

Hand in Hand...
Linking Lives



Nov / Dec 2024

GOT—GROWING OLDER TOGETHER

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

*If you need
something, just ask!*



A Thanksgiving Bounty

by Thomas Cambridge

Recently, while seeking inspiration for this article, I took advantage of the stunning early autumn afternoon and headed outside. I am fortunate to live on 13 acres with a great variety of nature, and while the upkeep can be a physical challenge, it is a responsibility I embrace with great ardor. My dog Maude and I took a seat near my firepit, under the majestic 100-foot eastern white pines that line my driveway. It's the time of year when the inner needles on the boughs turn yellow and fall off. That afternoon, a gentle breeze assisted them to their new homes below, which included the top of my head and shoulders.

One hundred years ago, the original owner of my property planted 20 apple trees, and 15 of them are still standing. Some are leaning and all are gnarled, top heavy, and in great need of pruning. They don't look too healthy. Yet, if the conditions are right, they will still produce gorgeous, plump, crisp fruit. This year has been a good year for them. Like the pine needles, they will drop on their own and Maude regularly enjoys a healthy snack on her strolls through the orchard.

I love autumn. The fleeting nature of the season urges me to grab hold, linger and live in the moment. The heavy, late harvests have arrived and are providing the bounty for our upcoming Thanksgiving menus. I cover my garden with compost, say a farewell, and express my gratitude for the beets, tomatoes, basil, hollyhocks and dahlias, which also had a great year. I am reminded of my favorite piece by English poet John Keats:

“Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit around the vines that round the thatch-eaves run.
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.”

Of course, Thanksgiving is a time of gratitude. I am grateful to live in a region with four seasons, and while winter claims more than its share of the calendar in my view, all four are sublime. I am equally grateful for our dedicated GOT volunteers who do a fantastic job of helping our members maintain their quality of life. Thank you!

Wishing you and yours a sumptuous Thanksgiving, and best wishes for the Holidays that follow!



(Thomas Cambridge, here with Maude, is Executive Director of Growing Older Together.)

Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly

by Mary Greene

Is there a more emblematic symbol of Christmas and the “season of giving” than the Christmas tree? It has particular meaning for those of Christian faith, but the Christmas tree has become a popular cultural icon as well--as witnessed by the thousands of visitors who flock to Rockefeller Center each December to pay homage to the tree that celebrates the season there. The first Rockefeller tree lighting took place in 1933. Every year since, a Norway spruce topping up to 100 feet tall is located and felled from the vast tracts of woodland upstate. Traditionally, families will choose a tree from their own woods, or from a local Christmas tree lot. Artificial trees have grown in popularity over the decades, and for someone like me, a widow whose children are grown and living away, a small live “tabletop” tree with a few lights and ornaments can perfectly bring me into the spirit.

But how did the Christmas tree tradition arise?

In the Northern hemisphere, the winter solstice--the year’s shortest day and longest night--falls on December 21 or 22. As we do today, ancient peoples cut evergreen boughs to fill their entrances and dwellings, believing that bushes and trees that remained green all year long had special powers to bring the sun god back to health and renew the earth. In many cultures, the green wreaths and boughs were thought to repel witches, ghosts, illness, bad tidings, and evil spirits.

The oldest record of a decorated Christmas tree came from a 1605 diary found in Strasburg, France. The tree was decorated with paper roses, apples and candies. In Austria and Germany during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the tops of evergreens were cut and hung upside down in a living-room corner, decorated with apples, nuts and strips of red paper. In Germany during the 1800s, having a feather tree was common. The boughs were covered with feathers from geese, turkeys, ostriches and swans.



Decorating a family Christmas tree

Early American settlers found Christmas trees an oddity. Trees were first cut for display in the 1820s among German communities in Pennsylvania, but as late as the 1840s, Christmas trees were seen as pagan symbols and not accepted by most residents. New England's first Puritan settlers viewed most festive Christmas celebrations as unholy. In fact, in 1659, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law making any observance of December 25 a penal offense; people were fined for hanging decorations. The lively influx of German and Irish immigrants during the nineteenth century began to erode these stern Puritanical values. To bring matters a step further, in 1846, Queen Victoria and her German husband, Prince Albert, were sketched in the *Illustrated London News* standing with their children around a Christmas tree. Victoria was very popular with her subjects, and what was done at court immediately became fashionable—not only in Britain, but with fashion-conscious East Coast American society. The Christmas tree had arrived.

Early twentieth-century Americans were decorating their trees mainly with homemade ornaments, and many German-Americans continued to use apples, nuts and marzipan cookies. Stringed popcorn was added to trees' decoration after being dyed bright colors and interlaced with berries and nuts. Electricity brought about Christmas lights, making it possible for Christmas trees to glow for days on end. With this, Christmas trees began to appear in town squares across the country and having a Christmas tree in the home became an American tradition. Many families buy and create meaningful ornaments that are kept in a box year after year to bring the holiday spirit alive again.

Don't you have a few? I do.

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

Wearing Many Hats and Loving It

by Jan Goodwin

Twelve hours a day, seven days a week for 42 years! Without Elaine Giguere's (pronounced Jigere) astounding energy and mammoth effort, Narrowsburg, NY, would not be the amazing success it is today. Elaine founded The Delaware Valley Arts Alliance (DVAA) with her late husband, heading it for more than four decades. She also rescued the then defunct Tusten Theater, and helped start the Tusten-Cocheton library in Narrowsburg, as well as the area's award-winning newspaper, the *River Reporter*. Today this charming hamlet that sits at 113 feet on the deepest part of the Delaware River in the glorious Lower Catskills, is a weekend escape for many New York City residents. Black bears, bald eagles, blue herons, white-tailed deer, mountain laurel and towering oaks. Nature joins chic shops, and restaurants with fabulous views and great food, making Narrowsburg the recipient of rave reviews in such publications as the glossy *Architectural Digest*, *The New York Times*, and other important publications.

When Elaine arrived here to join her future husband, Tom DeGaetani, the area was suffering from the malaise of the mid-1970s, very high inflation and unemployment. At the time, Elaine believed her future was in ballet and modern dance. Having performed in Manhattan, she was Artistic Director and choreographer of the Staten Island Dance Theater. Tom was a former program director at the Juilliard School of Music and Managing Director at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and was now consulting in rural arts for the Ford Foundation. The couple met when Elaine was 29 and Tom was 46, they dated for two years and then married. But at the beginning of 1978, less than a year after they wed, Tom died suddenly at 48 from a heart attack," says Elaine. "I'd never seen anyone die, or buried anyone. I grew up pretty fast. But I decided to stay on here rather than return to NYC."

DVAA was her baby. “I wanted to make sure it would continue,” says Elaine. “My parents asked me to return home to Maine. They didn’t know what to do for me. But I liked living in Narrowsburg.” Dealing with her grief, Elaine says she: “just put one foot in front of the other, threw myself into the work. I started writing many grant proposals to fund the DVAA.” Despite those 12-hour days, Elaine found herself writing grant proposals in the middle of the night. “There was no other time,” she says. “There was so much going on. So many balls to keep in the air. Creating programs, renovations. I used to say when you come to town, don’t tell anyone you have skills. You will be snatched up immediately. I was typist and exec director of the DVAA.”



Elaine Giguere, ballet dancer



and Narrowsburg volunteer today

She remembers the first time she won a federal grant of \$250,000 grant to renovate the theater. “That was a lot of money and transformative for the community” she says. “I was so excited, I ran up and down the street telling everybody.” She was also fundraising for her own salary and everyone else’s. “Sometimes the government would hold up funding, it would be delayed. I’d wake up in the night but I was too busy to panic.” She loved what she did. “The artists were always doing something interesting. Energy creates energy. My job was different every day.”

Time sped by and one day she was 70. “It was time to retire,” she says. But even today, seven years later, Elaine finds it difficult not to do anything, saying it’s hard to settle down to read a book. She still volunteers at the DVAA, which will celebrate 50 years in 2026, and at the Tusten Theater and Narrowsburg’s Repair Café. She also helps promote the Narrowsburg ecumenical food pantry, and voter registration. “And I do a little traveling.” she says.

(Jan Goodwin is an award-winning author, journalist and GOT volunteer)

Friendsgiving: Another Way to Celebrate Thanksgiving

by Shirley Longshore

You might be surprised to learn that it was on the popular sitcom "Friends" in 2007 that the word "Friendsgiving" was first coined--an informal meal with friends to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday. For many in our spread out world, it makes sense and reduces the stress that often surrounds the holiday plans.

In fact, many of the older generation are participating in a Friendsgiving now because the traditional Thanksgiving Day meal is disappearing. Gathering at the family home with grandparents and aunts, uncles and cousins of several generations is almost impossible to accomplish. One couple I know at ages 78 and 82 have joined a rotating group of friends, old and new, at an agreed upon location for their Friendsgiving celebration for several years. Their families—his and hers—are not all in one location as they once were and the travel is too stressful and too expensive.

These gatherings are celebrations of friendship, built around the joy of relishing a meal with people whom you know well or meet for the first time through a mutual friend. One single man in his 50s who goes to the church I attend began hosting a Friendsgiving for a small group of friends six years ago. His family is scattered around different parts of the U.S. and it had become too difficult for them all to be in one place. “I was going to be alone,” he says. He planned a Friendsgiving, ordered food from a local company and invited friends. Two people came that year and now, this year, he has six invited.

Last year after my husband’s death, he invited me to join his Friendsgiving dinner. That brings up another reason for these ways of celebrating to make sense. You may know someone for whom a change since 2023 has altered life in some way. They are living alone perhaps, and would welcome an invitation. I certainly deeply appreciated it. He offered to pick me up so I could be there. That is also an important thing to offer if possible. While many seniors drive into their eighties, even nineties, many no longer do.



Americans eat 46 million turkeys on Thanksgiving and 50 million pumpkin pies

Friendsgivings are moveable feasts. The location--a private home, a community room, a restaurant--can change from year to year or stay the same--so can the menu. My friend chose to use outside help. Or you can roast the turkey, while guests bring the side dishes and dessert.

It doesn't have to be elaborate. Another friend's family in PA became so large with more marriages, children and grandchildren that she became overwhelmed with the family celebration and the travel and expense associated with it. For the last two years, she and her husband have stayed home and ordered Chinese food.

Getting a large family group together is a feat these days. Christmas is right around the corner. Many seniors have to be careful about traveling, especially as the weather gets colder and snow comes earlier. Maybe many of you have begun to have Friendsgivings already and not really calling it that. Go ahead. It's a very trendy thing to do these days.


(Shirley J. Longshore is a writer and editor)

Don't Let Stress Spoil Christmas

by Colette Ballew

Christmas is a time that should be special but do we put too much emphasis on making the holiday perfect? Have any of us ever been able to achieve that? By trying to do so, the stress takes away the peace the season should bring us. Here are some ways to achieve the goal of a calm, low-key and unpretentious holiday by incorporating these suggestions to rethink what Christmas means to us and create the holiday that we want to have.

1. Consider donating time or money to the local food pantries instead of making a lavish meal. A "soup kitchen" meal for the homeless or food insecure can make a difference for the wider community.
2. Can't be with your family? Set a time for a virtual gathering, maybe at the meal hour, so that you can still share time face to face.
3. Sort out your recipe box and find the special recipes you've always enjoyed. You can make those dishes to thank your neighbors, friends and people who've helped you throughout the year, instead of buying gifts.



Each year more than 3 billion Christmas cards are sent in the U.S. alone

Rethink Christmas gift giving:

1. Pool the names of everyone in the family and assign each one a name to play “Secret Santa” to that person. Save money by avoiding having to give a gift to each member of the family.
2. A fun way of gift giving is the “White Elephant shuffle” game where the participants get a number from one to the number of participants. The low numbers may choose first --one gift from all the gifts displayed. The catch is that you get to choose from all gifts, even the gifts already selected. If that happens, the person with no gift may choose again, but until the end, no choice is guaranteed. All adult participants must bring a gift to enter into the shuffle. This works best with adults only.
3. Do you knit or crochet? What about woodworking or other crafts? Make things to keep people warm: hats, mittens, gloves and socks, or create useful or decorative items. Donate them through local churches and organizations with programs for distribution. You will feel more engaged in the holiday when you give to others, especially those in need.
4. Think about your holiday card list and only send cards to those relatives and friends you don't see all year who live in far-flung places. Have you seen those new stamp prices? They've increased twice this year, and five times in the last two years!

Over the years, my little family has made many different adjustments to find the peace of mind that we seek at the end of the year. We have gathered with friends and family to discuss a charity we feel strongly about. We tell them our thoughts and invite them to help us make a choice. Then we gather at the holiday time to enjoy each other's company. It has made Christmas more joyful and meaningful – and much less stressful.

(Colette Ballew is a GOT board member and volunteer coordinator)

Every Day is a Gift

by Marcia Nehemiah

In my late sixties, I heard people say that the coming decade would be the best one ever. I was completely skeptical. How could the future possibly be the best years of my life? My body, although relatively healthy and strong, showed signs of its continuing and inevitable deterioration: occasional backaches, arthritic hands, subtle balance issues. As I lost an inch in height, it seemed that the flesh wasn't lost at all, but rather gathered in mass around my middle.

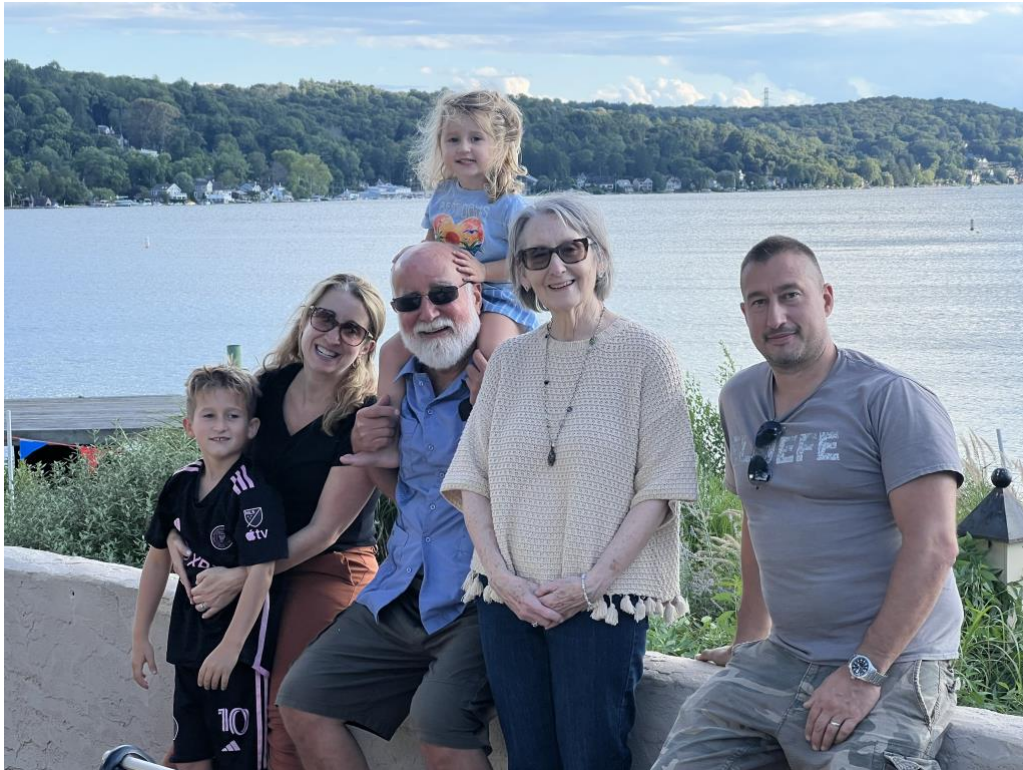
I celebrated my 72nd birthday in June, and I now understand that each moment I live is filled with riches. My physical body is indeed deteriorating; aches and pains come, but thankfully go. A cut takes longer to heal than it did when I was younger, but heal it will. I walk less than I used to because the hills are getting longer and steeper, but I still exercise regularly, if more slowly. I appreciate the body I have, rather than mourn the youth I've lost.

Free from the ambitious striving that comes with youth and middle age, I no longer seek for more—whether material goods, achievements, or recognition. All that is behind me. Abundance is already here. I can still hear, see, taste, smell and touch the world, which daily reveals its wonders. A deepening spiritual practice has given me the eyes to move beyond my small concerns and contemplate an encompassing, miraculous reality.

Family and friends have become increasingly treasured. My husband calls our children and grandchildren, indeed all those who are young and vibrant and creating our contemporary world, “replacement units,” and it is a joy to know that the flow of life continues onward, and will when I am gone.

I leave a small, but I hope meaningful legacy behind--the support I offer to the younger people who seek it. It is a blessing to share the wisdom of my years with willing listeners, and to spend time together creating memories that will live in them as the memories of my deceased loved ones now gone still live in me.

I have grieved over these losses. It makes more real the truth of life's impermanence. More and more, I recognize what a tragedy it would be to waste even one precious day by indulging negative thoughts, worry, discontentment, wanting things to be different. Just being alive is enough, to quote Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki Roshi.



Marcia and her husband Pat, the grandparents, Amanda & Jeff, the parents, and Autumn & Bennett, the grandchildren

An oft-quoted phrase is: "Grow old along with me; the best is yet to be." The future cannot be predicted; but the best is certainly here right now. I remind myself daily not to take even one moment for granted and to maintain a steadfast gratitude for this life I am blessed to have today.

(Marcia Nehemiah is a co-founder of Growing Older Together and its past president. Currently she is the lay entrusted guiding teacher of Two Rivers Zen Community. Visit <https://tworiverszen.org/about-two-rivers>)

SAVE THE DATE! GOT End-of-Year Fundraiser is Dec. 2nd

Celebrating Art, Music and Neighbors

Mark your calendar and join us for an evening of delicious food, wine, art, and music at GOT's end-of-year fundraiser, set within the annual *Art in Sixes* exhibit at the Delaware Valley Arts Alliance! The event will take place in Krause Hall on **Monday, December 2nd, from 5:00 PM to 7:30 PM**. Enjoy a live musical performance by the local group, Little Sparrow, as we come together to support our mission to serve our senior neighbors. All artwork is for sale and benefits the DVAA.

Tickets:

- **\$25** online at <https://myrivertickets.com/events/GOT>
- **\$30** at the door

We look forward to celebrating with you and appreciate your support in helping GOT continue its work in our community!

GOT Needs Volunteers!

We have exciting News!

GOT's membership has grown significantly, allowing us to serve even more seniors in the region. While we're thrilled that awareness of our mission is spreading, our members now outnumber our volunteers. To continue providing the excellent level of service we pride ourselves on, ***we need to recruit new volunteers.***

Here's a few reasons why volunteering for GOT is so rewarding:

- **Flexible commitment:** You can volunteer as much or as little as you like. Our user-friendly website allows you to browse open service requests and select the ones that fit your schedule.
- **Meaningful connections:** Our members are wonderful, accomplished individuals, and many volunteers report forming deep, lasting friendships with them.
- **Enhanced well-being:** Volunteering has been proven to protect mental and physical health, reduce stress, combat depression, keep a mind active, and provide a renewed sense of purpose.

If you, or someone you know, has a few extra hours a month, we'd love to discuss how you can become a GOT volunteer. GOT covers the cost of a background check, and you'll complete a short training session to get started.

There are three ways to get started:

1. Call the GOT hotline at **570-630-0509** during weekdays between 9 AM and 4 PM. Let our call manager know you're interested in volunteering, and they will connect you with our volunteer coordinator to guide you through the next steps.
2. Visit the GOT website at www.growinggoldertogether.org. Click on the **Volunteer** tab, then select **Volunteer Info & Sign Up**. After filling out a few questions online, someone will get back to you.
3. Send us an email with your interest and contact info to growinggoldertogether@gmail.com.

Please consider joining us! We have an amazing team of volunteers, and you're bound to make new friends while making a real difference in the lives of our members.

As Elbert Hubbard, the writer / philosopher, said:

“Down in their hearts, wise men know this truth: the only way to help yourself is to help others.”

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 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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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
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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.