

Hand in Hand...
Linking Lives



July / Aug 2024

GOT—GROWING OLDER TOGETHER

570 630 0509 830 Main St. #574 Honesdale, PA 18431 www.growingoldertogether.org

*If you need
something, just ask!*



Joining Forces to Serve Our Senior Community

by Greta Knutzen

Tusten Social is thrilled to partner with Growing Older Together in bringing Sage Sessions to our seniors. This collaboration illustrates the strength that develops when organizations unite to better serve people. A local nonprofit established in 2023, Tusten Social was founded to foster community through social connection. We partner with other nonprofit organizations and businesses so that people in our community can have the best opportunities to enjoy life—and ensure that no one is excluded—most especially seniors.

Our partnership with Growing Older Together allows us to pool resources, expertise and volunteers, creating a more comprehensive support system for seniors in our community. By working together, we are able to offer a wider range of services and social opportunities that neither organization could provide alone.

*Hand in Hand:
Linking Lives*

Sage Sessions has become a cornerstone of this collaboration. These twice-monthly social gatherings provide a vibrant space for seniors to connect, learn, and engage. From guest lectures showcasing local talented peers and fascinating presentations about our part of the world, Sage Sessions creates a sense of community that combats isolation, which is crucial for mental and emotional well-being.

Our united efforts mean more frequent and diverse social gatherings, making it easier for seniors to stay active, connected, and involved in local life. Together, we are building a vibrant, supportive network that ensures no senior in our rural area needs to feel alone or left out.

We invite all community members to join us in this effort. Whether through volunteering, attending Sage Sessions, or simply reaching out to a senior neighbor, each of us has the power to contribute to this vital mission.

Sage Sessions were created by Tusten Social, in partnership with Growing Older Together based on community feedback from our work with *The River Reporter's* Let's Talk Seniors session and the overwhelming need for safe, consistent, accessible opportunities to socialize. Sage Sessions happen on the first and third THURSDAY every month from 1:30-3:30 p.m. in Krause Hall at the Delaware Valley Arts Alliance (DVAA), 37 Main Street, Narrowsburg. The sessions are free and no registration is required. Anyone 60 years or more living in the area is welcome. Free parking is available on the street and next to the post office on Main Street, Narrowsburg.

The Sage Singers group began earlier this year. No prior singing experience is required, and all are welcome. The group also meets at Krause Hall, DVAA, 37 Main Street on the second and fourth Thursday of the month from 3-5 p.m. If you are interested in joining, please contact hello@tustensocial.org



(Greta Knutzen, here with her dog Maizey, is a proud member of the board of Growing Older Together and co-founder of Tusten Social, a local nonprofit organization.)

Sincerely Yours

by **Marcia Nehemiah**

It's hard to say exactly what prompted the idea, but perhaps it came to me while I was reading Megan Marshall's book: *Elizabeth Bishop, A Miracle for Breakfast*, in which I was astonished to learn that Bishop wrote over 400 letters in her lifetime to her friend and fellow poet Robert Lowell. All of Bishop's letters are collected in a book that runs to 928 pages in paperback. Another one of my favorite writers, Virginia Wolff, was also a prolific letter writer; her correspondence has been published in a six-volume set.

Perhaps this is what inspired me to write letters again, rather than always emailing or texting friends and loved ones. In April, I dug out one of my two Esterbrook fountain pens, filled it with ink, and settled into my wing-backed chair at my desk. I wrote a letter to my sister. A few days later I wrote to my niece, and then to a friend.

Letter writing is a slower process than emailing. It requires time to think about what I want to convey to the recipient of the letter. In a phone conversation, when someone asks me, "What's new?" my stock response is "Everything is good," (not always true) but when I sit down to hand write a letter, I am inclined to express in a deeper and more focused way exactly what I want to communicate about my life. Taking the time to do this is self-reflective as well as communicative. I hold the person in my heart and mind. Memories, images and emotions of my ties to the person arise as I'm writing. No screens, no pings, no emojis, no spam.

I don't expect to receive return letters. As of yet, only one person has written back. That's okay. Most of my recipients have followed up with a sweet phone call. "Hey! I just got your real letter!" They sound surprised and touched as if they've received a special and unexpected gift. I relate to their response. I've always looked forward to getting mail, and these days a hand-addressed envelope is rare. Most of the mail I receive is what might be called analog spam—solicitations from someone trying to sell me insurance or another charge card offer.

I encourage you to resurrect the old-fashioned means of communication. Get out your favorite pen, your fancy stationery (remember that?), sit down and start writing. Imagine the look on your loved one's face when he or she reaches into the mailbox and pulls out the treasure you've sent. It is worth the effort.



(Marcia Nehemiah is a co-founder of GOT and its president until 2022. She is also the author of Crone Age—eight octogenarians who became her mentors.)

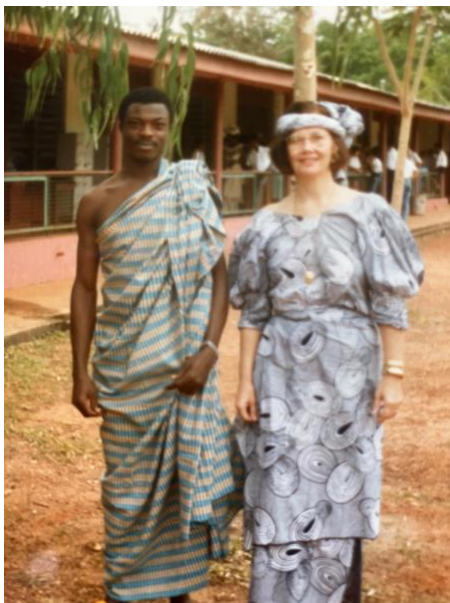
Everyone Has a Story – This Was Mine in Ghana, Africa

by Penelope Gharthey

Soon after I arrived in Ghana from America, two little boys came to our door and stood silent, hand-in-hand, as if for inspection. They stared in wonder at my white skin, my four light-brown children in their bright American clothes, and at the bowls of food covering our dining table. The taller of the two pushed the little one forward. "Please, Auntie," he said, "this is Moses." And so we took a fifth child into our family. Moses was a beautiful child with large eyes, and glorious ebony skin. Probably seven, his small stature and baby face made him seem five at the most.

My Ghanaian husband and I had long planned to raise our four mixed race American children in his homeland. Then in 1986, my husband, a retinal surgeon, suggested I take our kids to Ghana on my own for a while, while he stayed in Boston where he taught ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School and was working to raise money for the eye clinics he planned to start in Ghana. At that time, the country had just one eye doctor.

The first challenge in my new life came with the arrival of a little Moses. It was not uncommon for children in Ghana to move from one family to another. His medical checkup revealed a frightening list of problems: chronic malaria, anemia, intestinal worms, and a nasty abscess on his leg, which was a symptom of the Guinea worm, a parasite in the contaminated drinking water of his village. The worm's larvae, when swallowed, lives in a person's body for a year and then the female worm hatches and emerges from a limb causing extreme pain. Left untreated, it causes great pain and disability. There was no medication, only a very difficult procedure done at home. Twice daily for two weeks, Moses' leg was placed in a bucket of water as the guinea worm can only lay its eggs in water. The water in the bucket of water encourages the meter-long worm to leave.



Penelope with a fellow teacher at the Ghana-International School on International Day



Moses, bottom right, Penelope's husband Dr. Kweku Gharthey and two of their sons: Harold, 8, and Joseph, 13

It was a baptism of fire for both of us, but Moses and I quickly formed a strong mother-child bond over those unpleasant treatments. My Boston children saw the realities of life of those who live in poverty in Africa where there is inadequate access to health care.

But another challenge awaited me—to get a well drilled in the family’s village to provide it with clean water, the only way to prevent what happened to Moses. My husband and I would pay for the well, but none of the local authority’s drilling equipment was in working order, a common situation in a developing country. World Vision, an American NGO, did have the equipment for our well. And then Jimmy Carter’s foundation joined with local governments in Africa to fight the disease with education and drilling of wells. In 2016, thanks to Carter, Guinea worm was declared eradicated from Africa, becoming the second-ever human disease (after smallpox) to be wiped out. This is just one episode of my years in Ghana.

(Penelope Gharthey is an 84-year-old Canadian, living in Damascus, PA, who runs local memoir writing workshops and has just authored her own memoir.)

Why Jesus Never Ate a Banana

by Jan Goodwin

You can’t walk on water, but you can do something that Jesus never did: eat a banana, tomato or a potato. That’s because they never grew in his lifetime, some 2,000 years ago, in the Middle East where he lived. Bananas are believed to have originated in the jungles of Southeast Asia up to 10,000 years ago. Some scientists think they may have been the first fruit on Earth.

And those tomatoes and potatoes that we now firmly associate with the kitchens of Italy and Ireland, both actually originated in the Americas. The latter two crossed the Atlantic in what became known as the Columbian Exchange: the transfer of plants, animals, and diseases between the Old World of Europe and Africa and the New World of the Americas. The exchange began in the aftermath of Christopher Columbus’ voyages in 1492, and later accelerating with the European colonization of the Americas.

Today, we can walk into any supermarket on the planet to find those three items, or any of the other once-regional food crops that have since gone global.

With the specter of famine forever hanging over earlier societies, new crops were eagerly sought out and transported across the world. In 1551, the Spanish saw their first potato, high up in the Andes. In 1567, just 16 years later, they were already growing them in Northern Spain.

That has been the rule ever since: if it fills bellies, it travels. Fruits, vegetables, grains from anywhere are now grown and consumed just about everywhere. Food, it can certainly be argued, is the most globalized commodity on the planet. And the process is still ongoing. By 2011, food crops originating outside the region where they were first consumed made up 70 percent of the global diet.

(Adapted from Big Think.com, a website explaining our ever-changing world.)

How Beavers Engineer the Land

by Mary Greene

A four-acre beaver dam ruptured in a pounding summer rainstorm in Hancock, NY, eight summers ago, sending flood waters smashing through a wedding reception and forcing 130 guests to evacuate. Emergency crews found people muddied but not injured. Amazingly, beaver dams can be this big. Beavers are the largest rodents found in the U.S., growing to three or four feet in length to include their long flat tails, which slap the water loudly and continuously, in case of danger. They are one of the few animals known for modifying their habitat.

Beavers live in aquatic lodges underneath their dams, venturing on to land to harvest favorite tree limbs and branches from alder, aspen, apple, birch, cherry, cottonwood, poplar and willows. Employing their signature toothy triangular cut, they use these limbs and branches to construct their dams and lodges which are built using sticks and mud. Beaver teeth grow continuously, as much as six feet throughout their lifespan, but daily chewing on hardwood keeps them trim.

Adults live in monogamous pairs with their offspring, the yearlings, who help their parents repair dams and lodges. Beavers were hunted vigorously in the past to the point of near extinction for their fur, meat, and castoreum, a secretion of the scent gland believed to have medicinal properties, and once used as an artificial vanilla. Hippocrates wrote about castoreum's healing properties in 500 B.C., and by the Roman period, it was part of people's pharmacopia.



Currently, beaver populations have recovered, and the National Park Service considers them a “keystone” species because of their ability to dam off streams that create biodiversity and improve habitat and water quality for insects, and the birds and fish that feed on them. Beaver dams are a common sight among our area lakes and ponds. But few of us realize that these dams are a covering for the beaver lodges that house the rodents all year long. The beavers eat, sleep and raise their kits in the lodge.

When journalist Sam Ogozalek was a local, curious 14-year-old, he shimmied so far into a beaver lodge tunnel, only his legs were still outside. His photos show a snug tunnel that leads to the beavers' living quarters and a tangle of fine, hair-like roots, sticks and branches.

For a fascinating look inside a beaver lodge go to: <https://www.facebook.com/watch?v=3737295556550295> You'll see tunnels extending back 15 feet or longer, connecting to each other, and wide enough to allow beavers to carry in sticks, logs, and branches.

Ruptured beaver dams can cause flooding, road closures as well as infrastructure and home damage. When a beaver dam bursts, the resulting flood wave can carry a large amount of material, including water, sediment, trees and vegetation, downstream.

The world's largest beaver dam is in Wood Buffalo National Park, Alberta, Canada, and is 2,788 ft long, more than twice the height of the Empire State Building. It's so large that it's visible from space in satellite images.

(Mary Greene is a poet and author, and frequent contributor to the GOT newsletter)

Wanted – Bridge Players, From Beginners to Experienced Needed

by Jane Luchsinger & Barbara Peters

One of the games that scientists recommend to help preserve our memories as we age is bridge. It's a thinking game, involving strategy and planning.

"Bridge is the perfect balance of fun and logic; it has strategy and planning" says Barbara Peters, a former physical therapist, now aged 86, who has played since college. With her late husband, Fred Krasselt, an IBM manager, they played at dinners and country clubs, and even as far from their Beach Lake, PA, home as Hilton Head, S. Carolina. "It's very good for your brain. I love the companionship, being with other people, concentrating and using your mind, and meeting new people. It's a great way to preserve your memory as you become older."

Bridge has its roots in 16th century England. A version of the game, contract bridge, was invented by Harold Stirling Vanderbilt who clearly had some invaluable idle time on a steamship cruise. Perhaps surprisingly, bridge is now seeing a resurgence in American high schools and colleges. A number of European countries, such as the Netherlands, France and Belgium, are also incorporating the game into their schools' curricula. And now, there is even a free app: "How to play bridge" for beginners on iPhones/iPads and Androids.

Whether you played bridge years ago or wish to learn at this time, consider joining the Hawley-Honesdale Bridge Club. They meet Mondays from 10:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Wayne Senior Center, 323 10th Street, Honesdale, PA 18431. You are not required to live in Pennsylvania or be a member of the Senior Center.

The Hawley-Honesdale Bridge Club is a registered not-for-profit organization. There is a \$7 charge per day of attendance. This money supports student scholarships in both Pennsylvania and New York. Coffee and donuts are available at no charge, as are snacks. You may bring your own lunch or a hot lunch is provided for \$2.50.

Why not give bridge a try? Any players—from beginners to experienced—are welcome. Long-time member Barbara Peters says: "Don't be scared. We will teach you. It isn't hard. It's a very friendly game, we appreciate new members, and both men and women really enjoy it."

If someone wishes to come alone, we will find you a partner. Call Barbara in advance, tel: 843-290-9985 and she will try to find you a partner. Couples are more than welcome.



*Hawley-Honesdale Bridge Club members
playing bridge at the Senior Center*

Some GOT members are also asking if there is a local chess or backgammon club? If you know of any, or you want to start one, let us know.

(Jane Luchsinger & Barbara Peters are both long time GOT members)

Save The Date!

Growing Older Together is thrilled to announce our second annual summer fundraiser – **Lavapalooza!** Join us on Saturday, August 3rd, 2024. for a day filled with fun for all ages and families.

Lavapalooza! is a 1950s “Rock-a-Billy” style carnival and picnic event designed to raise funds and awareness for GOT. Set on a stunning Pennsylvania hilltop under a big tent, the event will feature:

- Great food: Enjoy delicious carnival treats and picnic fare
- Midway Games: Engage in fun games for all ages
- Live Music: Dance to the tunes of the era performed by the Kingston, NY-based band “Lara Hope & The Ark-Tones
- Live Auction & Raffle: Works by local artists, dinners at local restaurants, gift certificates from area merchants

Lavapalooza! aims to redefine senior-focused fundraisers by creating an event that:

- Appeals to the Whole Community: Welcoming youth, families and seniors alike
- Attracts a Younger Generation of Volunteers: Encouraging community involvement across all age groups
- Becomes an Annual “Must Attend” Event: Establishing a beloved tradition on the community calendar

Mark your calendars for August 3rd and join us for a memorable day at Lavapalooza! Rain date is Sunday, August 4th.

Location: Second District Brew Farm, 163 Fallsdale Road, Milanville, PA 18443

Time: Saturday, August 3rd, 3-7PM (Rain date: August 4th)

Tickets: All inclusive \$45 available at the door or online at: www.myrivertickets.com

See you there!

GOT needs volunteers to help with this event for the admission and auction tents, food service, parking, and carnival games. If you can help, please call the GOT hotline at 570-630-0509. No special skills required. Thank you!



GROWING OLDER TOGETHER PRESENTS

THE 2ND ANNUAL

LAVAPALOOZA
2024

Your **tax-deductible donation** will go a long way in sustaining GOT as we continue to fulfill our mission: to give residents aged 60 and older who live in Wayne County, PA, western Sullivan County, NY, and surrounding areas both the practical means and the social connections to live independently in their homes. GOT is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Any amount, large or small, is welcome. Please visit our website and click the **Donate** button, or mail your check to GOT, 830 Main Street #574, Honesdale, PA 18431. Thank you in advance for your support.

Please help spread the word about the benefits of becoming a member and/or volunteer for GOT. If you know a friend or neighbor who might want to offer a helping hand or might benefit from one, share our phone number, 570-630-0509, and/or our web address:

www.growingoldertogether.org Thank you!

Growing Older Together is supported in part by generous grants from the Sullivan County Legislature, Wayne Memorial Health Foundation, and Wayne County Community Foundation, as well as with support from the following corporate sponsors:

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COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Growing Older Together collaborates with and is supported by numerous organizations in the area to fulfill our mission, including:

Delaware Valley Arts Alliance
Tusten Social
The River Reporter
WJFF Radio Catskills
Wayne County Area Agency on Aging
Sullivan County Office of Aging

Diversity is a Source of Strength, Creativity, and Innovation Growing Older Together is committed to fostering an environment that welcomes and values every person and respects all identities, cultures, heritages, and abilities.