

# SOUTHSIDE BOOMERS

A DAILY JOURNAL PUBLICATION

Winter 2022



*For the  
kids*

CASA volunteers  
advocate for the  
most vulnerable

Respite care gives you a needed break // Photographer offers new view on aging

# SOUTHSIDE BOOMERS

Fall 2022

## ON THE COVER



Kathy Burnell, Mike Riley and Gary Coffman, all volunteers with Johnson County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), work with abused and neglected children.  
Photo by Mark Freeland

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## *take a break*

Caregivers can get help through local respite care options.

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Food: Apples a sweet addition to your holiday feast



## 5 tips to pull off a sensational holiday party

STORY BY FAMILY FEATURES | PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

With stay-at-home holidays a thing of the past for many families, they're now busy preparing for full-blown celebrations. The return of traditional festivities brings seemingly never-ending to-do lists and pressure to be the perfect host.

From mastering a mouthwatering menu and donning your home with decadent decor to ensuring guests enjoy the evening to the fullest, hosting duties bring plenty of responsibilities. This year, though, you can avoid those anxious feelings with some preparation ahead of the big day. To help pull off a sensational seasonal soiree, consider these tips from the entertaining experts at Sun-Maid.

### Invite others to share favorite traditions

Especially with stay-at-home holidays in recent years, some friends and family members may have developed their own special traditions from new recipes and foods to seasonal games and activities. Inviting your guests to bring or share something that represents their favorite part of the holidays can help everyone feel welcome.

### Take time for yourself

Remember to make time for yourself so you can enjoy the fruits of your labor right alongside guests. The busyness of this time of year can add stress but reflecting on the true meaning of the season and reveling in your favorite parts of the holidays can help you avoid feeling

overwhelmed.

### Add new ingredients to your menu

While pairing this year's turkey or ham with the classics provides comfort and calls to mind holiday memories of the past, cooking with new ingredients and adding fresh recipes to the menu can put a fun spin on the season and maybe even create your own traditions to carry forward.

### Hop on hot food trends

One of this year's most popular trends in the kitchen is food boards, a fun and easy way to elevate flavor while incorporating favorites like cured meats, cold cuts, cheeses, dips, nuts and more. Plus, you can keep your board balanced with nutritious items like vegetables and fruit, such as raisins, which provide sweet flavor without the added sugars.

### A time for truce

Gathering for the holidays is about coming together with loved ones, family, friends and neighbors. Pulling it off means catering to everyone's needs and wants. It's a time for compromises and truces. Try incorporating a theme to the party or coordinate fun activities and games that can be enjoyed by all. For example, holiday-themed charades, a seasonal "name that tune" game and gift exchanges all give guests ways to get in on the excitement.



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Kathy Burnell, Mike Riley and Gary Coffman, all volunteers with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and CASA director Tammi Hickman look at a file in the conference room. The organization advocates and serves as a voice for abused and neglected children in the court system.

# 'IN THEIR BEST INTEREST'

## Volunteers advocate for children in the court system

STORY BY CHERYL FISCUS JENKINS | PHOTOS BY MARK FREELAND

Not all of the children will be taken from their homes.

Some will reunite with their parents following necessary improvements made to the household. Others will find placement in a new environment where they feel safe and loved.

Older youths may give input on the projected path their shattered lives should take, while little ones may cling to each other if placed under the same roof with their siblings.

The CASA program works to ensure the children's voices are heard by those making these decisions about their lives.

Tammi Hickman has seen numerous circumstances and situations in her 17 years as director of Johnson County Court Appointed Special Advocates Program, or CASA. It is all in a day's work for herself and the group's 50 volunteers as they represent youths sharing a common bond of growing up in abusive and neglectful homes. It is a difficult and rewarding job for those involved and even harder to stay emotionally detached.

"I cry all of the time for the kids and some of the things we see," she said. "But I'm not the only one crying for them."

"When you care about somebody, you absolutely want the outcome to be in their best interest."

CASA formed locally in 1988 and operates under Johnson County Circuit Court to advocate for and provide every neglected, abused, or exploited child in the county a voice in the court process. Its current caseload is roughly 150 kids, decreased from more than 300 youths needing assistance in prior years, Hickman said.

The program began nationally decades ago by a judge in Seattle who decided he needed to know more about the young lives placed in his hands and has flourished throughout the nation. Johnson County's program is one of the oldest in the state, Hickman said, and Indiana ranks high in the country for volunteers serving the organization.

Area residents Gary Coffman, Mike Riley and Kathy Burnell have volunteered at CASA for several years, all deciding to pursue the opportunity after retiring from their long-time careers. The challenge, they said, is getting to know the children on a personal level to relay their findings and information in a report to the judge deciding the case.

*Continued on Page 6*



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CASA director Tammi Hickman with wrapped gifts for kids in the CASA program. Volunteers prepare the gifts, which are given out at a yearly party.

“You have kids in a traumatic situation,” Riley said. “You need someone who can get down to a personal level.”

The Greenwood resident includes pictures and many details of the child with his report so a judge would understand the youth’s personality and needs before deciding a case.

Burnell provides consistency in her cases, such as when one child, for various reasons, had been in five foster homes in 18 months. The Franklin resident may never receive a thank you from the families she helps, but she remains confident those efforts have had an impact on the brokenness of many situations.

“Sometimes you just have to know it helps, and that’s all you can do,” she said.

Coffman of Greenwood feels like he occasionally provides a varying viewpoint that organizations such as Johnson County Department of Child

Services, or DCS, or others may not have considered. He cherishes having a positive impact on the children he serves.

“At the very minimum, you have introduced a caring adult into the home,” he said. “These kids may not have had someone who cares.”

DCS, CASA, judges and attorneys all play a vital and caring role when determining future living arrangements for young victims. Cases begin when DCS receives a call of neglect or abuse and investigates whether court intervention is needed. CASA then assigns a volunteer to meet with the child, family members, social workers, and school and health officials to make appropriate recommendations.

Volunteers assess living conditions and how the kids are doing in school. They study reports of case managers and advocate on behalf of the youths in court.



Burnell



Coffman



Riley

They take an array of cases for a variety of ages and help explain the complex legal process at an age-appropriate level so a child can comprehend the situation.

“For kids, the scariest thing is the unknown,” Hickman said. “Keeping them in the dark doesn’t help their trauma.”

Often the biggest debate among professionals is whether the children will reunite with their parents, which is ultimately the goal in the best of situations. It is difficult, though, to always advocate for kids and their families to be together again.

“Sometimes we have parents who see their children as disposable,” Hickman said, adding that many adults fail to go through the necessary healing steps or give up drug use.

That leaves authorities tasked with finding a child the family he deserves, whether through foster care or adoption. CASA volunteers aid in the interview process of uniting adoptive families with kids needing forever homes.

“That’s a huge responsibility,” she said. “It’s stressful. What if you make the wrong choice?”

Volunteers attend initial and ongoing training covering subjects such as cultural diversity, interviewing and report writing. They typically invest eight to 10 hours per month in the work and commit to staying on a case until it resolves, which can be a year to 18 months.

The service is tough. Volunteers have witnessed distressed children when parents fall short of their goals, kids attempting suicide and foster families upset when they are denied the opportunity to adopt.

Small victories keep each of them wanting to do more.

Coffman, who volunteered for Big Brothers Big Sisters organization for decades, has been moved by his cases involving multiple siblings from a single home and the challenge of getting to know them individually.

Riley, who also works at a food pantry, recalls a fond memory of building a trusting relationship with an 18-month-old girl by playing with her stuffed toy.

Burnell, who also knits for charity and helps with her community’s activities, remembers well a young girl who became distant while not fitting into her temporary living situation, then blossomed when moved to a new family, inviting her CASA friend to watch movies and see her room.

Hickman’s goal is 100 volunteers to allow current advocates to take a break on occasion, keep children off the wait list and give young victims the attention their cases deserve.

“I don’t think there is any volunteer opportunity out there quite like CASA, where you are making a lifelong difference for the child,” she said.

Johnson County Juvenile Judge Michael Bohn agrees. He credits the program’s volunteers and director with being very dedicated to their calling and helping him make educated decisions on whether the children are thriving in a home or need an alternative placement.

“I always find the CASA reports I get to be informative,” he said. “It helps me make a better decision on cases.”

Volunteers must be 21, undergo background checks and complete the training requirements.

Information: 317-346-4561 or [www.casajohnsonco.org](http://www.casajohnsonco.org)



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# CARE FOR CARETAKERS

## Respite care helps avoid fatigue, burn out

STORY BY JENN WILLHITE | PHOTOS BY ADOBESTOCK

Taking care of a loved one — be it part- or full-time — can be physically, emotionally and financially taxing, making burnout a real possibility. In these situations, respite care is an invaluable tool for caregivers who need an added layer of support, experts say.

Essentially, respite care is simply giving the caregiver a break so they can go out and take care of themselves, says Beth Bigham of ComForCare Home Care for South Ind. Exhaustion can exacerbate physical, emotional and financial strain.

“They need to take care of themselves,” Bigham says. “Because if they don’t, they are no good to that person they are taking care of.”

The definition of what respite itself means can vary. For some, it may mean a few hours a day, while for others it could mean a couple hours a week.

Respite caregivers generally keep a set schedule, Bigham says. For most, that means a full 40-hour week, however, some families may not need that much assistance. Whether it is for a few hours or a whole day, decide on a set day/time and timeframe when scheduling respite care, Bigham says, because it isn’t an “on demand” service and requires planning.

Staci LaGrange, program director for Respite Care a Senior Retreat in Franklin, says determining what type of respite care a loved one needs first requires a bit of background.

“We initially meet with families to determine where they are in their caregiving journey,” LaGrange says. “And we determine what specifically their loved one is needing and the goals of their respite care.”

When it comes to the benefits for the caregiver, statistics and research show there is immeasurable importance in allowing oneself permission to step away for a break.

For many, alleviating the guilt associated with seeking a break can itself be a hurdle. However, self-care should always



remain a priority and not be misconstrued as a selfish act.

“Getting caregivers past the fear and guilt is important,” LaGrange says. “Guilt for a caregiver plays in constantly. Just knowing, maybe they aren’t ready for a permanent move for their loved one to be cared for in assisted living or a skilled nursing facility – but to look at a few hours in the day or in the week to lighten the burden for the caregivers.”

LaGrange adds that statistics show that caregivers who have support are more rested and have more patience and ability to manage their caregiving responsibilities.

“We are here to thrive, not just survive,” she says.

There are different types of respite care depending on one’s situation. For those with a loved one who is ambulatory, but struggles with cognitive impairment, such as dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, they can benefit from the socialization offered by day programs, like what LaGrange’s organization offers.

“We are helping serve not only those with dementia, but those who may have a medical need where family members don’t feel comfortable leaving them home alone 24/7,” LaGrange says.

Respite care is not only beneficial for the mental health and wellbeing of the caregiver, but also the person being cared for, LaGrange adds.

Socialization allows the person being

cared to make new friends and feel a sense of belonging and purpose, LaGrange says.

“We have folks come in and the first day they are finishing each other’s sentences,” LaGrange says. “We work through household chores. A lot of our folks are actually retired professionals, whether they are engineers or skilled woodworkers, we are trying to find something that fits into what their life has been like all these years and still give them a sense of purpose. There’s a lot of socialization and a lot of laughter, too.”

For many families, when the necessity of respite care is obvious the focus can quickly shift to how to pay for it.

On average, respite care runs in the ballpark of \$20 and up per hour. Like other forms of healthcare, the ins and outs can get messy. So, here’s the short of it.

Some organizations and facilities offer tiered pricing, depending on the level and type of care required, Bigham says. And, there are some, who offer more extensive help, too.

For instance, Bigham’s organization works with a loan company who offers reverse care insurance, or RCI, to help families cover the cost of respite care. Determining the cost of care involves anticipating how long care will be necessary and the level of care required. An added benefit is RCI can be acquired and implemented in relatively short order, Bigham says, especially when respite or hospice care are needed unexpectedly.

“No one has to sell their house or do a reverse mortgage,” she says. “It is a lower rate than maybe traditional loan sources. Mortgages and things take time.”

Check with insurance to see if respite care is covered by your loved one’s policy as some companies, including Medicaid and Medicare, do offer assistance and coverage depending on the situation, type of care required and the provider.

There’s no harm in exploring all cost



saving options; however, when caregiving is involved, be mindful and leery of too-good-to-be-true opportunities.

Oftentimes, offering a neighbor or an individual cash to come in and offer some respite can sound appealing. And, in times of financial stress, can sometimes seem like an only option. However, it is essential to exercise caution, Bigham says.

In her professional experience, she's seen good intentions going horribly awry.

Basically, it breaks down like this: Say you hire a neighborhood friend or individual to care for a loved one. Respite care is not an absolute and will eventually end when the loved one dies. Now, that individual you paid for all those afternoons has kept track of what you've paid and is now unemployed. All it takes is that person filing for unemployment and you're on the hook for not only their unemployment insurance, but their taxes and workman's compensation, Bigham

says.

"That creates a big bugaboo," Bigham says. "It isn't discussed as much as it should be, but it is a reality and can happen."

Whatever one's situation calls for, respite care is a valuable resource that LaGrange says she wishes more people knew about.

"What I hear frequently is, 'We wish we had known about this sooner' or 'We wish we would have started this sooner,'" she says.

Maybe one doesn't need respite care right now, but the possibility is better than not that one day the need will arise, LaGrange says. Right now, there are an estimated 6.5 million Americans living with Alzheimer's or dementia, LaGrange says, so that means there are a lot of folks out there caregiving.

"We know there are a lot of folks who need assistance now that just don't know quite where to look," LaGrange says. "We want folks to know we are that option."



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# Can you find your way without GPS?

Travel restrictions have relaxed to almost pre-covid days. Tourists are once again hitting the road seeking rest, relaxation, and adventure. Traveling is like before except the likelihood of delays, closures and cancellations is greater. Regardless, enjoy your getaway plans.

There was a time when we didn't have road maps for counties, cities and towns. "Oh, my heavens, how did we ever arrive at our destination?" When I began a career in outside sales in 1986, I often asked for directions with each appointment.

Farm kids knew directions like north and south. We knew address patterns. For example, the odd ending numbers for addresses were always on the south and east side of the road or street. Boulevards and winding roads were a bit trickier.

How did I remember that? A friend of mine once delivered pizzas and informed me of this little rhyme. "Go West young Stephen, North and West are always even." Yes, but county road numbers were difficult until I learned 100 equals one mile. A mile from what, you ask. The middle of the county seat. They have north-south and east-west division roads down the middle of the counties. It is imperative to know those roads. Some counties name those roads "Division Road." How clever.

Also, city planners of old once laid out city streets alphabetically. Knowing this made finding the addresses much easier. People eventually found their way; however, getting lost can be a great adventure too.

Unfortunately, many people are directionally challenged. In fact, some might get offended if you offer directions like, "North, south, east or west." They seem insulted that you didn't use "right or left" for your direction. Consequently, if you asked them, "Which direction does your home face?"



Phyllis Bex has been a resident of Johnson county since 1973, making her home in Greenwood. She can be reached at pbex49@gmail.com.

You might get a blank stare or a scowl.

For those of us growing up in the country, we seemed to have an internal gyroscope. If we didn't, we may never have made it back home. Roads had names that made sense, not a county road number. For instance, the one we grew up on was named Turkeyneck Hill Road. The hill was curvy and long like a turkey neck. Horseshoe Bend was a road curving around a ravine and creek with the water running down the middle on slick rock. How about a road named Graveyard Road? That made sense — it was next to a graveyard. Consider Drunkards Pike. Perhaps adult beverages were involved when it was named? Who knows?

Now all the county roads are numbered, the names are gone. Those of us who grew up in the country still refer to the roads by their old names. The county roads are numbered to assist with 911 responses, etc. However, thumbing through old phone books, some lists the old road with the old telephone number.

Eventually, I discovered every county, city, and town offices offer free maps. So, for

most of my career, I carried a large folder of maps in my car. People today have it easy with GPS. (Technology is great when it works.) Yes, we have become accustomed to a GPS system. If you have internet on your device, it reveals your location.

I often wonder when I travel by car, ship or on buses, "Where in the world am I and what am I near?" This little phone in my pocket is ready to show me the surrounding points of interest. In fact, the maps on the phone come in handy while touring in foreign lands. Many times, I feel sure of my exact location, but on cruises I have been wrong.

For example, did you know Portugal is not on the southern border of Spain? That is exactly where I thought it was until I looked at a large map. No, it's on the west coast of Spain facing the Atlantic Ocean. How'd it get over there? Let this be your geography lesson for the day.

Currently, the cost of cell service is affordable nearly anywhere on the globe. Therefore, when I hit the road again, I will use my phone to keep me updated of my surroundings.

The bottom line, we can't leave home without our mobile phone. Not that we actually use the phone to call anyone. No way. No, we need it for texting, maps, searching the internet and such. We are all guilty, even my seven-decades age group.

Do yourself a favor, try going without the GPS turned on. It will do you good to know you can still function. You'll still know how to get from point A to point B without technology, even though we seem crippled without it.

Yes, we do love our GPS and traveling. I hope you get there and back safe and sound, without too many detours.

# How managing blood pressure can help save lives

Effectively managing your blood pressure can help reduce your chances of life-threatening medical events, even death.

Gain confidence and learn how to take control of your blood pressure with these tips and resources from the American Heart Association.

## THE SILENT KILLER

High blood pressure is often referred to as the “silent killer” because it typically has few, if any, noticeable symptoms but can lead to heart attack, stroke, heart failure and even death. Many people with high blood pressure don’t even know they have it. Some overlooked symptoms can include dizziness, facial flushing and blood spots in the eyes.

## UNDERSTAND YOUR READINGS

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to regularly take an accurate blood pressure measurement.

BY FAMILY FEATURES

## Blood Pressure Categories



BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120-129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130-139	or	80-89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

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[heart.org/bplevels](http://heart.org/bplevels)

Understanding your results is key to controlling high blood pressure. Blood pressure numbers of less than 120/80 mm Hg are usually considered within the normal range, yet it is important to talk to

a doctor about your healthy range. Even if you fall within a healthy range, it can be beneficial to stick with heart-healthy habits like following a balanced diet and getting regular exercise. Consider these

numbers and ranges to know if it's necessary to take action:

- Elevated blood pressure is when readings consistently range from 120-129 mm Hg systolic (the upper number) and less than 80 mm Hg diastolic (the lower number). People with elevated blood pressure are likely to develop high blood pressure unless steps are taken to control the condition.
- Hypertension stage 1 is when blood pressure consistently ranges from 130-139 mm Hg systolic or 80-89 mm Hg diastolic. At this stage, doctors are likely to prescribe lifestyle changes and may consider adding blood pressure medication based on your risk of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, such as heart attack or stroke.
- Hypertension stage 2 is when blood pressure consistently ranges at 140/90

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# A RICH PORTRAIT ON AGING

## Photographer's 12-year quest to document her life

BY JUDITH GRAHAM/KAISER HEALTH NEWS

A dozen years ago, at age 70, Marna Clarke had a dream. She was walking on a sidewalk and rounded a corner. Ahead of her, she saw an end to the path and nothing beyond.

It was a turning point for Clarke. “I realized, ‘Oh my God, I’m nearer the end than the beginning,’” she said. Soon, she was seized by a desire to examine what she looked like at that time — and to document the results.

Clarke, a professional photographer decades before, picked up a camera and began capturing images of her face, hair, eyes, arms, legs, feet, hands and torso. In many, she was undressed. “I was exploring the physical part of being older,” she told me.

It was a radical act: Older women are largely invisible in our culture, and honest and unsentimental portraits of their bodies are almost never seen.

Before long, Clarke, who lives in Inverness, California, turned her lens on her partner, Igor Sazevich, a painter and architect 11 years her senior, and began recording scenes of their life together. Eventually, she realized they were growing visibly older in these photographs. And she understood she was creating a multi-

year portrait of aging.

The collection that resulted, which she titled “Time As We Know It,” this year won a LensCulture Critics’ Choice Award, given to 40 photographers on five continents. “There is a universality and humility in seeing these images which remind us of the power of love and the fragility of life,” wrote Rhea Combs of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Portrait Gallery, one of the judges.

Early on, some people were offended by the images Clarke displayed at galleries in the San Francisco Bay Area, near her home. “I found out there’s a taboo about showing older adults’ bodies — some people were just aghast,” she said in a phone conversation.

But many people in their 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s expressed gratitude. “I learned that older people are dying for some kind of recognition and acceptance and that they want to feel seen — to feel that they’re not invisible,” Clarke said.

Art has many benefits in later life, both for creators and for those who enjoy their work. It can improve health by expanding well-being, cultivating a sense of purpose, and countering beliefs such as the assumption that older age is defined

almost exclusively by deterioration and decline, Dr. Gene Cohen wrote in “The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life,” published in 2000.

Cohen, a psychiatrist, was the first director of the Center for Aging, Health and Humanities at George Washington University and acting director of the National Institute on Aging from 1991 to 1993.

In 2006, Cohen published findings from the Creativity and Aging Study, conducted in San Francisco; Brooklyn, New York; and the Washington, D.C. area. Two groups of older adults were studied: those who participated weekly in arts programs led by professionals and people who went about their usual business. Those in the first group saw doctors less often, used less medication, were more active, and had better physical and mental health overall, the study found.

For Clarke, “perspective” and “acceptance of my body as it is” have been benefits of her 12-year project. As a young and middle-aged woman, she said she was “obsessed” with and anxious about her appearance. “Now, I think there’s a beauty that comes out of people when they accept who they are,” she told me. “It’s altered how I look at myself and how I see others.”

In early August, Clarke, now 82, found herself at another turning point with the death of Szevich, 93, who had lymphoma and refused chemotherapy. The couple

*Continued on Page 14*



Marna Clarke documented herself as she aged, as well as during the recent illness and death of her partner, Igor Szevich.

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Marna Clarke and Igor Szevich hang greenery at their California home before his illness and death in August.

had been together since 2003 but hadn't married.

Szevich had fallen three times in the months before, broken his hip, contracted pneumonia in the hospital and returned home on hospice. As he lay in bed on his final day, receiving morphine and surrounded by family, two dogs belonging to one of his daughters came close, checking on him every hour. At the moment of his death, they growled, probably because "they felt a change in the energy," Clarke said.

"It was amazing — I have never been through an experience like that in my life," she said about Szevich's death. "There was so much love in that room, you could cut it with a knife. I think it's changed me. It's given me a glimpse of what's possible with humans."

Everywhere she goes in Inverness, Clarke runs into people who tell her how sorry they are for her loss and ask if they can help. "I am overwhelmed by the care pouring over me from my friends and family," she

said. "It's like a huge embrace."

It takes a community to comfort an older adult coping with loss, just as it takes a community to raise a child. Clarke said she is still "up and down emotionally ... questioning what death is" as she processes her loss.

Eventually, Clarke said, she wants to restart work on "Time As We Know It." "Because it's about aging me," she said. "My aging. And that's what I'm committed to. It's given me a purpose. And when you're growing old, you need to have something you love and makes you feel alive."

*Kaiser Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues. Together with Policy Analysis and Polling, KHN is one of the three major operating programs at Kaiser Family Foundation, an endowed nonprofit organization providing information on health issues to the nation.*

# As a young man, I traveled the High Sierra by mule ... after 59 years, I tried it again

BY DOUG SMITH/LOS ANGELES TIMES

**GOLDEN TROUT WILDERNESS, Calif.** — We clambered loudly up the miserable incline, horses stumbling as their shoes slid on the ladder of rocks that took us up and away from the Kern River.

“Devil’s Stairway,” Chelsea McGlyn, the wrangler on this expedition, said over her shoulder, twisting around in the saddle.

Was it such a brutal trail when I made my first trip here almost 60 years ago? Memory is too fragile to say definitively.

What I can never forget from that day was the cowboy on the fast paint horse who got stuck behind me and had to eat my dust — kicked up by a horse and three mules — until the trail leveled out.

He paused and introduced himself as Sterling Grant, farmer from the San Joaquin Valley town of Wasco, and invited the 16-year-old wannabe cowboy from Los Angeles to mosey up the river and visit him in the morning.

“I’ll be at Funston,” he said, and pulled away at a near trot.

The encounter, in 1963, was a fulcrum in my life. The three-mile ride from my camp to Funston Meadow awakened a lifetime connection to the Upper Kern River Canyon, a magical place of 2,000-foot-tall granite escarpments, impossibly angled rock taluses, boulders as big as houses launched by glaciers eons ago and stands of tamarack pine and fern.

Through it runs the Kern, not mighty by any measure, but seductive in every transition of color, shape and sound as the river moves through deep pools, wide riffles and violent cascades, a cinema known only to the few who would bear 28 miles of dust and sweat, on foot or horseback, to reach it.

The three granite towers looming over the entrance to Sequoia National Park became a spiritual foundation, the source of my understanding of my place in time. Just upriver, Funston became my temporal base where I learned the hard rules of self-reliance amid a setting of raw beauty and rough-hewn companions.

Over four summers, I became a seasoned mule hand, inured to physical hardship and at ease with the speech patterns and values of San Joaquin Valley cattlemen.

I vacillated between city and Sierra, finally settling on city in part because of the Watts riots of 1965. Though not the proximate cause, the uprising became a homeward pull, a call of distress from a city that never had seemed to me as vast as it was nor as damaged as it had become. I felt I had to return to the city and help it heal.

I also found love, started a family, became a newsman and have been one ever since, chronicling my city through 50 years of changes that have all but eclipsed the freedom I and my friends from Nightingale Junior High School took as a natural gift when we rode the bus from Highland Park to the Coliseum on Dodger game nights.

No matter how grim the events, I have always taken strength from the memory of places that cannot be erased. Whatever happens to the city, Golden Trout Creek (I say “crik”) will always cascade 300 feet over Volcano Falls on its descent to the manzanita flat where I waded up to my waist against a ripping current on that first time wrangling horses and mules.

I always knew I would return to the gorge. I never thought it would take so long. Finally, it was the awareness that my physical capacity for the journey was not infinite that overruled inaction.

This summer I came back, not as that boy whose bookish passion for Henry David Thoreau and Jedediah Smith somehow morphed into a real-life fantasy job, but as a 75-year-old reasonably versed in the changes of the time — both climate and culture. Would the mountains have changed in my absence? Might my own perceptions have changed too?

Some of the answers I already knew.

*Continued on Page 16*



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## Blood pressure, continued

mm Hg or higher. At this stage, doctors are likely to prescribe a combination of blood pressure medications and lifestyle changes.

- A hypertensive crisis requires medical attention. If your blood pressure readings suddenly exceed 180/120 mm Hg, wait 5 minutes then test again. If your readings are still unusually high, contact your doctor immediately. Seek emergency help if your blood pressure is higher than 180/120 mm Hg and you are experiencing signs of possible organ damage such as chest pain, shortness of breath, back pain, numbness or weakness, change in vision or difficulty speaking.

### KNOW YOUR RISK

While many risk factors for high blood pressure may be related to your age, gender and family history, there are also risk factors you can change to help prevent and manage high blood pressure. People at added risk may be those who engage in lower levels of physical activity, eat a diet high in sodium (particularly from packaged, processed foods), may be overweight or obese, drink excessive amounts of alcohol and may have multiple chronic conditions.

### TALK ABOUT IT

Whether you're making changes in your own life to combat high blood pressure or helping someone else, positive feelings and confidence are longer-term motivators to making health changes. If you're talking with friends, loved ones or your doctor, be prepared to ask open-ended questions. Be curious and kind to yourself and others you may be helping.

### LOWERING YOUR PRESURE

You can reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, heart failure and even death with lifestyle changes and medication.

Watching your weight, especially if you are overweight or obese, can

bring health gains; losing as little as 5-10 pounds may help lower your blood pressure. Managing your stress by relaxing for short periods during your workday, at night and on weekends is another productive practice.

If you have diabetes, it's important to work with a doctor to manage the disease and reduce your blood glucose levels.

If you think you could have sleep apnea, getting screened for and treating the condition can also reduce your risk for developing high blood pressure.

When you have high blood pressure, medication may be an important part of your treatment. Follow the recommendations carefully, even if it means taking medication every day for the rest of your life.

When you're discussing high blood pressure concerns with your health care provider, also be sure to talk to your doctor about over-the-counter pain relievers that won't raise your blood pressure.

### GETTING READY

#### FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT

Think about what challenges you face in controlling your blood pressure that you need to share with your doctor to create a plan that works for you. Start by considering the answers to these questions to discuss with your health care provider:

- How often do you check your blood pressure?
- Do you keep a log of your blood pressure measurements?
- Are you taking medications as prescribed?
- What are some things you can do to have less salt in your diet?
- What are some reasons it can be hard to manage your blood pressure?
- What are some things you'd like to discuss during your appointment?

Learn more about monitoring and managing high blood pressure at [heart.org/bptools](http://heart.org/bptools).



Sadly for me, Woody's Pack Station, the Depression-era compound of wood shanties that had been our base, was gone, bypassed by the logging roads that had shrunk the backcountry by several miles.

More happily, the declaration of the Golden Trout Wilderness Area in 1978 banished backcountry motorcycles from vast areas of Sequoia National Forest. Nothing but a stray spark plug or two would be left of the devilish machines that tore up the trails, annoyed the livestock and fouled the air with their sound.

I also knew that the Castle fire had swept over my corner of the Western Sierra in 2020. Still, I was unprepared for the epochal change I witnessed on the last leg of my five-hour drive from L.A. ascending the 27 miles of switchbacks up the Tule River Canyon on Highway 190. A ponderosa pine and cedar forest was reduced to a landscape of charcoal sticks.

Intuitively, I reached the conclusion — one I later learned was supported in a review of studies by the nation's forest managers and experts — that the conifer forest that had inhabited these slopes for millennia could be gone forever.

Golden Trout Pack Station, the new base camp at the end of a three-mile dirt road, had not escaped, either. Only a concrete slab and chimney remained of the lodge that had anchored a small settlement of tack sheds and guest cabins. Owner Steve Day invited me into the trailer that was his temporary home while waiting for Forest Service permits to rebuild. We clicked glasses of Jim Beam, and he told how he rallied his fellow horsemen from the

valley to trailer dozens of horses and mules to safety as the Castle fire made its inexorable approach to his establishment.

Day was scratching his way back with a depleted crew of wranglers and a wounded backcountry.

"It sucks," Day said, but then added about the burned-out landscape: "It's a different kind of beauty. If we get mad at it, all's we're going to do is be mad. We just got to be happy we're up here."

\*\*\*\*

I was up at daybreak, but the wranglers awoke two hours earlier to feed the livestock and then catch, brush and saddle the three horses and three mules chosen for our trip. I would be a party of one, having taken the place of a larger group that canceled at the last minute.

I felt awkward in the role of customer, standing idly as Chelsea and her younger sister, Correy McGlyn, fitted food, bedding and camp equipment into 75-pound packs, lifted them onto the saddle forks and snugged them down with ingeniously tied lash ropes.

As we descended toward the Little Kern River, I soon beheld the southern extension of the Great Western Divide, that string of treeless peaks that forms the western parapet of the Kern gorge.

The yellow Angora Mountain, the blanched twin Coyote Peaks and the purple cup of Farewell Gap, the source of the Little Kern River, filled me with flashbacks of awe and angst. When something went wrong in the backcountry — as it almost always did — and



we'd reach our destination after dark, the Sierra's most enchanting phenomenon would console me as the setting sun concentrated in a simultaneously shrinking and intensifying glow of fire before blinking out.

This time, I passed up the photo-op. My phone was turned off to preserve battery for our five-day trip. Besides, the picture in my memory was more striking.

There would be no line to the outside. In that way, I was again confronting a fact that had not changed since I first faced it 60 years ago. If something went wrong, we would deal with it on our own.

Four hours in, my creaking knees needed a rest. I dismounted to walk a mile through Willow Meadow, a narrow passage of ascending flatlands cupped in granite slopes. It was a decision I did not then realize would cause that inevitable something going wrong. At the time, my attention was on a carpet of yellow flowers highlighting a field of perpendicular black lines, the mast-like trunks of dead, burned tamarack pine.

"A different type of beauty," Chelsea said, repeating the line of stoic philosophy that had become a kind of mantra for the pack station.

We crested the canyon, began a steep descent toward the Kern River and met an inconvenient ramification of wilderness status. The chainsaw, once the trail crew's indispensable companion, has been banished along with trail machines. Consequently, tree trunks as big around as lasso loops lay on the trail where they had fallen over the winter.

The Forest Service long ago abandoned routine maintenance of these trails, leaving that duty to volunteers. Golden Trout's packers had worked the trails until the Castle fire destroyed their two-man saws.

So this year, renegade trails have been blazed around the windfalls, one lurching 30 feet or so down a rockslide, then back up the bank. Horses can't complain, but they groan. Riders contort. Mules endure.

As we worked our way toward the Kern River, a different kind of beauty began to reveal itself. The Castle fire, or other lightning fires before or after, had encountered a habitat that resisted them. Individual trees were blackened and dead but others partly blackened and still alive. The dead became fewer and fewer, gradually outnumbered by the living forest.



Two more hours and we reached the Devil's Stairway, an 800-foot climb around an ancient rockslide that created Little Kern Lake, an emerald oval that appeared below us as we topped the ridge. In my mind it should have been azure. Had the warming climate spawned an algae bloom or was it only faulty memory?

With that question lingering, we made one more climb over one more ridge to Big Kern Lake, our destination for the night. Chelsea and Correy went to work unloading the packs and stripping off saddles. I wanted to help out but learned that lifting a 75-pound pack box with one hand while easing its leather straps off the saddle forks with the other was no longer within my capacity. So I watched.

Turned loose, the horses and mules went to the nearest patch of sand and rolled on their backs, kicking their legs upward in an exhibition that comes as close to pleasure as a thousand-pound animal can get. Then they disappeared into the willows toward the meadow where they would spend the night eating and where we would, we hoped, find them in the morning.

Some things had changed in the practice of packing, I was learning. For one, back then we were a society of men — a ragged lot of misfit adolescents and worn-out ranch hands.

The "girls," as Day called Chelsea and Correy, had no inclination to the harsh animal husbandry those men had practiced. They managed just fine with sweet words and extra grazing time. Raised in a hamlet in upstate New York, they're westerners by choice, not birth.

Besides introducing the ethos of women packers, Day had elevated the job to include the culinary arts. Their livestock chores done, Chelsea and Correy created a multicourse dinner of shrimp hors d'oeuvres, pasta alfredo, salad with a cranberry vinaigrette and dessert.

Back in the '60s, the big parties from the San Joaquin Valley — Sterling Grant and the other Wasco farmers, the stockmen from Weed Patch and Metler, and the Shriners from Bakersfield — always came with an experienced backcountry cook, always a man, who would pack one mule with steaks on dry ice and another — for the gentlest mule — with whiskey.

By the dying glow of the campfire, I learned that Chelsea was in her third year packing. Correy, a recent USC graduate, had signed up as an apprentice.

The fire was dying out, so I found a nearly level corner of camp and laid out two saddle pads to cushion my sleeping bag. A persistent mosquito forced me to cover my face with a shirt, denying the reprise of that most pleasant memory of

fading off to sleep under the white swath of the Milky Way.

I slept soundly despite the rough bed, as fatigue overcame the inconvenience of oozing sores on the inside of both legs where the pull straps of my cowboy boots had worn away the skin while I walked — that something that always goes wrong.

In the morning, Chelsea offered me her clogs. But, dammit, some pretensions cannot be compromised. I wrapped spare socks inside the boot shafts to keep leather away from wound.

While Correy tended the mules, Chelsea and I rode on to the Kern Gorge where the emotional leg of my journey of remembrance would begin.

It came in small steps, not a revelation. First a deep blue pool beneath a granite outcrop that led up and away from the river. Then a half-mile vista of the Kern splashing straight toward us from around a bend. Reaching that bend we entered Sequoia National Park, crossed Coyote Creek and beheld Tower Rock in its most imposing posture.

It's not El Capitan. I concede that. Its majesty is its own, communicable only to those who embrace, ever so distantly, the spirit of hardship and discovery that brought Jedediah Smith to these mountains almost 200 years ago.

My infatuation with that seminal American explorer has faded with age, as has the cultural standing of mountain men like him who killed and ate their mules to complete their journeys, not to mention the human victims they left in their paths.

Even so, time has not diminished my wonder at the sight of Tower Rock. It is permanence. It is my touchstone in the universe, forever.

I watched its angles shift at the steady pace of a horse's walk. Then it disappeared behind us as we continued to Funston Meadow. At last, Chelsea and I squeezed through the passage between giant boulders that marks the final approach to Funston, reviving the memory of my first trip there almost 60 years before:

That's the thing about the Sierra — and perhaps about getting older. Things evolve, sometimes deteriorate. But some things won't change in my lifetime and many lifetimes ahead, and there's comfort in that. If I'm able, I'll return next year to watch for signs of a recovering forest and, of course, to wonder at the grandeur of Tower Rock.

# Make holiday memories with sweet eats

STORY AND PHOTOS BY FAMILY FEATURES



Whether your festivities include immediate family or bring together relatives from around the country, the holidays are about making memories with loved ones. From the first days of the season to the last, many families spend their precious time together with favorite activities and the best foods the holidays have to offer.

This year, you can change things up and start new traditions with a fresh ingredient like Envy apples, which provide an easy way to update classics due to their sweet taste and availability. The sweet, sophisticated flavor; uplifting, fresh aroma; delightfully satisfying crunch; beautiful appearance; and naturally white flesh that doesn't brown as quickly as other apples all lend themselves to shareable recipes like this Apple Wreath Salad or Roasted Apple Macaroni and Cheese, both perfect for holiday

parties.

Because cherished memories are made with sweet ingredients, you can turn cozy movie nights into festive and memorable events year after year by pairing Hallmark Channel's popular "Countdown to Christmas" holiday movies with a delicious dessert like Apple Custard Sponge Trifle.

Find more memory-making recipes at [EnvyApple.com](http://EnvyApple.com).

## APPLE WREATH SALAD

Recipe courtesy of "The Produce Moms" (@[theproducemoms](https://www.instagram.com/theproducemoms))

Balsamic dressing:

1 tablespoon honey

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt

1/2 teaspoon black pepper, finely ground

1 large garlic clove, minced

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar

3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salad:

10 ounces baby arugula

3 Envy apples, sliced

9 ounces goat cheese, crumbled

3 ounces pomegranate arils

3 ounces pecans, toasted

To make balsamic dressing: In small serving bowl, whisk honey, Dijon mustard, salt, pepper, garlic, balsamic vinegar and olive oil.

Place dressing bowl in center of large board or platter.

Arrange arugula around dressing bowl in wreath shape.

Place apple slices on top of arugula. Sprinkle on goat cheese, pomegranate arils and pecans.

## APPLE CUSTARD SPONGE TRIFLE

Servings: 8-10

6 Envy apples

2 tablespoons golden caster sugar

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 cup, plus 2 tablespoons, water

1 tablespoon corn flour

1 large plain sponge cake

2 cups vanilla bean custard

1/2 cup caramel or butterscotch sauce,  
plus additional for garnish, divided

1/2 cup cream

Fresh apple slices

Fresh strawberry slices

Peel, core and dice apples; place in large

saucepan. Add caster sugar, cinnamon and 1/2 cup water. Simmer apples 5-8 minutes until tender.

Combine corn flour and remaining water. Stir corn flour mixture into apples until apples are syrupy.

Cut sponge cake into 2-centimeter diced pieces. Arrange 1/3 of sponge pieces in base of serving bowl. Add half of cinnamon apple pieces, including syrupy juices. Add 1 cup custard and drizzle with 1/4 cup caramel sauce. Repeat with remaining ingredients, finishing with sponge cake; chill.

Whip cream and spoon dollops over sponge cake to cover top. Garnish with apple slices, strawberry slices and caramel sauce.



## ROASTED APPLE MACARONI AND CHEESE

Salted water

1 pound macaroni noodles

4 tablespoons butter

1 Envy apple, peeled and diced

4 tablespoons flour

2 cups heavy cream

2 cups milk

3 cups sharp cheddar cheese, grated

1 cup Romano cheese, grated

1 cup Gruyere cheese, grated

1 tablespoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon Worcestershire

Topping:

2 tablespoons butter

1 cup panko breadcrumbs

Bring large pot of salted water to boil. Add noodles and cook until just tender. Drain and set aside.

In large pot over high heat, melt butter then saute diced apple until caramelized and tender. Sprinkle in flour and stir. Cook 1 minute, stirring frequently.

Whisk in heavy cream and milk; bring to boil, whisking

frequently so milk doesn't burn.

Once boiling, turn heat to low and whisk in cheddar cheese, Romano cheese, Gruyere cheese, salt and Worcestershire. Continue whisking until cheese is melted thoroughly.

Carefully pour mixture into large blender and blend on high until smooth.

Pour cheese sauce over noodles and stir.

Pour macaroni and cheese into 9-by-13-inch pan and spread evenly.

Heat oven to broil.

To make topping: In medium bowl, melt butter and stir in panko breadcrumbs.

Sprinkle breadcrumbs over macaroni and cheese; broil until golden brown.





*Jeff and April Herrmann*

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