

PLATEAU

April/May 2022

MOUNTAIN LIFE IN HIGHLANDS-CASHIERS NORTH CAROLINA

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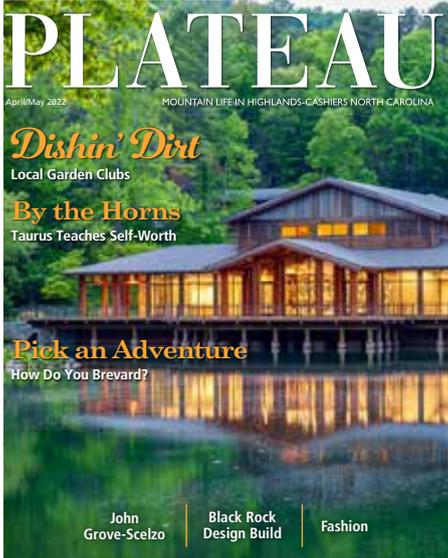
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Giddy-Up

Ten years ago, I found the courage to leave my dream job. I got paid to create and think outside the box. On weekends I drove up the PCH and read books on a blanket as waves crashed into the Malibu beach. I should have been happy; deep down, I wasn't. The feeling started as a tingling of emptiness; as the sensation grew, it haunted me, "if you don't change now, it will be too late."

The change was long and uncomfortable, a falling apart followed by stumbling to regain my footing. A melody came to me the morning I turned in my resignation. It grew into a lullaby. Inspired by its imagery and with the gift of time allowed to a new freelancer, I turned the song into a children's book. The illustrations are straight out of a unicorn space rodeo with rainbows dancing across a cosmic desert sky. The opening line is "there's a prairie in the stars, out past the Milky Way."

The book, which I self-published and named "Giddy-Up Fairytale Cowgirl," is about chasing dreams, conquering fear and finding self-worth. Though it wasn't my original intent, it was a letter to myself, my inner child, a message not to be afraid. It became, in many ways, my manifesto. I found it wasn't "what" I was doing that left me unhappy; it was the core of the "why." I needed to fall apart and rediscover my authentic self to identify the purpose carved on my heart. I love to learn, and I want to teach other people to love to learn through creativity and storytelling.

Unfortunately I'm stepping down as managing editor of Plateau Magazine. Though a few day-to-day living logistics helped me decide to move back West, I know that ultimately it is time for me to pursue my dreams of edutainment. I wanted to share my story because I believe the microcosm often echoes the macrocosm. We all have a purpose, a fire inside. Sometimes it is hard to identify, sometimes it is put on hold and sometimes we must break apart and heal before continuing.

I look forward to watching Plateau Magazine grow and share stories about our community. I can't wait to visit and spend time with the people I adore in this place I love. If my letter speaks to you this issue, I leave you with the last words from my first children's book, "but if you're too scared to dream or of what others might think, your rocket ship will never fly, and your boat will surely sink. So, giddy-up, fairytale cowgirl!"

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The Handyman Can

What to look for in handyman services on the plateau

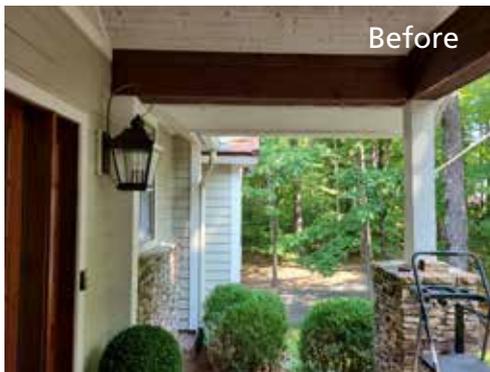
By KAT FORD

MY MOTHER BOUGHT A new home last spring. It took until New Year's Day of 2022 to get everything hung on the walls and in place, mostly because she had to wait until I came home to help. Some of the items on her honey-do list were beyond my limited wall-hanging expertise and required added know-how and muscle. So, we called a handyman to hang oversized mirrors and TVs. When handling home renovations and improvements, tasks fall on a broad spectrum, from "who in this family is best with a hammer and nail?" to "do we need a licensed professional?" There are several handyman services to choose from on the plateau; what

should you consider when choosing?

Emma and Mike Geisler, owners of Ace Handyman Services in Cashiers, say to start where you look for most things, Google. "When looking for a handyman to come to your home, the most important thing to do is look at their reputation, look at all of their reviews online. Social media is a powerful tool to help when vetting a company that you trust will work in your home. It's also very important to make sure that the handyman company is fully insured, their craftsmen are insured and covered by workers' compensation, as all of Ace Handyman Services' amazing craftsmen are. It is also important to ask if the handyman company guarantees their work."

Ace Handyman Services is a locally owned business whose parent company is Ace Hardware. Like Ace Hardware, Ace Handyman Services is known for its outstanding customer service and immediate responsiveness. A quick scroll down the Cashiers Community Together or What's Happening in Highlands, NC, Facebook pages show plenty of happy customers recommending Ace Handyman Services when fellow group members ask for recommendations. According to Emma and Mike, they experienced how difficult it is to find responsive, quality companies in the area and started the business to help their neighbors with handyman needs. Ace Handyman Services is a fully licensed and insured corporation and can do over 1,200 handyman jobs in customers' homes. All the work done by Ace Handyman Services is guaranteed for one year, showing how confident they are in their skilled employees. Office manager Lisa answers the phone and schedules clients immediately. Craftsmen call the night before to review jobs with clients, text when they are on the way and show up on time.



Greg Mitchell of Franklin, NC, owns **GEM Residential Services**, is fully insured, certified and a member of the Association of Certified Handyman Professionals. Greg says his current availability is two to three weeks out, so make sure to schedule your services a few weeks in advance. With a tagline of "Handy help for homeowners," Greg specializes in general home repairs, crown molding, baseboards, door casings, laminate flooring, drywall repair and texture, caulking, towel racks, shelving, rock and stone veneer, bulb and filter changing, ceiling fan installation, light fixture replacement, small tile jobs, painting, pressure washing, gutter cleaning, exterior window washing, picture hanging, TV mounting and more.

We have a running list of handyman needs at my mother's house. My mother is a widow; when my father was alive, he could handle most small jobs. But having a spouse with a barn full of tools rivaling the local hardware store meant not needing to do much yourself. She's come a long way, and these days, when I'm standing on top of a ladder asking her to change the driver bit from a Phillips head to a flat head,

Before and after pictures of handyman work by the skilled craftsmen at Ace Handyman Services in Cashiers. For more information, contact (828) 547-0455 or visit www.AceHandymanServices.com.

she knows the difference. Daddy would be proud. But she has windows and gutters she wants to be cleaned, filters and light bulbs to change on ladders that are too tall for her to climb safely, and taste in incredibly heavy wall decorations. So, we are grateful to have her handyman's number close.

In North Carolina, if you need electrical work, HVAC installation, repair or maintenance, demolitions, structural work or plumbing services, make sure you reach out to an appropriately licensed professional. For all other jobs, and there are many (1,200 at Ace Handyman Services alone!), your insured and vetted handyman has you covered. **P**

Handyman work by Greg Mitchell of GEM Residential Services, including a wainscot fireplace, shelving over cabinets and a laundry folding table. For more information, contact (828) 371-8600 or email gemresidentialservices@gmail.com.



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summer camp.
Others send them
to the back yard.**

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Into the Mystic

A journey towards self-worth

By KAT FORD

ONE AFTERNOON WHILE WORKING AT THE BASCOM IN 2019 a co-worker called me into the shop. Naturally curious, I enjoy hearing what inspires other artists. Tell me all the cool stuff. Teach me your ways. She was looking at a new artist's work and was interested in my thoughts. I glanced through the images and was drawn to a grouping, one of which resembled an abstract jack-in-the-box bursting from a seed. "These are really interesting," I said, pointing. "Those are part of my zodiac series; I study astrology," replied the man on the opposite side of the counter. That's how I met Mark Shryock.

Mark didn't start off as an artist. Early in his career, with a naturally charismatic nature, he gathered a group of investors for a company that eventually collapsed. The experience propelled him into depression. "I was very egoic and power-driven at the time. People believed in me so much that they invested money they did not have." During this dark night of the soul, on the brink of suicide, he had a revelation. "I was given this saying that I now live my life by. I say 'given' because one minute I did not know it, and the next I knew it in its entirety: 'I am the Dreamseed that lies within you as in all humankind. In no one am I the same; this is my gift and curse to you. Many will laugh at your dream, for they dare not know their own. But I say unto you, dare to know me, for I am the path to all you can be, and I would not be within you if it were not possible for you to do and become all I have placed within. Faith is my wellspring; you are the creator, and nothing but yourself can stop the reality I wish to be.'"

Artist's Remarks: Gemini (left) and Taurus (right): "In nature, each sign's cycle is like a pendulum that answers the sign before it and swings to the opposite side of the sign's cycle of expression. This is not the same as opposite signs, like Aries' independence versus Libra's relationships, or 'how much do I give to me' versus 'how much do I give to you.' Instead, think of Aries as the will to be, a seed bursting forth in the spring, the struggle and male principle pushing up through the soil. Aries is the spirit of resurrection that calls all things forth to rise from the tomb of death and darkness. In Taurus, the pendulum swings to the feminine yin from the masculine fire yang of Aries. Venus rules Taurus, so instead of striving, passive being and seeking light occurs. Death occurs as the lower is surrendered to the higher and the peace of God is known. Will is replaced with being. In Gemini, the duality always present in matter arises. The pendulum falls to the middle and, for a brief moment, stands between the masculine and feminine principles of Aries and Taurus, only to swing again towards Cancer. This begins the cycle of birth, death and rebirth with the process of summer in Cancer, Leo and Virgo.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MARK SHRYOCK



Inspired by the promise of his vision, he attended a thirty-day codependency treatment center after his breakdown. Three years later, he returned to the center working full-time, conducting workshops he created, his first experience teaching. He loved it. When the center closed, he moved from Kansas to a small cabin on a creek in Oklahoma. The family who owned the property were prominent and active in the artistic community. They supported his creative endeavors by allowing him to live in their cabin for free. He painted, wrote and thought about mysticism, something he had studied since he was 13 through astrology. Wanting to share his thoughts with others, but with no formal training, he considered college.

Painting was a preferred pastime over writing. But upon meeting the chair of the university art department, he was told he was a lousy artist with no future in the field. It was soul-crushing. Discouraged, Mark considered becoming an English major. Writing didn't come nearly as easy. He hadn't done well in high school; it wasn't until an above-average IQ score that contradicted numerous low marks in reading comprehension led to further testing, which exposed severe dyslexia his senior year.

Mark spent two years in remedial classes in college before he could take the core classes necessary to graduate. He had to hire a tutor and spend three hours a day just to get through algebra. In freshman English, he won an essay contest. He won a scholarship to a journalism seminar in Paris his senior year. After graduating, he began an interdisciplinary humanities master's degree in ecology, cosmology and consciousness studies at Prescott College. The community project for his thesis spanned seven years; he named it Willow Creek Clearing. In his thesis, he would attempt to bring back a tallgrass prairie, recreating what had been destroyed while academically documenting the entire process. "In addition to restoration and ecology work, Willow Creek Clearing was a living lab where I could study astrological cycles, create sacred space and landscape art, and explore the evolutionary dynamics of whole systems in space and time. In the Prescott College M.A. program, you build a team of mentors who are experts in areas you are studying. I had several prominent ecologists and tallgrass prairie restorationists, some top astrology authors, some strong spiritual and nature writers, some experts in evolutionary dynamics and my primary mentor, a highly successful painter and sculpture," says

Mark. At Prescott, he found the academic freedom to connect the dots. "Dyslexia is a tremendous handicap in some ways but is also an incredible gift. I see the world very differently than the average person. I see in patterns, and this allows me to make connections others miss."

Mark explains how he combined astrology and symbolism to create immersive art experiences within the tallgrass prairie in his thesis, "For Aries, I made a sacred space room in the formal garden. The outside boundaries were 12-foot limbs that we cut out for forest succession. We placed in a large circle, upright the stalks, and buried them one and a half feet deep. I then hung wire on which we placed red-dyed sheets hanging from wire to the ground. The result was a large, round red wall circle you entered into by lifting one of the sheets at the end of the path. Around the edges inside were seven pots of red hibiscus flowers ... and seven candles around each hibiscus. A fire was in the middle, surrounded by a circle of red-washed earth. On the night of the Aries full moon, we each marched down the single path file, holding a lighted sparkler to the process with great pomp, whistling the theme song to "Bridge on the River Kwai." In the circle around the fire, we tell jokes and tell yarns, both activities ruled by Mars as we each take turns beat-

ing rhythmically on one of the two drums being passed around the circle... We shared how we would be more courageous, wilder and creative the following year. I used circles mainly and the power and symbolism of paths, plants, color, shape, form and movement. The artwork was constantly being created and destroyed."

In 2007 Mark traveled to South Korea to teach English, desiring to travel while studying art and spirituality in Asia. His ability to identify patterns became a strength in designing curriculums that targeted strengths and weaknesses in learners. He was a professor, social justice writer, consultant and international lecturer. He became a Ph.D. fellow at Pondicherry University in India, where he studied Indian spirituality and cultural studies, especially the writings of Tagore and others like him on education, creativity and art. Throughout Asia, he worked in the health sector, observing patterns in the life skills of nurses and doctors, a practice he continued academically upon returning to America in 2016.

In 2018, to attain greater exposure for his art, Mark opened a Facebook account. "I would be lying if I said it was not crucial to my self-esteem the first year I left academia. I was unsure of my ability as an artist; I desperately wanted validation from others that





my art was worth something," says Mark. But what started as a self-esteem crutch became a burden, finding that it affected others in his household, especially during the pandemic. "There were a couple of months, before I realized the insanity of it all, that I spent hours on Facebook answering comments on my art and commenting on other posts thinking this was what I needed to do to drive the art. This is time I will never get back with my family. The loneliest I have ever felt was sitting next to my now ex-wife as she was on Facebook."

On September 25, 2021, he decided to take a stand and take a break. He took a five-month hiatus from Facebook and

(left) "Buffalo Dawn," acrylic and mica on canvas, 48 inches by 60 inches, located at Mountain Feathers Gallery in Clayton, GA; (above) During his five months away from Facebook, Mark spent more time in his studio and developed a new technique for his canvas paintings.

found his creativity soared. He painted, wrote a book, spent time with his daughter, lost weight, read more, listened to new music, got centered and found peace.

While Mark reactivated his account at the request of galleries representing him, he remains mindful to keep boundaries between professional necessities and falling back into the social media validation trap. "I view it as poisonous to my soul. I am certain social media created separateness in my family and my inner self," says Mark.

Galleries are where Mark wants to sell his work, which is what led him to The Bascom in 2019, the man standing across the counter from me. While he once feared rejection, now he says, "My formula is just to keep painting and not worry about it. To practice my craft. Once I developed my own belief in my art, the world began to mirror the value I saw." In what Mark would undoubtedly note as symbolic, the painting I identified that day at The Bascom was

of the zodiac sign of Taurus. Ruled by Venus, Taurus is connected to value, money, luxury and resources. It is said that one of the lessons Taureans must achieve in their lifetime is self-worth.

No matter where the sun was located on the day of your birth, true self-worth is something we all must master. In an era of likes, shares, followers and digital friends, it is just as easy to confuse value with social media as it is to falsely associate it with prize, praise or dollars. We are each unique and navigating a dimly lit course towards our own type of dream, the "Dreamseed" as Mark would call it. Others might say divine purpose. The way is dark because it is uncharted, different for every individual; we are walking and forging paths simultaneously. Self-worth is not what you are rewarded at the end of the road; it is what you find along the way. ■
To learn more about Mark Shryock's work: markshryock@yahoo.com