

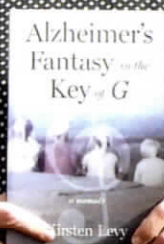
Newton Neighbors

"WHAT'S RIGHT WITH THE WORLD"

JOYFULLY BRINGING

VILLAGES TOGETHER

KIRSTEN LEVY: THE WRITE FRAME OF MIND



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KIRSTEN LEVY: THE WRITE FRAME OF MIND

By Peter Crisano
Photos by Peter Crisano
and Kirsten Levy

If you run into me around Newton, you will find that I have no shame in trying to convince locals to be featured within *Newton Neighbors*. We are fortunate to have such a unique community, full of so many interesting and talented individuals. Last month I told you about a local author in our community, Kirsten Levy, and that you would be hearing more about her in the December issue. Without further ado, I am excited to tell you her story.

Kirsten first came to Newton in 1983 when her (non-Newtonian) mother thought it would be the perfect place to raise a family. She agrees that her mom was correct, as Newton has proved that to her in so many ways. "It's also a wonderful place to enjoy retirement. The schools are great. The city is well-run. My street has an international flair, on it are French, Korean, Iranian, German, Canadian. It is close to excellent medical care, which was helpful during my mother's decline in Alzheimer's Disease, and to creative writing outlets (Grub Street, Pangyrus Lit Mag), for help when I was ready, finally, to write my mother's Alzheimer's story," says Kirsten.

That story is Kirsten's first published book. This newly minted author released her book in May 2022, *Alzheimer's Fantasy in the Key of G*, a personal account of her experience when caring for her mother as she battled through the disease. I highly recommend reading it, and it will personally resonate with those of you who are in or have encountered a similar situation with your loved ones.

I admire Kirsten's passion for writing, as it is one that I share with her. She is a reader/reviewer for a literary magazine, Pangyrus Lit Mag, based in Cambridge, and a member of Grub Street, Boston. These literary activities keep her close to the writing scene. Prior to joining these



organizations, she was an editorial board member and author mentor for a journal specialized in the kind of work she was doing at Boston University.

She is also in The Optimists' Book Club, so named because the members are determined (and have every hope and expectation) to keep it running (since 2010) despite pandemic, tough family times and the usual scheduling hiccups. Thus far, they show no signs of slowing down.

I could have filled this entire feature simply by focusing on Kirsten's passion for writing, but to get a full picture of this local Newtonian, you need to

hear about her other commitments. Kirsten has an incredible track record of volunteerism.

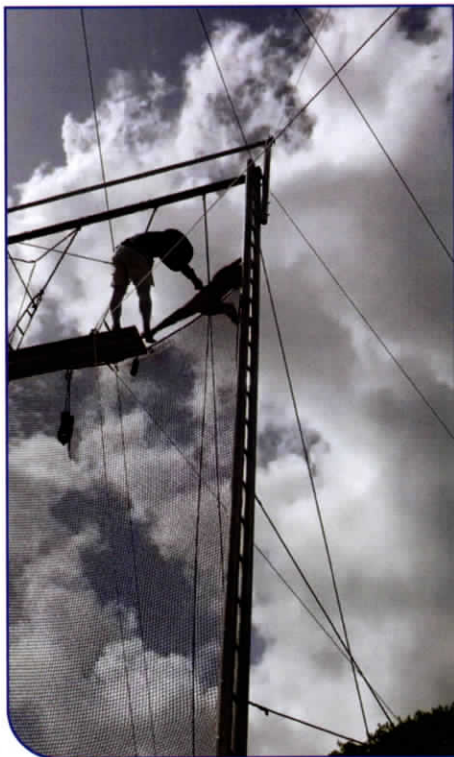
"I'm a 21-year volunteer for the Boston Athletic Association Marathon and can be found every April along the racecourse, usually at the start but for many years served the runners as they passed through my water station in West Newton around mile 18. BAA has honored me on their Wall of Volunteers and recently sent me their memorial badge which I've kept safe along with all my BAA paraphernalia," says Kirsten.

Kirsten was also previously with the American Red Cross from 2005-2008

as a Disaster Relief and Community Liaison and spent two memorable, horrific weeks in Baton Rouge and New Orleans helping with Hurricane Katrina relief.

I would be remiss if I did not tell you that between writing and volunteering, she is also an incredible mom to three daughters, a grandmom to seven grandkids, and a loving wife to her husband, Simon.

Kirsten met Simon in the basement of a university dormitory in Geneva Switzerland where the students put up a disco/dance/bar every Thursday night. The connection between the pair



was instantaneous, beginning with a very simple gesture. "He made a signal from across the room. "Do you want to dance?" he said, and I responded in kind, "Sure!" and we did," says Kirsten.

She earned her BA at Wellesley College in 1974 and later her MBA through Boston University in 1993. She wrote for an international business journal in the early years until she and her husband decided to move back to USA for Simon to pursue a PhD in Physiology. He graduated 1983 with that PhD. "In 1985 I went to work at Boston University and moved up under the steady, benevolent leadership of Aram V. Chobanian, M.D., the world's best boss, who later became BU's 9th

president," she says. Kirsten likes to have an open world view and many of her professional activities have involved international experiences.

The couple tied the knot on June 1974 fresh out of college. They are approaching 50 years together and have grown their family exponentially in that time. Their three daughters, Melanie, Brenda, and Hannah now have seven children between them, ranging in age from 15 months to 18 years old.

The three girls are sports-minded, but as they now are raising families, they have little time for it. The grandchildren

Continued on next page.

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are doing interesting gap year/high school/primary school and baby things like studying abroad, wrestling, soccer, flag football, gymnastics, drama and home theater shows, and learning to walk.

One got himself a toolkit and began earning money by repairing his and his friends' skateboards; their project to build a skateboard practice ramp for big air lifts will one day be accomplished (unknown if they will charge admission). Another of the grandchildren just ran the Tel Aviv 10k. A third scares grandma and grandpa with her talent on the high wire, suspended 20 ft in the air.

Kirsten tells me that she prefers to do sports rather than follow teams. She's an avid exerciser, logging over 6 hours each week rain or shine: slow jogging, walking, dancing, Pilates, weights, stretching. She also enjoys finding good



hikes around New England and in the national parks.

"We challenged ourselves to hike up to all eight of the AMC back country huts in the White Mountains. It took nine years to do it."

Summer vacations on Cape Cod are becoming tradition for the family. They also usually plan a big family vacation to a special spot. They chose Yellowstone last summer. Simon and Kirsten have lived in or traveled to many other wonderful places before and during their time in Newton: Paris, Geneva, Israel, the former Soviet Union, Canada, North and South Africa not to mention the western US. A long family vacation in 2019 was a far-reaching itinerary to Israel, Crete, Santorini and Tuscany, finishing up with a visit to dear friends in Geneva. At various points the rest of the family joined in.

Their international experiences reflect the immigrant story as a thread that runs through their own family, as is common throughout the US. Simon is from Morocco, and the first person in his family to attain a high degree of education. He has his own wonderful story. Kirsten's brother married a Greek whose father was a career diplomat and lived all over the world, while her other brother married a woman from Chile.

The daughters continued the thread: they set their sights on husbands from London and Johannesburg/Haifa while their youngest daughter's spouse is first-generation Mexican American. Kirsten certainly does not forget the

immigration experience of her own mother's Irish ancestors who made their way post-famine to settle in Boston in 1853, which she details in her book.

An interesting anecdote: Kirsten loves dogs and had many while growing up. She and Simon had their hands full with the three girls and so decided against taking on the additional responsibility of a family dog. "Thus, as in life, the tables have turned, our children have given dogs to their children. It has been lovely to see," laughs Kirsten.

The family motto is clearly that of an author, "Write, or tell, your story. It matters now and will matter more later."

Kirsten's book can be found on Amazon and at other booksellers, *Alzheimer's Fantasy in the Key of G* ■

Please contact us if you, or a family you know, is interested in being featured as our cover story in one of our upcoming issues. We'd be delighted to add you to our family feature list. Email us at pcrisano@bestversionmedia.com.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Some people are worth melting for."
— Olaf