



Mary Cole: A Work of Heart

On a morning back in March, I started off the day with a joyful email message from an East Wallingford resident. The sender introduced themselves as Mary Cole, a reader of the Neighbors of East Wallingford publication, who wanted to express cheer over learning that I was also a “nature nut.” The friendly note that followed shared a bit of her passion for the outdoors and her roots to the Wallingford community. In closing, she expressed gratitude for “the quaint publication of our sweet town.”

Her cheerful sentiment and kind words added a smile to the morning. I was curious to learn more of her story and what drives her enthusiasm. As luck would have it, on a cool windy day back in mid-April, Mary introduced me to Marcus Cooke Memorial Park, across from Rock Hill Elementary School. We took a short stroll through the nature trails while Mary candidly spoke about her life, and the leap of faith she took two years ago that landed her on new career path.

Born and raised in East Wallingford, Mary followed her

mother’s roots to Louisiana shortly after she graduated Lyman Hall High School in 1992. For the next 24 years, the deep south would become her home; Where she’d marry and hold a career as a grammar school Physical Education (PE) instructor. A divorce in 2009 would start Mary in a new chapter as a single mom to two sons, aged 8 and 11. For the next seven years, she pursued a profession as a teacher, while continuing to raise her kids.

While she grew to love the early summers and delicious gumbo of southwest Louisiana, she also longed for the land of the north. “I truly felt like life was being sapped from me,” she wrote about not having the beauty of the seasons, “...with all their magic to inhale.” Finally in 2016, she followed the urge back north and headed to her hometown of East Wallingford. She made the 1,600-mile trip with her youngest son, Tyler, then age 15. She remembered the challenging journey back home, “At five feet one inch tall, driving a 26-foot moving truck was terrifying.” Mary recalled. “The truck literally broke down five times.” Still, she persevered, and made it back to her hometown with a further

lesson in resilience; A virtue she continues to value and instill today.

It had been over two decades since Mary left the beloved town. By now, an aunt was the only family to remain in town, along with a best friend since childhood, Kelly Wolcheski. “Kelly and Aunt Carol were incredibly supportive and helpful while Tyler and I made the transition.” Mary remembered. She was further grateful to her mother, who kept as a rental the house that her father had built years before, which would serve as a new home for Mary and her son. Mary quickly found delight in the glorious fall seasons and “pizza perfection that is New England.”

Following her return to Connecticut, Mary was hired as a PE teacher at Orchard Elementary School in Milford. It was then she created an after-school program to bring kids outdoors and into nature. The success of the program further sparked her interest to connect people of all ages to the outdoors. So, in 2020 she took a leap of faith, and ended the chapter on a 20-year career in public education to start a personalized outdoor fitness and nature education program. Her business, *Fit by Nature*, offers outdoor programs to people of all ages, through various town parks and recreational programs, as well as homeschool groups throughout the area, “...my little work of heart.” as Mary referred.

Mary holds a degree in Health Promotion and is a Connecticut certified educator for PE and Health. She also earned two nature-based education certifications and is both a certified forest therapy guide and a certified



MARY WITH HER SON, TYLER (21), WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN THE COMMUNITY. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY COLE



MARY WITH HER OLDEST SON, MATTHEW (24), WHO RESIDES IN LOUISIANA. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY COLE



MARY'S HIKING COMPANION, TROOPER. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY COLE

youth fitness specialist. She can also identify an array of forest plants, as she instinctively demonstrated on our walk together, like a true teacher at heart. Oh yeh, and she also has an eye for spotting heart-shapes in small rocks, as she notably revealed as we trekked over a clay-colored section of the path.

Her oldest son, now 24, remains in Louisiana, where he's established a successful livelihood. Her youngest son, now 21, graduated from Sheehan High School and continues to live and work in the community. Nowadays, most of Mary's time is spent dedicated to her business, but in her free time she enjoys hiking with her canine hiking companion, Trooper, or curling up to a good read. A few of her recent books include, *The World Becomes What We Teach* by Zoe Weil, *Heart Minded* by Sarah Blondin, and *The Awakened Brain* by Lisa Miller.

A devoted pet owner, Mary has friended a dog for nearly her entire life. Trooper, a 13-year-old lab mix, was a stray that showed up in her yard in Louisiana only two weeks after her beloved 16-year-old shepherd/chow mix, Mack, walked over the Rainbow Bridge. A miniature dappled dachshund, Frankie, also shares space in her home, after being given away in a parking lot when he was only a puppy and could fit in the palm of her hand. “He’s my barnacle.” she lovingly quoted. Then there’s Timber, “a southern gentlemen of a cat,” as Mary describes, “who will only drink out of a sink!”

Since her return to East Wallingford, Mary continues to appreciate and delight in this area of New England. “I still pinch myself upon gazing at a maple,” she



MARY IS DEDICATED TO DEVELOPING OUTDOOR PROGRAMS THAT ENTICE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO COME OUTDOORS AND CONNECT WITH NATURE.

PHOTO: AMY PARISI, AMY'S ARTISTRY

eloquently described, "...or cooling off in a brook!" A true nature nut at heart, Mary loves and respects our land and finds no greater pleasure in witnessing people of all ages connect with Mother Nature. "We'll all face difficult times during our life." Mary acknowledged. "Observing nature not only teaches us to live in harmony, but the woods will consistently provide a peaceful place to reset."

Neighborhood Classifieds

Have something to sell or give away? It might be just the thing your neighbor is looking for! To place your free classified, go to www.bestversionmedia.com and click "Submit Content." Ads must be 40 words or less, text only, and no business listings.

Electronic Strike Zone bowling game with five game selections, lighted scoreboard, up to 4 players, \$1,950. 222-222-222. jane@abc.net.

Youth Classifieds

Hey Kids! Free Advertising!

Be in business for yourself and make a little money – all while helping your neighbors! To place your free classified offering services, go to www.bestversionmedia.com and click "Submit Content." Please limit to 40 words. Parental permission will be obtained. Please be advised that all communication regarding Kids' Classifieds will be directed through a parent or guardian.

Landscaping Tyler

I have worked at a landscaping company for two summers and can mow lawns, water plants and perform general maintenance in your yard. Call 333-333-3333.

Pet Sitting Amy

I can take care of your dogs and cats while you are busy or on vacation, up to a week at a time. Call my mom at 555-555-5555

Hiding from the IRS?



WE CAN HELP!

DUSZYNSKI & ASSOCIATES
ENROLLED AGENTS

391 Main Street, Yalesville, CT

203-907-6626 • fedtaxservices.com

TAX SERVICES: Planning/Preparation/IRS Debt

BUSINESS SERVICES: Accounting/Payroll/

Cash Flow Management

QUICKBOOKS: Set-up and training

FOR INDIVIDUALS: Estate and Elder Care Planning

FREE Initial Consultation - 10% OFF for Senior Citizens