a loan and purchased it for \$16,000.

"I bought it purely as an investment," he said. "I figured that if it fell into the cellar hole the next day, I wouldn't have lost anything." But it didn't fall into the cellar hole. By the end of the summer, he and Barbara were living in the farm-

house together. By the end of the year, they were married. After an improbable 18-month stint managing a nightclub in Puerto Rico, they settled in Maine permanently in 1972 and eventually had two children.

Drawing on his theater background, Mather had some success producing freelance marketing presentations. But gradually, he became more focused on the work of the farm and the community around him. He started writing a weekly gardening column for the local paper and helping people get started using organic principles. He got involved with environmental protection projects and became active in the York County chapter of MOFGA. He found he didn't have time for the marketing gigs, and with Barbara working seasonally at the playhouse and other jobs, they didn't really need the income.

By the mid-1970s, they were growing vegetables and baking pies for a handful of innovative new restaurants, notably The Hollow Reed and The Baker's Table, both in Portland's developing Old Port district and early harbinger of the farm-to-table movement.

Mather's longtime friend and neighbor Owen Grumbling, now a professor of environmental studies and chairman of the Wells Conservation Commission, recalls those years as a heady time of idealism and new thinking.

"There was a kind of urban exodus," he said of the back-to-the-land movement. "We didn't want to deal with what was going on with politics and powerful corporations. We just wanted to get simple."

In the area around Wells, Grumbling said, there was a compatible group of a dozen families who got together regularly to share meals, chores and conversation,

often at Mather's house.

"It was like a loose commune of people," he said. "We were all raising livestock, growing a garden and keeping an eye on the bourgeoisie."

It was in this context, in 1978, that Mather's first book, written with Barbara and titled "Gardening for Independence," was published.

"That book really struck on an idea," Grumbling said. "Their thinking was that you didn't have to be fully autonomous — to get off the grid — in order to have more independence. You could save money by raising your own food, work less at an outside job and have more time to live your life."

The book sold well in Maine and elsewhere. It's now out of print, but is available through Mather's website.

## The legacy of Laudholm

Mather's environmental and community leanings were aggravated by a 1974 proposal to build an oil refinery in the nearby town of Sanford. He spoke against the project at a public hearing, then assumed leadership of a new activist group, Friends of Intelligent Land Use. The refinery project eventually was turned down. Mather's involvement there set him on course for what may be his most lasting legacy.

In the mid-1970s, Laudholm Farm, a historic 250-acre property in Wells, was poised to be sold for commercial development. There was talk of a golf resort with condominiums or a corporate retreat center with a landing strip. Mather and many others felt the property should be put into public protection instead. The town of Wells, mindful of the impact on its tax revenues, preferred the development route.

After learning that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was looking for a site for an estuarine sanctuary for research and education, Mather proposed the Laudholm property to the government agency. He also founded the Laudholm Trust and launched a widespread educational and fundraising campaign to purchase and protect the property in partnership with NOAA.

"Wells, as was typical of a lot of Maine towns, had not seen a lot of prosperity and thought a development would be more beneficial to the economy," said Tin Smith, an early supporter of the project and now the stewardship coordinator at what is now the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. But by the time federal officials came to Wells to see how townspeople felt about the project, Mather effectively communicated his vision, he said, and everyone who came to the public hearing spoke in support of it.

The Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, established in 1986, protects some 2,250 acres of land, maintains more than 7 miles of nature trails, conducts essential environmental research and provides education and professional training to thousands of children and adults each year. The farm buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"Wells is now a leading conservation community," Smith said, and that improves the quality of life, increases property values and attracts vital tourism dollars. He credited Mather's "perseverance, dedication and enthusiasm" with pushing the project through.

## Happiness

These days, Mather's sites are set closer to home. With Barbara, he keeps the



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN

Mort Mather washes lettuce in his back yard in Wells. The greens, grown on his land, are bound for his restaurant, Joshua's, in town.

old farmstead, called Easter Orchard Farm, snug and tidy. He takes pleasure in raising a few Rhode Island Reds and cultivating a couple of acres of certified organic vegetables for personal use and for the restaurant, which opened in 2004. Barbara is the hostess there; Mort works behind the scenes, managing the business and helping out in the kitchen as needed.

And he writes. Mather's website is an absorbing mix of past and present, including a long excerpt from his personal philosophy book, "How to Improve Your Life and Save the World." In it, he defends the pursuit of personal happiness as a primary goal and argues for the power of universal love to transform human relationships.

Readers also can learn about his stint in the Coast Guard, his experience as a business consultant for nonprofits, his reflections on the theater world and the books that have helped him shape his worldview.

There is also a good deal of information here about his his moody but tender and beguiling first novel, "A Stone's Throw: Orvie's Stories," published earlier this

year via Maine Authors Publishing in Rockland. The book is "largely fiction," he writes, yet, "Orvie and I grew up on the same farm in the '40s."

Developed over a period of years as a series of short stories, the book's theme of discovery and loss emerges gradually as the coming-of-age narrator examines the world around him — including profoundly difficult family dynamics.

"[M]y father left giving as his reason that he didn't love my mother or me any more," Mather writes on his website. "An interesting thing to tell a thirteen-year-old. I suspect it has had an influence on my life." The book is available through local booksellers and Mather's website.

Already, Mather said, he is working on a sequel to Orvie's stories. He's taking it slow, allowing the ideas to form themselves. There's time ahead.

For now, he said, looking out over the high-summer fields and gardens behind his house, "I intend to keep raising vegetables, writing and trying to keep my wife happy ... which is just another way of keeping myself happy."

# Haskell

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So far, we're keeping ahead of this tsunami, this avalanche of berries. Each trip to the cellar feels like money in

the bank, an investment in the future. We'll enjoy these delectable bites of summer all winter long, mostly plain, on cereal or with ice cream or yogurt. Maybe we'll make a few jars of jam to give away at Christmas. Maybe we'll make a raspberry pie and invite

Dan and Noelle over for dessert some cold winter night.

Though it seems impossible now, we know from experience that the raspberries will be just about gone by mid-April or so. That will leave us rummaging forlornly through the frosty packages

of beans and kale, looking for one last bit of ripe, red sweetness to remind us of the summer past and assure us of the summer still to come.

Read more of Meg Haskell at [livingitforward.bangordailynews.com](http://livingitforward.bangordailynews.com).

## Orland church to hold bean supper

ORLAND — A baked bean and casserole supper will be held 5-6 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 6, at Orland United Methodist Church, off Route 1 near

the river in Orland Village.

The menu will include baked beans, casseroles, salads, biscuits, beverage and pie. Cost is \$8 for ages 12-adult, \$4 for ages 5-12 and free for children under 5.

For information, call Cindy Kimball at 469-0077.



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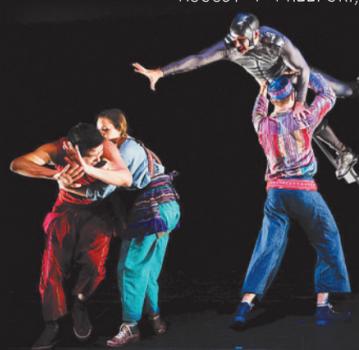
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