

FOX VALLEY REVIEW

VOLUME II | ISSUE 4



APRIL 1, 2026

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THE FOX VALLEY YOU'VE NEVER SEEN

Hidden Places, Local Stories, and Lost Legends

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01 Mission & Vision



WHO WE ARE

WHAT WE DO

WHERE WE AIM TO GO

FOX VALLEY REVIEW is a regional digital magazine dedicated to curating and elevating the voices, stories, events, and cultural expressions of the towns and communities along the Fox River. We strive to inform, inspire, and connect residents through thoughtful storytelling, critical reflection, and celebration of the local from neighborhood events to regional art, food, and civic life.

We envision a more connected and culturally vibrant Fox Valley where every town and resident sees themselves reflected in the stories we tell. Through inclusive journalism, creative expression, and civic commentary, Fox Valley Review aims to become the cultural compass of the region, building bridges between communities, generations, and ideas across the river.



**FROM THE DESK OF THE CHIEF EDITOR
DR. BAUDELAIRE K. ULYSSE**

As we step into April, we do so with a deep sense of gratitude and renewed energy. Our March Release Party at Global Brew in St. Charles was more than a celebration of a new issue; it was a celebration of community. The room was filled with conversation, laughter, and connection, reminding us that Fox Valley Review is not just a publication, but a shared space for stories, voices, and relationships to come alive.

We extend our sincere thanks to Global Brew for hosting us so generously and helping create such a warm and inviting atmosphere. To our contributors, past and present, thank you for trusting us with your words and

perspectives. And to our readers and guests, your presence, engagement, and continued support are what give this publication its heartbeat.

A special note of appreciation goes to Diane, our Associate Editor, whose thoughtful editorial guidance and commitment to excellence continue to shape the integrity and quality of each issue. We are also grateful to Kelsey of Hemp Club, whose handcrafted jewelry display added a beautiful, artisan dimension to the evening, an

embodiment of the creativity and local talent we are proud to highlight.

This April issue carries forward that same spirit of depth and connection. In "Ditch the Snow Boots," we are reminded of the quiet power of simple human gestures and the unexpected friendships that emerge when we take a moment to see one another. "Family Heirlooms" invites us into a space of memory, legacy, and the objects that carry stories across generations. And in "What's Good for the Goose," we

“

*LET THIS BE
YOUR WINDOW, YOUR MIRROR,
YOUR INVITATION!*

”

encounter a bold and provocative exploration of relationships, power, and the lines we draw, and redraw within them. Together, these pieces reflect the complexity, warmth, and honesty that define this issue.

As the season shifts and the Fox Valley begins to thaw into spring, we are reminded that renewal is not always loud; it often begins quietly, in conversations, in reflections, in small acts of courage and care.

We wish you and your loved ones a joyful and meaningful Easter and Passover season, filled with renewal, connection, and hope.

~Baudlaire Ulysse
Editor in Chief, Fox Valley Review

A NIGHT OF LOCAL CULTURE

From handcrafted goods (Kelsey's Hemp Club display) to meaningful conversations, the evening reflected the essence of Fox Valley, community-driven, creative, and full of life.





MARCH RELEASE PARTY | GLOBAL BREW



Ditch the Snow Boots and Say Hi

And The Sun Shall Shine

WRITER: Beau

PH: Staff

March lingers like a stubborn memory, with winter clinging, refusing to loosen its grip. Snow softens, but the air still bites. The sun arrives, but cautiously, like a promise not yet fulfilled. It is a season caught in between.

On one of those days, Nico stood alone in the snow, layered, bundled, prepared. Boots planted firmly, insulated from the cold, from the discomfort, from the unknown.

Then came Diego. New to the country. New to the cold. New to everything. He stepped into the same snow, but without armor. No boots. Just a light sweater, a quiet courage, and curiosity. His feet, exposed to a world he hadn't yet learned to navigate, began to freeze.



*“Nico noticed, not the difference,
but the need. He walked over. Said hello. A
simple act. A small crossing.”*

“Not advice. Not distance. Not observation. Exchange.”



Nico noticed. Not the difference, but the need. He walked over. Said hello. A simple act. A small crossing. “Are you cold?” he asked. “My feet are freezing,” Diego replied. And in that moment, something shifted. Nico did something rare. Something instinctive. Something generous. He offered his boots.

Not advice. Not distance. Not observation. Exchange. Warmth, shared. What followed was not just play; it was connection. A friendship that stretched beyond that patch of snow. From playground to classroom. From passing glance to presence.

Because sometimes, all it takes is sunlight and a hello. Spring has always been more than a season. It arrives in small ways; the drip of melting snow, the softening of frozen ground, the warmth that lingers just a little longer each afternoon. It is a quiet insistence that life is ready to begin again.

The snow does not vanish all at once. It melts slowly, like hesitation. Like

fear. Like the invisible walls we build between ourselves and others.

But sunlight insists. And so should we. There are Diegos all around us; neighbors we haven’t noticed, stories we haven’t asked about, lives unfolding quietly beside ours. And there are Nicos within us, waiting, perhaps, to step forward, to bridge the distance, to offer something simple yet profound.

A greeting. A gesture. A moment of shared humanity.

Spring is not just blooming flowers and longer days; it is the invitation to awaken, to reconnect, to step out from the insulated spaces we’ve grown comfortable in. It calls us to shed more than coats and boots. It asks us to shed indifference.

To see. To reach. To say hello. Because relationships, like seasons, are powered by light. And sometimes, the first ray of that light is nothing more than a small, courageous word spoken across unfamiliar ground.

So as winter loosens its grip, slowly, reluctantly; perhaps it’s time. Ditch the snow boots. And say hi.

“Sometimes, the first ray of light is simply saying hello.”

“When I look at these rings, I cannot help but wonder about the history and meaning behind each of the diamonds.”



03

Family Heirlooms and the Stories They Hold

SENTIMENTALITY

WRITER: Miriam

PH: Staff

March, which just passed, was Women’s History Month! Over the last weeks, I have been thinking a lot about the women in my family who have passed. My maternal aunt, who passed away several years ago, lived in Canada,

where my mother also grew up. I inherited my aunt’s jewelry, including a few rings of my grandmother, whom I had never met. After my maternal grandmother passed, my aunt had a jeweler remount family diamonds into new settings,

“

Perhaps one stone is from a promise,

another from an engagement and one,

perhaps the largest, from a wedding.

”

which she wore daily and greatly enjoyed. My grandmother's name was Rose; so, my aunt had one of the stones mounted in the middle of a 14-K rose-motif setting, which served as a thoughtful tribute to my grandmother.

There is another ring with three mismatched diamonds, with the largest in the middle and two others of unequal size, mounted on either side.

I now routinely wear these rings to work and functions and greatly enjoy them, which I am sure all the women in my family would appreciate.

When I look at these rings, though, I cannot help but think and genuinely wonder about the history and meaning behind each of the diamonds in these two settings. Again, none of the stones match, so I suspect that the diamonds were gifted to my grandmother, and perhaps even her mother, at different times.

Perhaps one of the smaller stones is from a "promise" ring gifted to my grandmother; perhaps another stone is from her engagement ring; likely one of the stones, perhaps the largest, is from her wedding.

As my maternal grandfather died suddenly at a relatively early age, it is unlikely that my grandmother received or "upgraded" to a "bigger and better" diamond after his passing.

This prompts me to suspect that at least one of the stones is that of my maternal great-grandmother.

As I reflect on these rings and the origins and history of these diamonds, I cannot help but think about the women, my ancestors, and the rich histories and stories that they might share with me about these stones, these rings, their relationships, their families, and their dreams of a

life they envisioned for themselves whether such actually did, or did not, transpire.

As I ponder all of this, I genuinely long for the opportunity to meet with them, to ask the myriad questions that I have, and for them to share aspects of their lives and rich histories that, unfortunately, are otherwise lost to me.

For me, this seems to be a reminder to connect with family members, if and as they are alive, to inquire about and appreciate the likely rich histories of those who are important to us. Should you be so inclined, I hope that this essay serves as an impetus for your own pursuits along these lines and the enlightening, and perhaps delightful, discoveries that might well ensue.

~Miriam



Generations of love and heirlooms



Heirloom rings with romantic scenes



Granny Remembers

THE MILL IN BATAVIA SANG ALL DAY

A memory from Batavia's working past—when the mill's rhythm carried through every home and every day.

GRANNY'S

WOVEN QUILT SERIES

THE MILL IN BATAVIA SANG ALL DAY

“

DINNER IS SERVED

AND SO IS HISTORY.

”

WRITER: GRANNY

PH: STAFF

They say if you listened closely enough, Batavia had a melody all its own. The rhythm of the town was kept by the great windmill on the east side; she'd creak and groan in harmony with the breeze, her blades slicing through the air like a metronome for life in the valley.

When I was a girl, our mornings started with the piercing sound of the factory whistle, sharp as a slap but just as awakening. Fathers packed up their tin lunch boxes and kissed mothers goodbye.

The Fox River shimmered golden in the early light, a silent witness to the industry and grit that pulsed through Batavia's streets.

From our tiny kitchen window, I could see neighbors filing into Challenge Company or the foundry, and we children would wave from porches, their silhouettes framed by the steam from the kettle.

The mill sang all day, its hum blending with the laughter of children playing stickball in alleys and the buzz of women hanging laundry on lines. Even

04



now, I can remember the soft shuffle of aprons against cotton dresses and the sharp snap of wet towels in the wind.

We didn't have much, but we had rhythm. Meals were clockwork, 5 o'clock sharp. You didn't dawdle. You didn't keep your mama waiting. Supper might've been pot roast, chicken and dumplings, or fried bologna and white bread, but whatever was on the table was eaten with gratitude and grace.

Sundays were slower. Church in the morning, then a stroll past the river, maybe a hand-cranked batch of ice cream by the porch. On those days, the mill took a rest, and Batavia's heartbeat slowed to match the rustle of maple leaves.

The mill doesn't sing much anymore. But if you stand near it at dusk and the breeze is just right, you might hear the echo of its chorus and with it, the quiet hum of a town that knew how to work, how to love, and how to



A sweeping, slightly elevated view of Batavia in its early days: the mill centered near the river soft smoke or steam rising townspeople moving about

gather.

Dinner is served, and so is history.

~Granny



*A street or yard near the mill: children playing nearby
women hanging laundry or talking men hauling goods the
mill visible in the background*

Stay tuned for the next story from Granny's Women Quilt Series. It's coming up in the May Issue.



Unlocking the First Door

Jenna standing at the threshold of her new home with hand turning a key in the lock, with warm golden light spilling from inside.



*Jenna walking or jogging along the river
same path shown in layered time.*

WRITER: Jenna

PH: Staff

Putting Down Roots

Nine months ago, I wrote about trying to stay active and healthy while navigating my first full-time job at a financial firm here in the Fox Valley. At the time, my life felt like it was moving at full speed, spreadsheets by day, XSport workouts by night, quick walks through St. Mary Park to clear my head before doing it all again.

I thought I was building discipline. What I didn't realize was that I was building a life.

This past February, I bought my first

***“I thought I was building discipline.
What I didn't realize was that I was
building a life.”***



*“When I unlock my front door now,
it’s not my parents’ house. It’s mine.”*

home. And I got engaged.

Both sentences still feel surreal when I say them out loud.

I grew up in St. Charles. I ran these river paths as a teenager. I walked Pottawatomie Park after high school football games. I remember watching the river freeze in winter and swell in spring. But when I left for Purdue, I assumed adulthood would take me somewhere else: Chicago, maybe even out of state.

Instead, it brought me home. Only this time, it feels different. When I unlock my front door now, it’s not my parents’ house. It’s mine.

When I drive past the Fox River on my way to work, I’m not just passing through; I’m investing here, professionally and personally. My clients are my neighbors. The coffee shops I stop at are the same ones I studied in during high school. There’s something groun-



“I’m balancing adulthood and health; I feel like they’re aligned.”

Now I measure it in commitments made.

And for the first time, I don’t feel like I’m balancing adulthood and health; I feel like they’re aligned. I feel strong not just because I work out, but because I’m building a life that feels steady.

I left for college thinking success meant going somewhere bigger. But I came back and realized success might just mean staying.

And this time, I’m not just passing through the Fox Valley. I’m planting here.

~Jenna

ding about that.

Staying active still matters to me. I still lift at XSport after long days at the office. I still walk the trails when I need to reset. But lately those walks feel less like escape and more like appreciation. I’m not walking to outrun stress; I’m walking to soak in where I am.

Buying a house at 25 is exciting and honestly, terrifying. There’s a different kind of workout in learning about mortgage payments, lawn care, and why the sump pump suddenly sounds different at 11 p.m. Being engaged feels the same way: joyful, steady, full of possibility, and humbling all at once.

But here’s what I’ve realized: health isn’t just about gym routines and step counts. It’s about stability. It’s about choosing where to invest your energy. It’s about deciding that you want to grow somewhere instead of constantly

preparing to leave.

For so long, I thought ambition meant movement: climbing, chasing, relocating. Now I see that ambition can also mean planting.

Late summer in the Fox Valley has always felt like a pause before change; the air still warm, but the evenings hinting at fall. I feel like I’m in that same season personally. I’m still building my career. I’m still pushing myself professionally. But I’m also building something quieter: roots.

The parks look different when you know you’re staying. The river feels different when you know it’s yours to return to. Even the ordinary things, grocery runs, neighborhood walks, mowing the lawn, feel meaningful in a way they didn’t before.

I used to measure growth in miles run or promotions earned.

A TENDER MOMENT

WRITER: Jeff Weisman

PH: Staff

The Bowl Right There



*“We would go to the mall from time to time
because at least we could get out of the house...”*

“The only thing she had wanted was to lie down on the couch with a blanket.”



Only about an hour earlier we had been at Woodfield Mall in Schaumburg, spending the day wandering around doing whatever we could to entertain ourselves. It was the middle of winter and there wasn't much to do. We would go to the mall from time to time because at least we could get out of the house and walk around a bit.

But now we were home early since my daughter suddenly started to feel sick after eating an ice cream cone from McDonald's.

“Are you sure you're okay, sweetie?” I asked, leaning down next to her as she lay back against the arm of the couch, a blanket covering her tiny body. (She was maybe six.) “I just want to rest, dad.”

“I know. But you don't need anything else?”

The only thing she had wanted was to lie down on the couch with a blanket. “No.”

“Okay,” I said, kissing her on the forehead before standing back up.

“Remember, the bowl is right there for you to throw up in if you need to.

Okay?”

I had put a large plastic salad bowl next to her on the couch because I was worried she might get sick. She did not look good.

“I know, dad.”

“Good. I'm going to the kitchen. I won't take my eyes off you. I'll be right there.” I pointed toward the kitchen. My kitchen and living room were one open space, so I could easily see her.

“I know, dad,” she softly repeated. Feeling like she was okay for a second, I walked over to the kitchen to put away our few things from the mall and clean up the dishes from breakfast that morning. (I know; not the smartest thing in the world to do, but I never said I was a genius.)

Not a minute later, at most, while I was in the middle of putting a bag of veggie straws back in the upper cabinet, she sat up on the couch, leaned forward toward the coffee table, and vomited everywhere.

A geyser of vomit would not be an exaggeration.

And it all happened in slow motion.

“The bowl, sweetie,” I immediately yelled, slamming the cabinet shut and running over to her. “Use the bowl!” She didn't even acknowledge that I was there.

“The bowl!” I shouted again, watching her vomit once more, an even bigger geyser this time, if that was possible



Guests gathered at Global Brew in St. Charles, sharing drinks, conversation, and energy as the March issue release brought contributors and supporters together in a lively, welcoming atmosphere.



“She looked so small and helpless, a little dribble of vomit hanging from her chin.”

while I frantically ran toward her. “Use the bowl!”

Nearly beside myself, I stopped next to her and looked down at her sitting on the couch. She looked so small and helpless, a little dribble of vomit hanging from her chin.

“Are you okay?” I finally asked.

Yes, I know I probably should have asked that first. Of course I was worried about her. But I also didn’t want the entire house covered in vomit.

She almost immediately looked better and answered, “I feel better, dad.”

“Good,” I said. “I’m glad, sweetie.”

(I was.)

“I think it was the ice cream cone I ate,” she continued, wiping the dribble from her chin with the back of her sweater sleeve. “I feel a lot better.”

“I’m glad, sweetie,” I repeated, looking down at the huge pool of vomit covering the coffee table, the carpet, the blanket, and the edge of the couch. It was disgusting.

“But why didn’t you use the bowl? I put it right there next to you.”

“I forgot about it,” she answered, still sitting up on the couch, the light returning to her eyes, the blanket pushed off to the side.

“But it was right there,” I stressed again. “You even said you knew it was.”

“Sorry, dad. I forgot.”

“Right,” I muttered, starting back toward the kitchen to get some towels, soap, and water to begin cleaning everything up, knowing I was going to have to change her clothes and wash her up too.

“You forgot.”

Yep.

It was one of those days.

~Jeff

WRITER: Fox Valley Review

PH: Staff

What's Good for the Goose

Is Good for the Gander



07

What's good for the goose is good for the gander," she concluded, less as a proverb, more as a warning.

Lexis and Jackson had the kind of beginning that felt prewritten. They met in high school, lived a few blocks apart, shared the same friends, the same routines, even the same quiet expectations that small-town proximity often breeds. Their parents knew each other. Their lives overlapped so seamlessly that, for a time, it felt less like a relationship and more like an extension of the same story.

When Lexis got pregnant, the decision to move in together came quickly, almost automatically. It was the next logical step, the one everyone assumed they would take. Stability, at least on the surface, followed. But fidelity did not.

Jackson had a reputation, subtle enough to be dismissed, obvious enough to be true. He was charming, social, and, as Lexis would come to understand, habitually unfaithful. What began as whispers evolved into patterns. What might have been forgiven once became harder to ignore when it happened again, and, again, with no real consequences. Lexis remained faithful. Jackson did not.

The moment that shifted everything didn't come from Jackson. It came from Melissa.

The call was direct, almost surgical in its precision. "I'm meeting with your man," she said, naming the restaurant and the time, as if issuing an invitation or a challenge.

Lexis arrived early. She chose a seat that offered visibility without exposure, her presence hidden just enough



*"Until you experience a great loss
yourself, you may not realize how isolating
and lonely it can be."*



to observe without being seen. When Jackson and Melissa walked in and sat down together, the ambiguity dissolved. At the bar, Lexis ordered two Jäger bombs. She drank the first quickly, steadying herself. The second she carried with her.

By the time she reached their table, there was no hesitation left.

The confrontation was immediate, sharp, and impossible to ignore.

"Why would you go out with my boyfriend if you knew he was taken?" Lexis demanded, her voice cutting through the low hum of the restaurant.

Melissa didn't flinch. "Your man pursued me," she replied.

"And I like him. If he's in a relationship, that's on him, not me. Either he keeps his pants zipped, or you keep him on a leash."

Image 1 : Two truths. One man. No balance.

Image 2: The moment everything spills-truth, tension, and consequence.

Image 3: What's good for the goose... finally cuts both ways.



The table shifted. The blame redirected. The truth, however, remained. Lexis turned to Jackson. "Why are you sleeping around behind my back while living with me and telling me you love me?"

His answer was as casual as it was revealing. "I thought you knew," he said. "And that you were okay with it." There it was, the assumption, the entitlement, the quiet rewriting of reality. Lexis paused, then asked a question that reframed everything.

"So, you'd be okay if I slept with someone else?"

Jackson didn't hesitate. "No."

The contradiction hung in the air, undeniable.

"That's not a fair arrangement," Lexis said. "What's good for the goose should be good for the gander."

It wasn't just a statement; it was a recalibration of power, a refusal to accept a one-sided dynamic disguised as normalcy.

In that moment, Lexis saw more than betrayal. She saw strategy. Melissa's call hadn't been accidental. It felt deliberate, almost calculated, a move designed to expose, disrupt, and perhaps claim what remained. But Lexis didn't leave. Not immediately.

Instead, she stayed and shifted.

The aftermath wasn't reconciliation. It was tension, control, and an unspoken restructuring of the relationship. Boundaries tightened. Expectations sharpened. Jackson, once unchecked, found himself under scrutiny. The ease he had operated within was gone.

What remained was not the innocence of high school love, but something more complicated, something shaped by betrayal, confrontation, and a refusal to be quietly disregarded. Lexis didn't just confront the situation. She changed the terms of it.

Rewriting Family

Part VI, Grieving What Does Not Exist Series

There is a point in the story where you must decide whether to try again. Not out of denial, not out of desperation, but because something in you refuses to let grief be the end of the narrative. After the first adoption journey collapsed under the weight of bureaucracy, silence, and ethical red flags, we weren't sure if we had the strength, or the desire, to begin again. So we did the one thing we hadn't done enough of the first time: we slowed down and checked in with each other.

WRITER: Emma

PH: Staff

Do you still want this?
"What would make it feel safe?"

"What would make it feel just?"

"Is it fair to raise a child now, in the emotional space we're in?"

These conversations were not romantic.

They were sober, measured, sometimes tearful, sometimes interrupted by long silences. We talked about burnout, about trust, about how the earlier process had left us feeling used rather than supported. We talked about the grief that had settled into the corners of our home like a permanent guest.



***Leaving behind what tore them,
they take the path forward.***

We talked about whether we could hold a child with joy instead of fear, or whether the last experience had carved something out of us that couldn't be rebuilt.

But then there were the softer moments, the way he reached for my hand mid-conversation, the way we both lit up when imagining what a child might add to our lives, the way our love felt bigger than our disappointment. Hope did not come back in a rush. It returned in small, almost invisible ways. A shared smile. A quiet yes. A willingness to imagine again.

But this time, our hope needed structure. We were not walking blindly into the same system. We wanted a pathway to parenthood that aligned with



***Faintly visible chalkboard with
numbers partially erased.***

with our ethics, not in conflict with them.

So we began researching new agencies, but with a different lens, one sharpened by experience and rooted in justice. We asked questions we hadn't known to ask before:

- How many families do you intake per year?
- How many matches actually occur?
- What protections do you provide for expectant mothers to ensure they aren't coerced?
- Do you cap financial support?
- Do you require independent legal counsel for the mother?
- What is your refund or rollover policy if a match falls through?
- How do you prevent predatory or

performative matching practices?

We were no longer seeking a fast process. We were seeking an ethical one. We created practical guardrails, non-negotiables that would protect us, protect the expectant mother, and ultimately protect the child. Among them:

- Transparency: No vague promises. Every fee explained. Every timeline honest.
- Third-Trimester Matching Only: To minimize pressure and maximize informed consent.
- Independent Counseling for Mothers: Not agency employees, but neutral advocates.
- Strict Boundaries on Financial Support: Set amounts, monitored disbursements, no variable requests.
- Rollover or Refund Guarantees: No more losing thousands because someone mishandled paperwork or lost communication.
- Small, Sustainable Matching Pools: No factory-model agencies that bring in far more families than they can responsibly serve.

These guardrails were not about control. They were about dignity for everyone involved.

As we met with agencies, some were defensive. Others glossed over concerns. A few boasted about “high placement rates” in a tone that made the whole process sound like sales rather than care. But then we found one that listened more than they spoke. One that didn’t flinch when we said “ethics” or “boundaries.” One that focused on supporting expectant mothers first, birth parents second, adoptive parents third, not as a hierarchy of value but as a logic of care.

For the first time in a long while, hope didn’t feel naïve. It felt earned.

Still, we kept checking in with each other. Because rewriting family is not simply about systems; it’s about readiness. We asked, again and again: Is it fair to raise a child now? Do we have the emotional clarity? The stability? The softness? The time?

And the answer, slowly, became yes. Not a perfect yes. Not a yes without fear or caution. But a yes built on partnership, mutual care, and a commitment to bringing a child into a home where love is not confused with ownership, and support is not tied to transaction.

Choosing adoption again is not a return to innocence. It is a return to intention. To building a pathway to parenthood that is just, transparent, slow, thoughtful, and aligned with the values we refuse to compromise.

This is not a second attempt. It is a different attempt, one shaped by clarity instead of longing, ethics instead of urgency, and hope that has learned how to protect itself without hardening.

And in that hope, our family, whatever form it takes, begins again.

~Emma

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