



Carol Colton of Independent Seniors Network, from left, 100+ Women Who Care Southern Maine founder Deb Bergeron, Susan Doughty of In Her Presence and Pastor Karen Orr of Grace-Street Ministry.

Photo by Amy Paradysz

100+ Women Who Care Southern Maine breaks 500-member mark



Adele Ngoy, founder of former recipient Women United Around the World, from left, with Michelle Bolen and Caj MacDonald of Raymond.



New member Michelle Anderson, executive director of Junior Achievement Maine, from left, with Mainely Character board member Anne Cass and Lisa Norton of Scarborough.



Joyce Bailey of Windham, left, and Jutta Martin of Old Orchard Beach.



Anna Berke, from left, Tracy Brockhouse and Paige Enright, all of Portland.



Pamela Emery of Old Orchard Beach, left, and Pamela Nickles of Scarborough.



Stacey Schuler-Cannon, left, and Katie Winchenbach.



AMY PARADYSZ
SOCIETY NOTEBOOK

Since life coach Deb Bergeron of Falmouth founded the Southern Maine chapter of 100+ Women Who Care just over a decade ago, the giving circle has donated \$684,000 to dozens of local initiatives.

“100+ Women Who Care of Southern Maine is a living, breathing example of the extraordinary power we have when women come together to help those in need,” Bergeron said. “I truly feel blessed to be part of such a vital and compassionate community.”

At the Feb. 10 quarterly meeting at the Elks Lodge in Portland, anticipation was high that the organization could reach the 500-member mark. To do so, they needed at least five women to join — and they got 16.

“Seeing all those women who want to give back, I had goosebumps,” said new member Sandra Holland, a chef from Bath. “I appreciate that my relatively modest contribution, because the group is so large, results in a significant gift.”

With 500+ members committed to donating \$50, the giving circle will be able to raise \$25,000 for one nonprofit each quarter in just an hour (not including time spent mingling over drinks and a potluck before getting down to business).

Here’s how it works: The names of three nominated nonprofits are drawn at random. Women representing those nonprofits make impromptu five-minute pitches and answer questions. Then the members cast a secret ballot to determine the recipient of their collective giving.

This month, members heard from:

Independent Seniors Network, which matches volunteers with older adults in the Greater Portland area who want to age in place but need occasional help with things like a ride to an appointment.

Grace-Street Ministry, which provides emotional, material and spiritual support to marginalized people on the streets of Portland.

A new cultural doula training program through In Her Presence at Frances Warde House, a home for pregnant immigrant women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

When votes were counted, it was clear that many members wanted to direct the largest portion of giving to the leanest organization: Independent Seniors Network.

Grace-Street Ministry and In Her Presence will each receive at least \$2,000, thanks to corporate sponsorships and members who chose to give beyond the basic commitment.

And the ripple effect continues, as many giving circle members find organizations where they want to volunteer or give regularly.

“There’s so many places we can donate, and it can be hard to decide where,” said Alicia Greenwald of Portland. “This makes that easier. You just give every quarter, and it feels good.”

Camp No Limits, a nonprofit camp for children with limb loss or differences, won the quarterly vote in November and recently received \$24,000 to support a sNow Limits camp this week at Saddleback in partnership with Maine Adaptive. “It’s more than a number,” said Development Director Deb Maxfield. “It represents lives transformed and dreams realized.”

For more information on 100+ Women Who Care Southern Maine, go to their website at 100womenwhocaresouthernmaine.com. There are similar organizations in the Midcoast area (100womenwhocaremidcoastmaine.com) and in Androscoggin County (facebook.com/100WomenWhoCareAndroscoggin/).

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CLIFFS

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who lived in Genevieve’s home, the book moves from Awadapquit to Camp Mira, a fictionalized version of Maine’s spiritualist Camp Etna. Another chapter opens at Sabbathday Lake, the last remaining Shaker community in the world.

While the initial façades that Genevieve and Jane present in crafting their perfect homes — both in décor and in marriage — verge on saccharine, the book quickly finds its stride and unravels these façades to great effect. One of the novel’s richer examinations concerns the social realities women face, and it

brings deft, nuanced compassion and scrutiny to the ways in which the women navigate these pressures. Genevieve presents as a snobbish, preppy out-of-towner. While her demeanor often repels others, she so desperately wants to connect that she ends up with mere acquaintances instead of a tight friendship like the one that binds Jane and Allison. Her social anxieties become a point of recognition and sympathy for Jane, who herself has leaned on alcohol as a social lubricant throughout her life to increasingly perilous effects.

To this end, the perspective of the novel becomes more polyphonic as it collages the accounts of numerous women into the telling of this place’s story, and the book becomes a project of recording

women’s lives through various accounts — articles in decorating magazines, testimony at AA meetings, rare finds for the historical society. Herein lies the novel’s beating core, which makes the book a more propulsive read.

The prologue frames these themes. During a summer enrichment program at Bates College, a young Jane takes a seminar called “Early Women Writers,” whose subject serves almost as a mise-en-abyme for the book and inspires her career choices. Her professor “spoke the names of women from as far back as the sixteenth century who wrote down their life stories when no one thought it appropriate for women to write at all. By doing so, they endured.”

By intersecting a record of women’s

lives with the story of a place, “The Cliffs” insists upon including women in a history that so often excludes them. The novel further intersects with class and race as it explores the lives of Wabanaki and Shaker women who lived and worked in Awadapquit. J. Courtney Sullivan takes to task how history and psychic resonance get whitewashed by superimposition and aspirational home design while detangling the knot of geology, history, race, and class that encircle this place.

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FAST

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It’s clear that he accelerated from a red light with too much torque and was thrown from the bike, but that alone would not have been fatal unless he was helmetless, and he wasn’t. Her suggestion is that he landed in the oncoming lane and was hit by a passing motorist. Perhaps those specifics are still, after 25 years, too unstringing for her to get down on the page. But then why this epigraph by the contemporary French writer Patrick Autréaux: “Writing means

being led to the one place you’d like to avoid”? The blameless young man driving the car that may have hit Claude revealed to Giraud the final words her husband spoke, but she doesn’t reveal them to us, perhaps because they are too stingingly private. But then why mention it at all?

Stockwell too often resorts to cardboard jargon in his rendering of Giraud’s French; in one especially impressive feat, he fits three clichés into a single sentence: “crooked grin,” “half angel and half devil,” “drop of a hat.” But he’s capable of better, even memorable, lines, including the two saddest sentences in the story: “He was still our

son, but I’d have to learn to say my son. Just as I’d have to give up the we that had supported me and learn to say I.”

It’s something of a mystery how “Live Fast” has managed to be published as a novel. Nothing in its tenor or tempo, in the plinths and joists of its armature, in its overall narrative temperature and weight, suggests novel — it all overwhelmingly suggests memoir. Giraud’s American publisher has labeled it “a sensitive elegy to [Giraud’s] husband.” As a memoir it would slide honorably between C.S. Lewis’s “A Grief Observed” and Joan Didion’s “The Year of Magical Thinking,” but as a novel it’s much too

anemic, fragmented, unfinished: It lacks the structural complexity and depth of James Agee’s “A Death in the Family,” for some of us the greatest American novel of mourning.

No matter its tag, “Live Fast” is a small, crushing masterpiece of grief. Giraud does what the best autobiographical writers have always done: Through the vista of her personal calamity, she incites you to apprehend your own world with a bursting freshness you didn’t know you needed.

William Girdali is the author of three novels, the memoir “The Hero’s Body” and a collection of literary criticism, “American Audacity.”