



# BLACK HILLS *WOMAN* MAGAZINE

*A Winding Path  
to Watercolors*

WITH SAMMI GARTLAND

AMAZING GRAZE

*Crafting Community*

MOSTLY CHOCOLATES

*A Sweet Escape*

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# Letter from the Editor



I recently heard someone I greatly admire and respect say, “Let us gossip good news, leak out love, be distracted by kindness, choose generosity, live in wonder.” It is a sentiment that has stuck with me, one I have been pondering on frequently as this new year has begun.

How would our lives look differently if we loved others gracefully? To choose to speak kindly and bestow blessing, to be

generous with our time and our actions, to wonder at all that is good instead of honing in on the negative. Is the Golden Rule just something we memorized as children or a truth we’re putting into practice every day?

It is easy to be consumed by self - we live in a culture obsessed by it. But when we worry only about bettering who we are, and not those around us, we miss a very important piece of the puzzle. When we take the focus off of ourselves, we create opportunities to change ordinary interactions into meaningful moments for those we encounter. I personally have found when I am intentional about loving those around me, I am the one who experiences joy in return.

So this February, instead of focusing on romantic love, let us be reminded that love can be shown in a variety of different ways to all kinds of people. And that kindness and generosity aren’t characteristics that should be taken for granted, instead, they should be at the forefront of who we are.

Warmly,

*Kari Nielsen*



RILEY WINTER

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# A WINDING PATH TO WATERCOLORS

*with Sammi Gartland*

STORY BY KRYSTAL BRESNAHAN • PHOTOS BY ALYSSA CRAWFORD





SAMMI GARTLAND LOVES THE WAY  
PAINT DOES WHAT IT WANTS. FOR HER,  
EMBRACING IMPERFECTION FEELS LIKE  
FREEDOM. SAMMI'S CAREER STORY  
IS LESS LIKE A STRAIGHT LINE AND  
BETTER EXPRESSED IN BOLD, BENDING  
BRUSHSTROKES.

*Read on* TO LEARN HOW SAMMI FOUND  
HER WAY TO WATERCOLORS AND STARTED WILD  
BLOOM ART & DESIGNS.





“From an early age, I learned resilience, responsibility, and how to push through difficult circumstances,” Sammi says. “Art has always been a part of me. It just took me years to realize how much my soul truly needed it.”

When Sammi was just nine years old, her father died unexpectedly, leaving behind four young children ranging from 10 to just three weeks old. In high school, Sammi’s art teacher encouraged her to attend a summer art program after she won a Scholastic Award for a mixed-media painting, but as a single mom of four kids, her mom couldn’t afford it.

Instead, Sammi’s life headed in a different direction.

“I come from a long line of military service—my grandfather was a retired General, my grandmother a Colonel, and my mom was a Staff Sergeant when my father passed. After 9/11, I knew I wanted to serve, too. I earned an Army ROTC scholarship, attended Penn College, earned a Bachelor’s degree in civil engineering with a math minor, and captained my college soccer team my final two years... I commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Army, and after active duty, I transitioned into a career in construction management.”

Looking back, Sammi understands she filled her life with achievements to avoid feel-





ing anything too deeply.

“It wasn’t until I lost my dog of 14 years that I found my way back to art. In 2022, my grandpa—who also loves painting and photography—sent me a paint-by-numbers of myself and my dog, Charlie. That small gesture reignited something in me,” she says.

After finishing her paint-by-numbers, Sammi bought a cheap set of watercolors and completely fell in love. “Art saved me at a time when I didn’t even realize how lost I was,” she shares. “It gave me a way to process grief, joy, motherhood, now sobriety, and identity all at once—and reminded me that we’re allowed to evolve more than once in a lifetime.”

When Sammi started experimenting with watercolors, she was a mom of three young kids with a demanding career. She admits to worrying constantly about what people thought. “One night, I asked my family for feedback, and my then-seven-year-old said, ‘Who cares what we think, Mom? Art is for the artist.’”

That moment changed everything for Sammi.

“We put so much pressure on ourselves: be the best mom, the best employee, the best partner, the best version of yourself. Watercolor gave me permission to let go.”

Her first paintings were gifts for friends and loved ones featuring birth flower bouquets and portraits capturing the personalities of family pets gone too soon. “I quickly realized how meaningful art can be when it moves someone to tears or touches their heart,” she shares.

Two years ago, Sammi launched her small business Wild Bloom Art & Design, opening herself up to public inquiries and commissioned paintings. One of her favorite parts of creating art is the start: “The moment where the possibilities are endless, and a simple blank sheet can transform into something truly special.”

People often say how lucky Sammi is to be so talented. “The honest truth is, I was terrible when I started,” she shares. “Lots of paintings still end up in the trash, but I love the process of creating...I’m proud of the artist I’ve grown into and still have so much learning to do.”



Sammi says she's restarted pieces more times than she can count. Her biggest challenge is the emotional weight of capturing someone's essence—especially during grief. "One of my hardest pieces was a charcoal drawing of a grandmother holding two babies after a woman lost twins at 20 weeks, and the grandmother passed away around the same time," Sammi shares. "Having experienced miscarriages myself, I felt that grief deeply."

Although it might seem like a lot of pressure to create such personal pieces, Sammi loves building trust with new people and bringing joy and beauty to their lives. She says that's why she does this work: "To honor love, loss, and the emotions that come with them."

Her art practice continues to be energized and encouraged by her family. "Now I paint with my kids weekly, and we have an entire

hallway dedicated to their artwork. Creativity is part of our everyday life."

She's also supported in life, work, and dreams by her amazing husband, who agreed to sell their dining room table so they could turn the dining room into her work-from-home office and art studio. "Someday I dream of having a larger studio with more windows and storage, but I make it work for now!" she says.

She's determined to keep growing as an artist, taking on unique opportunities including custom wall murals, local art festivals, school craft fairs, and teaching watercolor classes. You can find her artwork in downtown Rapid City at Aqua and Acre Market and Byrch Boutique, and soon you'll see her stunning scenes of the Black Hills on permanent display inside the boutique.

Sammi still works full time in her construc-





tion career, and she believes creativity exists alongside practicality to make every part of her life richer.

"IF MY WORK DOES ANYTHING, I HOPE IT GIVES [YOU] PERMISSION TO FEEL DEEPLY, CREATE FREELY, AND TRUST THAT THE IMPERFECT, WINDING PATH IS OFTEN THE MOST MEANINGFUL ONE."



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MOSTLY CHOCOLATES:

# A Sweet Escape

STORY BY KARI NIELSEN

Mostly Chocolates has been a Rapid City staple for over 40 years. Often synonymous with the best chocolate shop in South Dakota, Mostly Chocolates is the go-to source for truffles, fudge, caramels, assorted chocolates, nut clusters, and chocolate-covered strawberries.

Peggy Porch, owner of Mostly Chocolates since 2021, recalls just how sought-after those strawberries are for the upcoming Valentine's Day holiday.











“All of our chocolates are popular, but our freshly dipped chocolate-covered strawberries are the star of the show,” she says. Noting that older (wiser) gentlemen often procure their Valentine’s gifts on the 12th or 13th, she shares that younger men often rush in on the 14th looking a bit frazzled.

*“our freshly dipped  
chocolate-covered  
strawberries are the  
star of the show”*

“One year, we ran out of chocolate strawberries mid-afternoon. A line of young men were in the store, each having asked for strawberries only to be disappointed. Then another young man walked in to get the strawberry order he had placed ahead of time. He turned to all the other men as he was headed out the door and said, ‘Lesson learned, boys!’ That story still makes me chuckle, and I also get more strawberries now so we aren’t as likely to run out,” Peggy says.

But whether you are looking for a

Valentine's Day gift this February, or just on the hunt to satisfy your sweet tooth - Mostly Chocolates is the area's premiere choice. Crafting almost all of their chocolate products in-house, they source ingredients of the highest quality to ensure their offerings are unmatched.

"Couverture is a specialty, premium chocolate with a high cocoa butter content, giving it the finest flavor, texture, and finish," Peggy shares. "There are only a few companies in the world that make couverture. We buy from several of them and use that chocolate to create our products. Over the course of a year, we buy thousands of pounds of premium chocolate."

But as the name suggests, while the main products are mostly chocolates, that's not all they are known for.

"One unique product we make is Gourmet Caramel Corn. We pop the corn, then mix it in a giant copper kettle while adding fresh ingredients to make the caramel coating as well as various nuts which are also coated in

caramel. Finally, we add some chocolate-covered nuts to the mix before packaging," Peggy says.

In addition, the German Almonds and caramel apples are in high demand.

"We sell hundreds of caramel apples, especially in the fall," Peggy shares. "Three flavors are standard - caramel, chocolate-covered caramel, and chocolate and pecan-covered caramel. We also do special flavors sometimes. I may be biased, but I think ours are the best around!"

Mostly Chocolates is also a great resource for specialty curated gifts.

"A couple of years ago, we were asked to provide a large order of our Rushmore Gift Baskets for sponsors of the Governor's Inaugural Ball in Pierre. We have supplied chocolate buffalo for the Custer Park

Annual Buffalo Round Up, and this year, we created chocolate pheasant molds for pheasant hunting lodges in the state."





For those with food allergies and sensitivities, consumers should know that most of the chocolate is gluten-free. All but two of the truffles are gluten-free, in addition to most of the assorted chocolates. There is also a nice selection of sugar-free chocolate in the store, and while that is not made in-house, it is sourced from an excellent company.

Aside from providing a gourmet selection of goodies, Mostly Chocolates doubles as M.C. Coffee House, sourcing coffee from local roaster Dark Canyon Coffee Company and making a variety of homemade baked goods such as their famous Lemon Huckleberry bread. Named after Peggy's parents, their best-selling latte is

affectionately called the “Boyd and Pat” and features chocolate, caramel, and English toffee. If that isn't your fancy, maybe try one of their other unique lattes like the “Cowboy in New York” (chocolate, hazelnut, and cheesecake), “Gold in the Hills” (butter pecan and pineapple), or “Singin' in the Rain” (blackberry, mint, and vanilla).

“Our coffee house is becoming very well known through word of mouth,” Peggy shares. “It is a lovely place to meet friends or business associates while enjoying a great coffee.”

Because at the heart of the business, Peggy hopes customers are blessed every time they walk through the



doors. As a fourth-generation South Dakota girl, Peggy understands the importance of strong community ties and lasting connections.

“My great-grandparents were some of the earliest settlers in Western South Dakota, raising cattle near the White River basin south of Kadoka (which hadn’t yet been founded). I have a deep love for the Badlands, the Black Hills, and the sweeping grasslands of this part of America,” Peggy says.

Although she lived in the eastern part of the state for several decades raising her four daughters as a stay-at-home mom, it was this affection for her roots that drew her back to Rapid City, ultimately through the purchase of Mostly Chocolates.

“While I was still living in Sioux Falls, I actually sent a random email found on the website of Mostly Chocolates to inquire about whether they would be interested in partnering with me,” Peggy shares. “The owner, who was also named Peggy, responded by telling me they were planning

to put the business up for sale. I spent the next couple of months seeking advice from family members and praying about if this is what God wanted me to do. The answer was YES!”

Inheriting a talented group of hardworking employees with high standards, including a couple of actual chocolatiers who have spent many years becoming experts at the craft, Peggy praises her staff for making Mostly Chocolates the friendly, professional atmosphere it is so well-known for. Those employees assist in the kitchen, put away newly made chocolates, work as baristas, do cleaning work, and move between the chocolate shop and the coffee shop as needed. Ultimately, they are the face of the business and are responsible for creating happy, lifelong customers.

“We hear so many compliments every day, which is uplifting,” Peggy says. “I want our customers to always feel genuinely appreciated and leave our shop feeling like a friend.”

*Visit Mostly Chocolates at their new location with a view*  
**7201 MT. RUSHMORE ROAD #500, RAPID CITY, SD 57702**





# *crafting* community

STORY BY MADIGAN SCHMITZ





Creating something beautiful has to start from somewhere, and for Joselyn Haines, taking a chance on herself allowed her to create something more beautiful than she could ever imagine.

Joselyn is the heart — and hands — behind Amazing Graze Charcuterie. A catering company dedicated to bringing people together through delicious food, by way of eye-catching tablescapes. Whether she's thoughtfully curating a board to adorn a festive dinner table, or artfully crafting a spread to feed 100 wedding guests, the people she's creating the charcuterie boards for are always at the center.

Caring for people is in Joselyn's nature, and before she began her journey in the world of charcuterie, she was working at Black Hills Children's Home. While rewarding, it was taking a toll on her both physically and emotionally. Long, taxing days led to her questioning if this was what she was supposed to be doing.

"I loved the kids and I loved being a part of their lives, but the job took a lot out of me. It even started to affect my immune system, and

the stress led to me fighting constant battles with illness. I eventually got to a place where I knew I couldn't do it anymore," she says.

During this time, Joselyn was working with a friend — Landi, owner of Sioux Falls-based Cultivated in Love — on her charcuterie skills. Her mother had previously taken a class with Landi and mentioned that Joselyn should give charcuterie board-making a go; she immediately took to it.

For her, the way forward was clear. She left her job at the children's home and took a leap of faith in starting her own charcuterie business. Under the mentorship of Landi, she learned everything from fruit and cheese pairings, to how to create delicate roses out of the meat. Landi took her under her wing and allowed her the space to explore and develop her own style, while teaching her a valuable lesson in the process.

"She taught me a huge lesson in community and collaboration over competition. She was so helpful and gave me such a huge boost as I was starting my business. It was a huge blessing," says Joselyn.







Now, three years later, Joselyn's business has blossomed. She creates boards and grazing tables for all occasions, and has outgrown her in-home kitchen operation as she serves the entire Black Hills region throughout the year. After requiring more room, she relocated her kitchen to Sturgis, in order to have a dedicated place to fulfill orders more effectively. This was successful for a while, but as her demand increased, she knew she'd have to rethink her preparation space. Now, she has a centrally located kitchen in Rapid City, which provides her with more time, flexibility, and space to create her beautiful boards. The community has warmly welcomed her.

She's well-equipped to assemble her popular Adult Lunchables, wash, cut, and prepare the fruit and vegetables that are placed on the boards. She can also create charcuterie roses to her heart's content. Since seeing success in her own business, she's committed to raising up other women who have hopes to start their own board-making journeys, in the same way Landi guided her along the way.

"Helping other women has only helped to

grow my opportunities and business. It's super important for us as local business owners to remember that we're all in this together, and it's better if we help each other rather than look at one another as competition."

Since embarking on her charcuterie board endeavor, Joselyn has found joy in abundance in not only being able to pursue her dreams, but to be a part of some of the biggest moments in people's lives. She's still able to give back to the community she cares for so deeply, but in a way where she's still able to have a little more energy left over for herself.

"It's so fulfilling. Even if I'm working 24-36 hours for an event, I just remind myself how grateful I am to be doing what I'm doing now. It's so cool to be a part of a day that someone's going to remember for the rest of their life, and I just want to be a part of that and make people happy."

Chasing her dream has led Joselyn to a career more beautiful than she'd thought possible, and now, her work — her passion project — is able to make people's lives a little more beautiful, too.



STORY BY MIRANDA O'BRYAN HERTEL

# Healing, *Together*

FIVE WOMEN  
BUILD A  
COLLABORATIVE  
MODEL FOR CARE  
IN RAPID CITY





**COMBINING THE MIND, BODY, AND SOUL, A NEW SPACE DEVOTED TO WHOLE-PERSON HEALING OPENED DEC. 5TH IN RAPID CITY CALLED THE HEALING COLLECTIVE.**

**THE HEALING COLLECTIVE IS A GROUP OF FIVE FEMALE-LED BUSINESSES HOUSED UNDER ONE ROOF, CONNECTING PATIENTS WITH TRUSTED PROFESSIONALS TO UNCOVER THE ROOT CAUSES OF THEIR CONCERNS AND FIND LASTING, INTEGRATED HEALING.**

“If I have a client who needs bodywork or something else that someone here offers, I can talk to them about, ‘Hey, in the same building, where you already feel safe, we have the staff to help.’” said Melissa Smith, a therapist and the visionary behind The Healing Collective.

The idea for a space like this began surfacing in 2020, as Smith saw a growing need for care that went beyond traditional approaches to mental health and overall wellness. She began connecting

with other area professionals who shared similar values around collaboration, whole-person care, and accessibility.

In 2024, that vision became reality when Smith partnered with fellow therapist Rebekah Kindall to formally create The Healing Collective.

“We are bringing together a plethora of providers who specialize in different things in the body - mental health, emotional, physical - and trying to treat the whole person,” said Kindall. “I think in so many facilities, you see people focusing on only one area. That’s not how we function as people.”

As the collective took shape, Smith and Kindall brought on three additional practitioners: clinician and yoga instructor Kelly Reinhart, health coach and craniofacial therapist Relyssa Weeda, and clinical social worker Lisa Kuzman.

Each woman operates her own independent practice while also contributing to the shared physical space known as The Healing Hub, the collaborative home of The Healing Collective.

“We each have our own businesses, but we’re running this together,” said Reinhart. “We’re supporting each other’s businesses, and being empowered in that. We’re all bosses, together.”

Though the women had not worked together previously, they have created a space built on trust - both for clients and for one another - making referrals seamless and cooperative.

“There is zero competition,” said Smith. Because collaboration is what will change mental health care.”



# Individual *Practices*

WITH A MISSION CENTERED ON RESTORING BALANCE, RENEWING LIFE, EACH PRACTITIONER WITHIN THE HEALING COLLECTIVE BRINGS SPECIALTIES AND UNIQUE BACKGROUNDS TO THE SHARED SPACE.

## *Melissa Smith* MA; LPC-MH; CCPT

Currently working with people 14 and older, Smith's practice focuses on trauma therapy, grief, anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD, relationship challenges, and life transitions.

"My biggest thing is helping people learn that they have the tools to heal with the right guidance. They're the experts in

their own lives."

Smith uses modalities including Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), mindfulness, narrative therapy, motivational interviewing, and more.



## *Rebekah Kindall* LPC-MH Supervisor; CCPT; Certified Children's Trauma-Informed Yoga Instructor

With a passion for educating and helping people understand how their bodies and brains work together, Kindall's practice emphasizes integrated healing approaches.

"If we're a whole person, we should treat people accordingly."

Kindall's therapy modalities include EMDR, somatic therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, trauma-informed psycho-education, and motivational interviewing.

# Lisa Kuzman

**BA; MSW; CSW-PIP**

Licensed in both Iowa and South Dakota, Kuzman brings more than 20 years of experience helping individuals navigate existential crises, career changes, professional growth, and end-of-life conversations.

Understanding her own trauma has been an integral part of her work.

“As a mental health clinician, I’ve also

been a person who needed a lot of mental health support. If I hadn’t done my own healing work, I wouldn’t be able to hold the space that I hold.”

Kuzman’s offerings include grief counseling, trauma education and resilience training, trauma-informed coaching and consultation, and more.



# Kelly Reinhart

**LCSW; CSW-PIP; Certified Trauma-Informed Yoga Instructor**

Guided by the belief that therapy is not about fixing oneself but reconnecting and realigning, Reinhart focuses on growth and healing while addressing burnout and people pleasing behaviors.

“A lot of what I do is around trauma healing. It’s not just about talking about how you feel - it’s whole body healing.”

Reinhart’s services include Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), deep brain reorienting, yoga and sound healing, trauma-informed sound baths, and interpersonal therapy for adults and couples.

# Relyssa Weeda

**IHP2; LMT; CFT; CbtT; Physiology educator**

Inspired by her own family's healing journey, Weeda integrates multiple holistic modalities into her practice through functional medicine testing, craniofacial therapy, and educating people on human physiology.

“I see everybody from pregnant mothers to newborn babies, toddlers, kids, teenagers, adults, elderly folks for a

variety of things, but my main modality is craniofacial therapy, a super gentle fascia-unwinding technique that helps with everything from infant latching to adults with concussions or surgery recovery.”

Weeda’s client offerings include integrative health coaching and functional lab ordering with interpretation, massage therapy, body-talk therapy, and more.





# The Future

While still in its infancy, The Healing Collective continues to grow - both in who it serves and what it offers.

"People are coming in saying, 'I'm looking for a therapist,' instead of being afraid to reach out," said Smith.

Looking ahead, Smith said the future of The Healing Hub includes expanding practitioner offerings, such as a dietician, as well as hosting community events, including women's retreats, integrative healing weekends, sound baths, and educational workshops.

The Healing Collective is located at Clocktower Plaza, 2525 W. Main St., Suite 217.



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# WINTER IN THE BLACK HILLS

## HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE SEASON

STORY BY KELSY PETERSON

One of the most underrated seasons to explore the Black Hills is winter. Cooler temps and shorter days have many believing it's sofa and TV streaming weather - and sometimes it can be. However, getting out to explore during this quiet season might just be the best-kept secret of our area. With or without a fresh blanket of snow, there are so many excuses to get out!



## **SKIING & SNOWBOARDING**

Buckle in to a favorite South Dakota destination, Terry Peak. Open for skiing, snowboarding, and even tubing - Terry Peak is a great way to spend a day or weekend in the Hills. Terry Peak also offers group or private lessons for skiing and snowboarding if you decide this is the year to give it a try!

## **SNOWMOBILING**

It's time to start planning your snowy excursion. The Black Hills are home to over 350 miles of groomed trails for snowmobiling delight. If that doesn't seem like enough to explore, all of the Black Hills National Forest is open to backcountry riding with the exception of private property, plowed roadways, winter wildlife ranges, active logging sites, and developed cross-country ski areas. Numerous businesses throughout the area rent snowmobiles for full or half days.

## **ICE FISHING**

Ice fishing is allowed on all the lakes throughout the Black Hills, as soon as the lakes freeze over. Most popular spots to drop a line are Sheridan Lake, Pactola Reservoir, and Deerfield Reservoir—the three largest lakes in the forest. New to ice fishing? Head to Outdoor Campus West in Rapid City. They provide free, hands-on lessons covering everything from equipment you'll need, safety, techniques, and locations to go.

## **CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING**

Drift through miles of the Black Hills during a cross-country skiing adventure. Select from a variety of trails groomed just for skinny skis or explore iconic routes in our area like the Centennial Trail or Mickelson Trail.

## **SNOWSHOEING**

One of the best ways to witness the untouched beauty of winter is crunching through the forest on snowshoes. Our area is home to a variety of trails groomed for this activity— but you can also snowshoe on any trail or path in the area if there is enough snow, except those groomed only for cross-country skiing. A few state parks and nature areas check out snowshoes so you can try this activity without the commitment of purchasing on your first outing.

## **HIKING**

Our area frequently sees warm weather during the winter, allowing for year-round hiking. You'll find the trails less populated and the forest a little quieter. Be on the safe side and bring the right gear with you—the hills are cooler and more shaded, which can create more ice. The winter season is also the only time Needles Highway is closed to vehicle traffic, making it a unique opportunity to tour this breathtaking road by foot.



**WITH OR WITHOUT A  
FRESH BLANKET OF SNOW,  
THERE ARE SO MANY  
EXCUSES TO GET OUT!**



## **STAYCATION**

In our area, you don't have to go far for an exciting weekend getaway. We have a treasure trove of staycation options! Plan one that fits your style, like a girls' weekend in Rapid City, a mountain escape in Deadwood, or a weekend of outdoor adventure in Spearfish. Choose from rustic cabins to hotels downtown; you've got the makings for a memorable weekend in every direction.

## **ICE SKATING**

From public ice rinks to the stunning mountain lakes, winter is the ideal time to lace up and skate. Many of the public ice rinks, like Main Street Square in Rapid City, Roosevelt Park Ice Area in Rapid City, and Outlaw Square in Deadwood, all offer skate rentals on site. Bring your own skates if you plan to twirl on the lakes of the hills.


## **WILDLIFE VIEWING**

Known as the off-season for area visitors, winter is an incredible time to check out popular parks like Custer State Park, Wind Cave National Park, and the Badlands. The salt used to keep the roads from icing is a sweet treat for wildlife like bison, mountain goats, and bighorn sheep, which means you get a closer glimpse at these astonishing animals. A reminder to stay in your vehicle when they are near, or maintain a distance of at least 25 yards when outside your car.

## **ICE CLIMBING**

The daring winter adventurers seek out frozen waterfalls for a climb. While not for beginners, experienced climbers with the appropriate winter gear are the perfect match for this winter fun. Not up for the climb? Just witnessing ice climbing can be a thrill. A popular place to watch is in Spearfish Canyon, occasionally at Bridal Veil Falls, or more popular spots like Community Caves and the 11th Hour Gulch trail.





he asked me  
if i was seeing anybody  
i replied yes  
i'm seeing myself

i'm seeing myself in love with who i am  
obsessed with who i'm becoming  
happy and at peace  
all while self-awareness increase

so yes  
i'm seeing someone  
i'm seeing myself

for the first time

i'm finally seeing me

KIA MARLENE

POETRY BOOK: EVOLUTION OF AWARENESS



# MOM OF THE MOMENT

**Motherhood is the most important job there is. It is thankless, rooted in sacrifice, and it's the one job that there's no PTO for.**

**For Jessica Smith, she had an opportunity to grow in her role as not only a mother to her two children, but as an advocate for mothers and children throughout the community.**

Her and her family know routine well, with the kids getting up and completing their chores while Jessica and her husband Sterling ensure her house and kids are ready for the day. In the past, it was ushering the kids out the door, working from home for an innovation consultancy, picking the kids up from school and chauffeuring them to after-school activities, and then ensuring a healthy meal is on the table each night before everyone went to bed to do it all over again.

But Jessica was ready for a change.

“Even when I was reading a book to my kids, I was thinking about work. I knew I had to change something. Some families are able to just shut off work when they're home, but it's just so hard,” says Jessica.

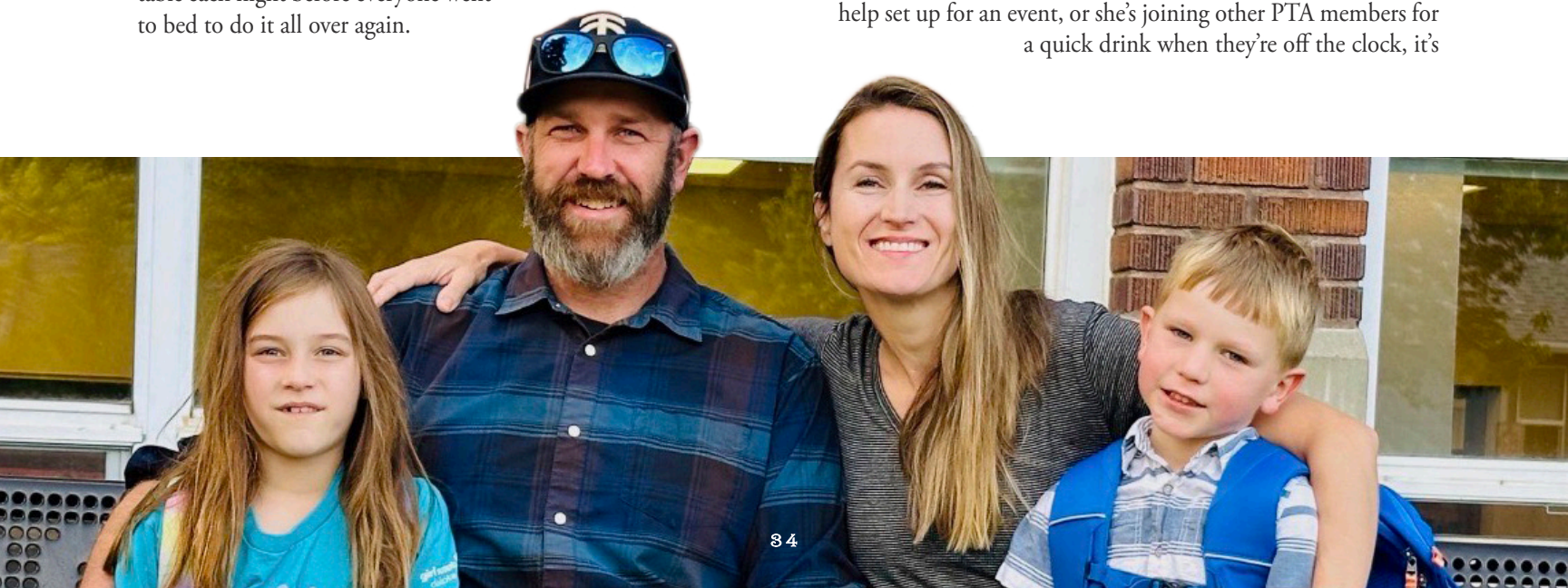
Originally spending 15 years as a graphic designer, she left her fast-paced job in order to be able to be more present with her family. Now, she's still a full-time mom, while also wearing several other hats in and around her community, including serving on the PTA for Wilson Elementary – her children's school — for the last three years

To make a little extra income, she has a jewelry business and does bookkeeping. With any extra time, she volunteers at the Journey Museum and for the school's PTA.

This transition has allowed her to focus more on her family, rather than having the constant the weight of never-ending deadlines. It's still a busy day's work for mother's like her so she's forever grateful she has ample help and support from her husband and mom!

Now, she's able to devote more time to her kids in more ways than one. On top of having their mom around even more, she's an active participant in their school, working to bring programming and events to the children and staff.

Having her kids see her being in a leadership role, where she's working to make their school a better place is something immensely meaningful for her. She's also able to connect with other parents and adults in a unique way, and that connection has fostered important relationships that have impacted both her and her children. Whether the kids are tagging along with her to help set up for an event, or she's joining other PTA members for a quick drink when they're off the clock, it's



created a community of individuals who come together to serve a common goal that everyone can agree on — their children.

“Everyone gets involved for a different reason, and for me I really think it’s so important to work on building and developing a community. And for us, that community is helping out the public schools, and they really need all the help that they can get. My parents always taught me to leave a place better than you found it, and this felt like the perfect opportunity to help do that.”

And she has certainly worked to leave the role better than she found it. She’s served many roles on the PTA, and loves getting her hands in a spreadsheet. She’s put in endless hours of work on budgets, and transition documents, in order to make onboarding new PTA members as smooth of a transition as possible. While still utilizing her corporate know-how, she’s able to fill her cup in a different way.

While Jessica is certainly staying busy, she welcomes the extra time she’s able to spend with her family — both in and outside of the walls of Wilson Elementary. Now, she looks forward to ice skating with her daughter, board game nights with her children and husband, and doing her part to keep making the world a better place. It’s all in a day’s work for mothers like her.

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# *A Trusted Voice in Times of Uncertainty:*

JENNY SCHMIDT AND THE  
WORK OF BLACK HILLS ADVOCATE



STORY BY MIRANDA O'BRYAN HERTEL

"I kept asking myself, 'Who's helping them figure out what's next?'"

That question became the motivation for Jenny Schmidt to start Black Hills Advocate more than a decade ago.

After moving back to Rapid City in 2006, Schmidt spent nine years at Westhills Village Retirement Community, serving as Director of Marketing and Business Development and Director of Independent Living. In those roles, she watched as families faced major life transitions and struggles while navigating complex paperwork, medical requirements, and long-term care decisions.

"There are all of these little stressors that can pile up and add up," said Schmidt. "And I just wondered if I might be useful in helping people navigate some of those seasons of life... to be able to step in and impact things immediately, but then also to put together the different parts of a plan that are going to add quality and independence to a person's life."

That idea became Black Hills Advocate.

Founded in June 2015, Black Hills Advocate supports individuals and families during some of life's most overwhelming moments. The organization works alongside people facing serious or life-altering diagnoses, those receiving home health or hospice care, and individuals living in nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Their mission is to be a trusted,

*"I love doing advocacy where I'm not the one dictating what should happen, but I'm creating the right habitat for groups to come together."*

on-the-ground advocate, care coordinator, and benefits navigator, helping loved ones receive quality services while keeping families informed and involved.

Since its start, Black Hills Advocate has been appointed more than 200 times as guardian conservator for people across the area - an indication of both the trust placed in Schmidt's work as well as the growing need for independent patient advocacy.

"The need is so great. I could literally work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the work would never be all the way done," she said. "I love doing advocacy where I'm not the one dictating what should happen, but I'm creating the right habitat for groups to come together. What comes out of that kind of collaboration and teamwork is generally better than any one person could have derived on their own."

Schmidt's passion for supporting older adults and vulnerable people is directly tied to her childhood, as



she spent much of her formative years with her grandparents. During this time, she developed close relationships and understanding with people generations older than herself, creating connections rooted in empathy and compassion. Because of this, Schmidt's work has never been about profit but about impact.

"I really wanted a business dedicated to filling in gaps not only in senior care, but also for vulnerable adults, including people who might be undergoing some sort of medical challenge or benefit navigation," Schmidt said. "[They] deserve to be able to call someone they can

trust that doesn't have any interest other than their best interest."

In addition to leading Black Hills Advocate, Schmidt is a board-certified patient advocate with more than 25 years of experience in the health care field. Her work often places her alongside families navigating caregiver fatigue, dementia diagnoses, and long-term decision-making that can feel overwhelming and isolating. Through both Black Hills Advocate and her nonprofit work, she focuses on providing continuity and support over time, rather than one-time solutions.

"Dementia is such a long disease," Schmidt said. "And what people need at different phases of that disease process is very different."

Rather than expecting families to become instant experts in health care systems, Schmidt works to bridge gaps, helping clients understand benefits, coordinate services, and plan for evolving needs.

As a woman leading her own organization, Schmidt has also spent years navigating professional spaces where she has had to advocate not only for her clients but also for her own voice. With time and experience, her approach and her confidence in it have evolved.

"I think as women, we have to fight for a seat at the table, and we have to fight to be heard," Schmidt said. "And I think through our life journey and certainly the journey as a



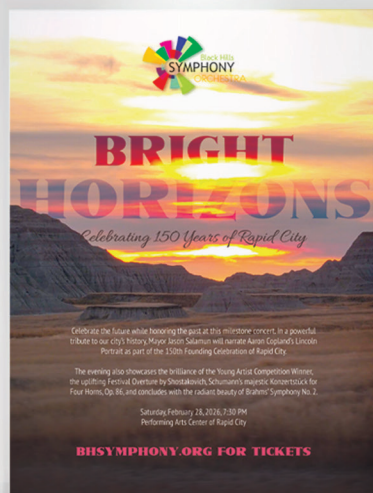
professional, there's a point - I feel like in my 50s now - I've arrived. I think my craft and my practice of how I do advocacy is more inclusive and collaborative than it's ever been, and that's really beautiful. The best part is that what comes out of that kind of collaboration and teamwork is generally better than any one person could have derived on their own."

Families frequently turn to Black Hills Advocate when they are unsure who to trust or where to begin, particularly when loved ones live out of state or are balancing responsibilities.

"We're able to make a difference. Not tomorrow, not next week, not next year.  
*Today. We can make a difference.*"

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