

Hand in Hand...
Linking Lives



Mar/Apr 2025

GOT— GROWING OLDER TOGETHER

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

*If you need
something, just ask!*



The Joy of March and April – Let There be Light ***by Irene James***

March starts out right – daylight savings begins this year on March 9 – so we will begin the month with the daylight that we have missed over these cold winter months. It will surely help our spirits to rise. This third month of the year was immortalized by Shakespeare in his play *Julius Caesar* with the famous quote "Beware the Ides of March," associating the month with Caesar's assassination in 44 B.C. You might be surprised to learn that March was once seen as a month of celebrations and appreciation for the new year.

In Roman times, people rejoiced with all kinds of feasts and tributes to Mars, the Roman god of war and to honor Jupiter, the Roman god of the sky. The Ides of March marked the middle of the month of Martius, March 15 on the Gregorian calendar. "Ides" derives from the Latin word *iduate*, which means "to divide." It also was associated with the full moon, appearing mid-month. Modern times have continued a celebration tradition with "awareness days" and months dedicated to specific causes.

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March is Women's History Month. It is also International Creative Month to encourage us to explore new hobbies, interests, skills and passions. So perhaps, not surprisingly, it is also Crafts Month. Surrounding the main holiday of St. Patrick's Day on the 17th is Employee Appreciation Day on the 1st, International Women's Day on the 8th and International Day of Happiness on the 20th. The week of March 18 has been declared Harmony Week. March, the official start of spring, and the longed-for change of season, is a reawakening of nature. Despite the still crunching snow, leaves are sprouting, flowers begin to bloom, birds are returning north, singing all the way. It's the time that spring rains encourage the stirring of roots. Lilacs may come out soon but in this part of the world, it is more likely that the first flowers will be snowdrops. As delicate as they look, they can tolerate the cold. Although native to Europe and southwestern Asia, they are widely planted in gardens in our part of the Northeast. Soon after, we should see the bright yellow of forsythia and the varied colors of crocuses and primroses.



April begins with Fool's Day on the 1st. The actual origin is unknown but it's been celebrated for centuries in many cultures. It is thought to have begun for no particular reason with playing pranks on others, and to date back to the mid-1500s in France. Later in the month, I personally plan to enjoy National Grilled Cheese Day on April 11 and will gather some friends together to play a game or two of a longtime beloved game on National Scrabble Day April 13. You could also try your hand at a short poetic venture on National Haiku Day on the 17th. Earth Day is April 22 followed by Arbor Day on the 24th. By that time we will have much more daylight, snow will have melted and the summer months will be beckoning.

(Irene James is an author and essayist)

From Seeds to Sprouts

by Dawn McIntyre

You've been gardening for a while. You love the early spring trip to the garden center to check out the display of beautiful blooms and sturdy vegetable seedlings. But as you've gained experience, you've noticed that the selection doesn't compare to the wide variety of choices found in those gorgeous, plant-porn catalogs that fill your mailbox. You might be nervous about starting your own seeds. Don't be. Seeds are hard-wired to grow, thrive and produce more seeds. It's their job, their destiny. You only need to give them the best conditions possible, do no harm, then ease them out into the world.

Start small. Plan on ordering a few seed packs of varieties that aren't offered locally, but buy some fully-grown geraniums, million-bells spilling out of hanging baskets, a few herbs for the kitchen. Hedging your bets will give you confidence. Even if this year's seed-starting efforts fall short, you'll still have something in the garden to enjoy.

Don't set thimble-sized containers on windowsills that get a couple of hours of sun a day—if the sun is even shining. A few of your seedlings might survive—barely—but that's not what you're after. Invest in plant lights, fluorescent or the newer LEDs, and install them in a room that's as warm as your living space. Special carts are available and the internet offers plans for those who would rather build their own set-up. The key is adjustability—you'll want to keep the light only a few inches above the soil, then the tops of the seedlings as they grow. This will guarantee sturdy, stocky plants, not spindly ones reaching desperately for the "sun." Shoot for twelve to sixteen hours of light.



Use whatever (new or clean) containers you like. Don't get fancy or spend a lot of money on these temporary homes. Naturally, follow the instructions on your seed packets to determine timing. Use a good quality, sterile potting mix only. Wet thoroughly at first and cover loosely with plastic wrap until sprouting occurs. Keep the soil only moderately moist afterward. Too much dampness can cause mold or root rot. Use the liquid fertilizer of your choice (according to its directions) once everyone is up and showing their first set of true leaves. Keep raising the lights so they're always a few inches above the tops of the seedlings.

Toward planting time in your hardiness zone, you'll need to get your green friends acclimated to the tougher conditions in the real world. Aim for ten days of this hardening-off process. Set your trays of seedlings in a shady spot out of the wind. Move them every few days into areas with more sun and less wind protection, until they're in conditions that match those in your garden. Plant and care for them as usual.

Remember that the catalog folks only photograph the very best specimens. Actual success is a healthy plant that gives you a decent number of flowers or vegetables. A plant that gives you joy.

(By Dawn McIntyre, author of *The Paper Pirate*, published by Running Wild Press, available on Amazon)

A Poem Beloved by Judi Dench

Don't Prioritize Your Looks

"Don't prioritize your looks my friend, as they won't last the journey.
Your sense of humor though, will only get better with age.
Your intuition will grow and expand like a majestic cloak of wisdom.
Your ability to choose your battles will be fine-tuned to perfection.
Your capacity for stillness, for living in the moment, will blossom.
Your desire to live each and every moment will transcend all other wants.
Your instinct for knowing what (and who) is worth your time, will grow and flourish like ivy on a castle wall.
Don't prioritize your looks my friend,
they will change forever more, that pursuit is one of much sadness and disappointment.
Prioritize the uniqueness that makes you you, and the invisible magnet that draws in other like-minded souls to dance in your orbit.
These are the things which will only get better."

(By Donna Ashworth, best-selling poet known for her motivational content for mental and emotional health)

Judi Dench, now 90, was diagnosed with age-related macular degeneration (AMD) twelve years ago. She has recently acknowledged that it has begun to affect her quality of life. The eight-time Academy Award nominee says she's hopeful that her advancing AMD won't force her to retire after nearly 70 years of acting. She can no longer read or write on her own, and has difficulty navigating her surroundings or recognizing faces, and must rely on friends to be her eyes.

"Losing my sight has been an immense shock and has left me feeling terribly dependent on others. I can't see on a film set anymore," she says. "But you know, you just deal with it. Get on. It's difficult for me if I have any length of a part. I haven't yet found a way. But I have so many friends who will teach me the script."

When Judi traveled to India to film the 2015 sequel *The Second Best Marigold Hotel*, she had to rely on old friends like Maggie Smith, who died last September, to help her get around. Even then, Judi's AMD was making it hard for her to handle steps and other low-vision challenges.



Actress Judi Dench

In a conversation with the Vision Foundation, a London-based sight-loss charity, Dench revealed her coping strategy for learning lines through repetition, hoping that the audience won't notice any mistakes in her performances. She admitted that her once "photographic memory" could no longer assist her in this regard. Previously, she could effortlessly memorize and recite lengthy passages, even the whole of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

Nevertheless, Dame Judi Dench continues to shine in her craft. In 2022, she received an Oscar nomination for her supporting performance in Kenneth Branagh's *Belfast*.

Although it can affect people of any age, macular degeneration is most commonly diagnosed in people over 60 years of age. With time, the disease causes a significant loss of central vision. Judi has wet macular, which advances more rapidly, and is usually treated with regular eye injections. Eventually macular degeneration can also make driving, cooking, or even watching TV impossible.

Dench's mother had AMD, and the actress's wet form requires her to have treatments every six weeks and makes coping with daily life—as well as her job—difficult. But like many people who experience vision loss with AMD, Dench is finding ways to adapt and keep doing to do. The philosophy in Donna Ashworth's poem helps.

(Jan Goodwin is an editor and journalist and volunteer for GOT)

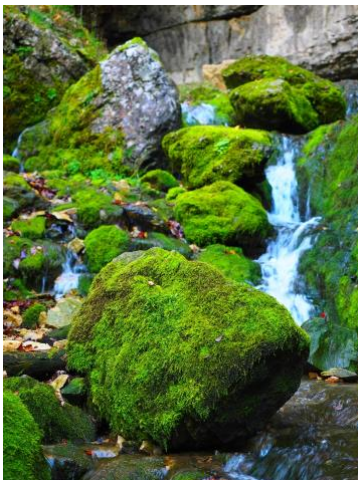
The Marvels of Moss

by Mary Greene

Slowly but surely, life is returning to the landscape, and moss is often the first thing to become green. Unlike grass, it lacks a root structure and is a non flowering plant. It is low maintenance, grows close to the ground, needing neither herbicides or fertilizers, and spreads quickly under favorable conditions.

Recent studies conducted after the Fukushima nuclear plant melt-down have shown that moss is capable of withstanding radiation and further, can assist in the recovery of surrounding land and water. Similarly, mosses will be key in the recuperation of the massive area of Los Angeles recently destroyed by wildfires by improving soil erosion, water retention, and the reestablishment of other plants and animals. Moss plays a vital role in the global carbon cycle because of its habit of absorbing carbon and releasing oxygen.

The oldest plants on Earth, mosses date back 450 million years, and have survived everything nature has thrown their way, including numerous extinctions and cycles of climate change. They even have antiseptic properties, and during the first World War, mosses were used as bandages. Before that, they were even used as diapers. Because of those antiseptic qualities, moss can be a reliable source of drinking water in a survival situation. Scientists have even discovered that moss can filter arsenic out of water, making it safe to drink.



Even though it is quite easy to overlook this tiny ground cover, in recent years moss has been gaining even more scientific attention. It can grow in an amazing array of conditions, from the boiling rivers of Iceland to volcanic lava fields, to the frozen tundra of Antarctica to baking hot deserts. There are over 23,000 varieties of mosses. With its ancient past, its extreme durability and healing properties, moss can be regarded as a very exciting plant. There is even a study in Copenhagen to see if moss can survive on Mars.

The simple biology of moss has allowed it to adapt to environments in urban areas as well as forests and grasslands. We all are familiar with the sight of moss growing from a crack in the sidewalk, up a cement wall or over a slate roof. This is possible because without a root structure moss can crawl around without soil. In its reproduction cycle, moss sends out spores from a pod reaching up and out over the plant. These spores easily travel to new locations, creating baby mosses. Moss

photosynthesizes all year, even in winter, absorbing filtered light from bare tree branches, and can even do so under snow. Moss will become dormant if too dry, but will resume growth as soon as it's rehydrated.

Birds, of course, love moss, seeking it out as a soft, durable cushion for their eggs. Legend says that fairies love moss. It was a favorite material of the children who attended my summer day camp as they constructed their fairy houses in the woods.

If you can, or if someone can do it for you, take a look around your own locale to discover the mosses living there. For those interested in a deeper dive, the BBC offers a fascinating and lyrical one-hour documentary from its 2023 "Discover Wildlife" program called "The Magical World of Moss," see:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001hqth>

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

Is it Time for an Aging Driver to Hit the Brakes?

The "car key conversation" can be painful for families to navigate. Sherrie Waugh has been yelled at, insulted and wept upon in the course of her job administering driving tests. Typically these extreme reactions happen when she is forced to render an upsetting verdict: It's time to hang up the car keys.

Ms. Waugh, a certified driving rehabilitation specialist with The Brain Center, a private neuropsychology practice in Indiana, often works with older drivers, putting them through an assessment that measures things like visual skills, reaction time and processing speed.

Decisions about when an older person should stop driving are often agonizing. "I had one gentleman, who had early onset dementia, who was just sitting here crying," Ms. Waugh said. "His wife was out in the car and she was crying." It can rock the driver's sense of independence and identity, and add to the responsibilities that many family caregivers shoulder.

But it is important to raise concerns as soon as you have them, experts said, and there are ways to make the car key conversation less painful for older drivers and their loved ones.

Before you ask a partner or parent to stop driving, drive with them, experts say. Are they missing traffic lights or safety signs? Are they struggling to maintain the speed limit or stay in their lane? Are they becoming confused about directions, particularly on familiar routes? Those are all signs that their driving skills may be waning.

Many of Ms. Waugh's clients come to her through referrals from primary care doctors, neurologists or eye doctors, and family members also reach out directly. She charges \$175 for a 90-minute clinical assessment, and \$200 for a road evaluation. (She has not succeeded in getting insurance to reimburse her clients.) But, experts say, professional driving evaluations can offer objectivity and clarity.

Ms. Waugh recently saw an older client who used to teach driver's education and was miffed that his wife and doctor had been urging him to stop driving. During the evaluation, he struggled to finish short-term memory tests, including a simple maze and a counting exercise. When Ms. Waugh showed him his results, he finally understood that he posed a safety risk to himself and others on the road.

Make a plan for how you will help a retired driver get around. In addition to ride-sharing apps, the experts also mentioned public transportation and car pools, as well as friends and family members who might be able to give rides.

Consider risk-reduction strategies, too. Maybe your partner or parent is safe to drive during the day, but not at night and not on the highway.

All of the experts said that it was important to make space for big emotions around these conversations.

"Be empathic," says Dr. Cheryl Greenberg, who coaches seniors and their families on life transitions and planning in North Carolina. "Don't just go in and say, 'Well, now you're done driving.' Listen. Ask questions that might help them be centered in the process."

(Adapted from an article by Catherine Pearson that ran in the NY Times)

A Japanese Adventure

by Colette Ballew

Japan is a wonderful destination even if you do not speak the language. The Japanese do their utmost to help you, and Google translate aids when all else fails. My inspiration for going to Japan this winter was to visit my niece whose husband is stationed there and was going to be home alone at Christmas.

In my time there I visited major cities like Tokyo, Yokohama, and Yokosuka. Yokosuka, where the Navy base is located, was an interesting combination of Japanese, American and European cultures. I found Burger King, Subway and KFC that were obviously catering to the Americans stationed there. I also found good Mexican, Greek, Indian and Nepali restaurants. The abundance of cafes and small bakeries reminded me of Europe. There were large malls for shopping and small shops on narrow streets.

When I went to Tokyo, with its 37 million inhabitants, the most populated city in the world, I was amazed at how easy it is to navigate by train, though you have to be willing to be "squeezed" into the car with the multitude of others traveling around the city. I experienced the Shibuya Crossing, the world's busiest pedestrian crossing, with its shuffle of 3,000 or more people at every light change, crossing the streets in every direction.

I also explored other areas outside of these large cities. Kamakura is a small town that is famous for its Kotoku-in Temple, where a 40ft Buddha that survived a tsunami in the 15th century is still residing peacefully. I wandered the streets of Oppama surrounding Takatori Mountain, looking for the "Takatori Yama Magaibutsu" and took the stairs to the top to find a path through the woods, then up and down more stairs until I finally found the stone wall with the carved Buddha over 26 feet tall. Well worth the climb and ramble.

We went to see one of the famous "winterland illumination," which was above a large shrine and a modern lighthouse called the "Sea Candle" on Enoshima Island, one of Japan's 14,125 islands.

I spent a day in Hakone exploring the lake Ashinoko by boat and then took a cable car to the top of Mt. Hakone to get the best view of Mt. Fuji, a view that never gets old.

A "true Japanese" experience was exploring Narita where I visited the ancient Edo-style temple Shinshoji and then went to an onsen (natural hot springs) before we ate at a lovely sashimi restaurant.

Vending machines found on almost any street corner were intriguing as they sold hot and cold drinks in the same machines. Sometimes you could find hot chocolate or even soups in these machines along with water, teas and coffees. These selections were less than \$1 on average and quite tasty. Most efficiently, there was recycling provided for the containers.

If you haven't already, add Japan to your bucket list as it is beautiful, friendly and not as expensive as I have been led to believe. Definitely worth exploring.



Japan's Mount Fuji

(Colette Ballew is a former high school foreign language teacher and GOT board member)

GOT Starts the New Year with Generous Support from the Honesdale National Bank Foundation

Growing Older Together (GOT) is thrilled to kick off the new year with generous financial support from the Honesdale National Bank Foundation (HNBF). In GOT's first grant application to the foundation, we were awarded \$3,500 to advance our marketing and advertising strategies, which are vital for raising awareness of our mission and services within the community.

On Tuesday, January 21st, Executive Director Thomas Cambridge and Treasurer Maryann Haberthur visited Honesdale National Bank's corporate headquarters to officially receive HNBF's generous contribution. Elizabeth Nagy, Vice President of Sales, Marketing & Digital Banking at HNB, presented the award.

During the meeting, Thomas expressed his gratitude and emphasized the significance of building partnerships with supportive local businesses. "We're excited about this new relationship with HNBF and look forward to working together to strengthen our impact on the community," he shared. This grant marks a promising start to 2025 and underscores the power of collaboration in achieving GOT's goals to support seniors in the region.



HNB's Elizabeth Nagy, Thomas Cambridge, Maryann Haberthur, and HNB's Kathy Enslin

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, northern Pike County, PA, 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.

Looking to plan your estate or make provisions in your will or beneficiary designations? Making bequests to non-profit organizations like GOT are a great way to ensure your legacy makes an impact in your community, benefitting future generations.

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 Honesdale National Bank Foundation, 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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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.