

If You Build It, They Will Come

Longevity of the ephemeral ice rink

By Aubrey Ann Parker
Current Editor

It was Christmas Eve 2014 when the Musgraves, a family of five, had moved to the south shore of Crystal Lake from Indianapolis so that mother Lisa could take over a dental practice in downtown Beulah. The three Musgrave children—Maya, Michael, and Quinten—had not yet been enrolled in school, and they did not really know much of anyone in Northern Michigan. But on that first full day in Benzie County, the family headed to the Benzonia Ice Rink with brand new skates that the children had found under the Yule tree.

“It was like the *agora*, the central, public space in ancient Greek city-states. This idea about the local community meeting place—that was the ice rink,” Dr. Lisa Musgrave says. “We met some new friends there immediately. We have good memories of going there.”

Now, six years later and deeply ingrained in this place, Musgrave is giving back to the community by starting a free skate-check-out program in conjunction with the Benzonia Public Library, located right next to the ice rink at Academy Park, at the corner of Traverse Avenue and US-31. Benzie’s long-standing outdoor rink is one of only a handful in Northern Michigan, and though it has changed locations at least twice, it has been around for decades—in the writing of this article, we actually had a hard time tracking down just how long, exactly.

“I skated on the rink as a kid,” says 70-year-old



Quinten (left) and Michael Musgrave moved to Benzie County from Indianapolis on Christmas Eve 2014, and the very first thing that they did was go to the Benzonia Ice Rink to make new friends. Now, six years later, their mother, Dr. Lisa Musgrave, is giving back to the community by starting a free skate-check-out program in conjunction with the Benzonia Public Library, located right next to the ice rink. Photo by Aubrey Ann Parker.

Jack Rineer, who grew up in both Dayton, Ohio, and Beulah, Michigan. Rineer went on to maintain the ice rink at Beulah beach and later at Academy Park for close to five decades, until just a few years ago. “There was a guy, Graydon Shively, who did it before me [in the 1950s at the Benzonia school]... I’m glad to hear that someone’s picked up the job; that’s always good news.”

That someone is Chris Howard (49), who moved to Northern Michigan five years ago to start The Cottage Pros, located on the US-31 hill between Honor and Beulah. Typically, his 35 year-round employees can be found building houses and deck additions, putting in docks, working on lawn maintenance, or “just about every odd job” that home- and cottage-owners could need done,

Howard says. But since late December 2020, The Cottage Pros has had five employees who have been taking turns maintaining the Benzonia Ice Rink. Every morning, someone arrives at 5 a.m. to plow and/or flood the rink; they are usually finished before 9 a.m.

Though a mid-January thaw meant that The Cottage Pros team had to restart from scratch at building the ice base, the rink was initially ready for skaters by the first of the year. By the following weekend, Rachele Sargent Boylan (40) had baked dozens of cookies and made gallons of hot cocoa to give to skaters from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, January 9, 2021.

“I had the cocoa, and Chris [Howard] brought cups and lids,” says Boylan, whose husband owns Xpert Fulfillment, a Benzonia-based company. “It was all free of charge. Just a couple of local business owners coming together and letting people know that they don’t have to have a lot of money to have fun.”

Between the library and the Musgraves, Shively and Rineer and The Cottage Pros, Boylan’s treats, and the herculean fundraising efforts of the late Dennis Pace and now others—if it sounds like it takes a village to make the ice rink a success, that is because it does.

Maybe not a literal village—though it kicks in money and resources, too—but definitely a

Please see Skating on page 6

Pandemic Parenting

A first-time mother considers how COVID-19 has affected parenting in Northern Michigan

By Mae Stier
Current Contributor

It is hard for me to imagine what parenting might look like in a typical year; how our daily routines would change if there were no pandemic.

Our son, Daniel, was not yet five months old when the novel coronavirus came to Michigan. At the time, my partner Tim and I were still sifting through the many transitions associated with becoming first-time parents. After realizing that it was not the best fit for our growing family, I had just closed my shop, The Blue Heron Mercantile, in Empire. We had bought a house south of Lake Ann and moved out of Empire, the village I had called home for three years and where Tim had called home his entire life.

Perhaps by March, we were beginning to find ourselves in a sort of routine again—between unpacking boxes and getting to know our new neighborhood—when “normal life” halted for what we expected would be a few weeks, a month at most. But what we hoped in March would only be a short interruption of our daily lives has undoubtedly changed our entire experience of this first year of parenting.

Even in a typical year, Northern Michigan has its challenges for young families. The affordable housing crisis continues, and because people seem more inclined to move to rural areas in the face of the pandemic, the market here is as competitive as ever.

When Tim and I began looking for our home a year ago, we had a restrictive budget—under \$175,000—which required us to open the radius outside of the Empire area. Thankfully, we found a decent option, only 20 minutes from the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and 15 minutes from both of our parents. Proximity to family was vital for us and has proven especially important



Mae Stier and Tim Egeler’s son Daniel was less than five months old when the coronavirus officially arrived, upending their parenting-worklife balance. Photo by Tim Egeler.

during this time, offering us a support system we would not have if our families were farther away.

Back in October 2019, as we prepared to welcome Daniel into our lives, we did not consider childcare options. As a self-employed person, I had always hoped that I would be able to reformat my days to care for my children. Of course, I had no idea the sheer difficulty that would ensue from attempting to care for my child while also trying to work from home, but in my state of hopeful ignorance, I imagined it would be manageable.

Fifteen months into motherhood—and 10 months into this pandemic—I assure you that “manageable” is not a word I would choose for

the balance of caring for children while working full- or even part-time from home. “Survivable,” yes; “comical,” on the best days; “overwhelming and isolating” on the worst. Whatever word I use to describe the dance of child-caring and working from home, I imagine there are far more parents in this role today than there were a year ago.

Beyond just the difficulty of housing, parents today face limited options for childcare in the region. Our move to Lake Ann put us much closer to in-home daycare and childcare facilities than what was available in Empire, but the options are still few outside Traverse City—and there are even less during the pandemic, as some providers in the

“high risk” category have chosen to take this time off. If I needed to work outside of the home, we would not have many nearby choices and would likely need to commute for childcare, which is a reality for many families.

Parenting support is about more than just childcare, however. When we moved out of Empire, I knew that we would make our way back to the village often, and especially planned to make Thursdays our “Empire day.” For years, the Glen Lake Community Library has hosted a story hour with Joanne “Yogi” Beare, a gift to Glen Lake-area parents. (Yogi was a childcare provider for years; Tim used to attend her daycare in Empire when he was a child. He fondly remembers the “goodbye song” that she would sing to them each day, a song she still sings at the end of story hour at the library.)

Unfortunately, only a handful of story hours have occurred this year, as we all do our best to keep our community safe.

Before the latest surge of COVID-19 cases in our region, the library and Yogi worked together to create a safe environment for story hour to happen: with limits to the number of people allowed, with masks in place, and with everyone at a distance. I took Daniel to story hour one week, and he was able to see other children his age, really, for the first time. It was refreshing to see other parents, for us to all shuffle through the doors laden with diaper bags and car seats, our eyes tired but smiling above our masks.

I realized that day that story hour and other children’s groups are as much for the parents as the children, offering us the opportunity to connect with people who understand the whirlwind of our days. Daniel crawled around on the floor

Please see Parenting on page 7



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Emmily & Jason Sheffield: 1801 Farm

Questions & Answers with community faces

Both Emmily Rosa Sheffield (29) and Jason Sheffield (29) grew up in Honor and graduated from Benzie Central High School in 2010 and 2009, respectively. Her family, the Rosas, have been in Benzie County for many generations, and her great-grandparents owned Bud's, an Honor gas station that offered auto repair, vehicle towing, and canoe rentals up until about a decade ago. Jason also grew up in a family of entrepreneurs—he remembers spending a lot of time as a child and young adult at his grandparents' party store, Lone Pine, located just outside Honor, near the Platte lakes.

The couple first became close friends on the school bus, back when she was a freshman and he was a sophomore. They started dating five years later, in 2011, after both moved back to Benzie County around the same time, following a couple of years away.

Having enjoyed biology in high school, Emmily attended Western Michigan University briefly, only to discover that college was not the life path for her. She then worked a rash of short-lived jobs upon landing back in Benzie County with no real idea of what she “wanted to do” professionally: office assistant at Labadie's Summer Place Casuals, where she learned a lot about managing a small business; a server at the Crystal Cafe and in the kitchens of both The Fusion and The Manitou, all of which gave her extensive knowledge about food.

Meanwhile, thanks in large part to Jason's high school background—he had especially enjoyed hands-on classes like building trades, wood shop, and ag-mechanics—he quickly became a highly skilled carpenter, building and repairing homes for nine years.

But in 2014, everything would begin to change. Emmily was pregnant with their first child, and the couple had decided to drive to Frankfort to fill out applications for an apartment, since they were soon to be in need of more space. While driving along M-115, they saw someone putting up a “for rent” sign in front of an old farmhouse in Crystal Lake Township, just about a half-mile from the Frankfort Gateway. Though it was above their budget and “a big-time long shot,” Jason says that they pulled into the driveway to check it out—a few weeks later, the couple made the move from Honor to the farmhouse on three acres at 1801 Frankfort Highway, which is how their future farm got its name. Later that year, the Sheffield's daughter, Fae, was born, and their son, Jason, came two years later.

By 2017, both Emmily and Jason had quit their other jobs and were farming full time, utilizing all of the skills and passions that had brought these young entrepreneurs to this point: biology, business management, food, and building.

Continuing with our interview series on impactful Benzie County characters, *The Betsie Current* caught up with the Sheffield's before evening chores, only a few days after two mama pigs had given birth to a total of 25 new piglets.

THE BETSIE CURRENT: We want to start with the basics—what does your farm produce? What made you want to become farmers? What do you enjoy about this line of work?

EMMILY SHEFFIELD: We produce packaged pork from hogs that are raised on a diversified pasture, pigs for roasting, stock pigs for other farms, eggs from free range hens—also raised on pasture—and ecologically sourced firewood. In the past, we have had a vegetable CSA [community-supported

agriculture], but we are taking a break from that in 2021, so that we can focus more effort toward the pig herd and the live pasture where we raise them. I became a farmer to fill a need in our local community for high-quality, nutrient-dense food. And also, it made sense at the time to create a job for myself, given the lacking available job market in Benzie County.

JASON SHEFFIELD: At 23, I was a new dad-to-be and a very burnt-out carpenter. I decided that, instead of building new/second homes for folks that didn't need them, I'd rather be producing food for people close to me—and teaching my children to do the same. The transition took a couple years.

CURRENT: Can you describe how your pigs are different from others that our readers might be more familiar with?

food, water, and often they have other requirements, like nesting material or a pool for bathing. After that big mainstay chore of feeding the pigs, my middays are full of a variety of chores that change seasonally—some afternoons are spent doing marketing/sales, some are spent weeding vegetable garden beds, some are spent preserving extra harvest. I love making pickles from all sorts of veggies. I also make salsa, tomato sauce, jams. I love to cure and smoke bacon, ham, and sausage. The Mangalitsa pigs produce an excess of high-quality lard, and I render it several times a year for baking, cooking fat, and for friends that make soap. My job very often extends into the night. During seasons that the livestock are having their young, like these past few days, they have to be checked around the clock. Besides farming full time, I also parent/homeschool our two children.

JASON: It really depends on the season, but typically most days begin with feeding livestock, then some firewood production. A big part of my job that I didn't anticipate is hauling things to or from the farm, like feed, equipment, animals, and goods for sale. I usually try to do necessary hauling in the evening, since traffic is less and daylight is for choring—cars have headlights, so I can haul things after dark just fine. A well-working farm falls into many rhythms; it resembles a symphony orchestra performance and a ballet happening at the same time. Daily tasks are precisely choreographed

to flow smoothly into the next hour, day, week, and season. The bass rhythm is what we call “managed rotational grazing.” For the wellness of our livestock, pasture, family, and our neighbors, we decided early on that we need to keep all of our animals moving around the pasture as often as possible. Periods of significant disturbance caused by a herd of animals, followed by long rest periods without any significant disturbance, allows our pasture's flora and fauna—including but not limited to: soil microbes, fungi, native and invasive plants, wild and domestic birds, predators, and prey from all Kingdoms—to process and consume waste produced by livestock, while converting it into soil fertility and eventually food for the future. It's very common for conventional livestock to be kept in the same pen or even in a barn for their entire life. Confinement-style management practices lead to sanitation issues very quickly. Most animals can survive very harsh confinement conditions but really need some space to be themselves, to exercise, to breathe clean air, and they need exposure to sunshine in order to be happy and thrive. Cattle really like to move to a new section of fresh, tall grass everyday, for instance. During the growing season, that is what we strive to accomplish with them. Meanwhile, swine enjoy wooded and savannah-like areas, and they like to hang out in a given space for a few weeks at a time. We work diligently to keep the hogs in areas where they have trees, bushes, grasses, clean water, and food available anytime they need it. Chickens really enjoy following large livestock and cleaning up their leftovers, as well as benefiting from the protection of being in

EMMILY: We raise several rare breeds of hogs. Mangalitsa is the first rare breed that we chose to start raising, back in 2015. We bought a pure Mangalitsa and two hogs that were crossbred between Mangalitsa and other “heritage breed” genetics. Mangalitsa is a breed of pig that originated in Hungary. Some investors in southern Michigan imported the breed to the United States from Hungary in the mid-2000s, so although it is a rare breed, it was somewhat easy for us to obtain here in Michigan. We had heard of the breed initially from Mark Baker of Baker's Green Acres, another diversified farm down in Marion. We have watched Mark's educational videos about farming since 2013. Mark is an advocate for the proliferation of heritage breed hogs, and through him, we learned that heritage breed hogs are easier to raise in a more animal-welfare-oriented environment that produces a high-quality product. The genetic differentiation of heritage breed hogs is apparent in the final meat content of the animal; its molecular fat structure is different from a conventional breed hog and is said to be a more healthful choice. Also, heritage breed hogs have physical features and natural instincts that drive them to sustain themselves in a more natural setting versus a conventional breed hog that cannot thrive in the Northern Michigan climate. For the past three years, we have produced 200 heritage breed pigs annually.

CURRENT: What does a typical day of work look like for you?

EMMILY: My workday changes dramatically with the seasons but will typically start with tending to the hog herd that needs daily



Jason and Emmily Sheffield with their children, Jason and Fae, along with a chicken. The Sheffield's own 1801 Farm of Frankfort, where they tend chickens, heritage pigs, and a few cattle. Photo by Aubrey Ann Parker.

a large herd dynamic. So we just let our 100 or so chickens go where they choose to go all over the farm; you'll often see them hanging with the pigs right now. Also, in this type of rotational grazing, studies have shown that there is carbon capture going on, because the ground becomes more fertile after livestock has been on it, so more plants grow there. This helps to offset the carbon/methane that the livestock give off. In that way, it becomes regenerative to the soil and the system as a whole, instead of a carbon input, like so much conventional farming is today.

CURRENT: How has your work life changed since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Northern Michigan in March?

EMMILY: Our work day hasn't changed a lot in the time of COVID-19. We have, however, felt a lot of pressure to increase pork production, so we have been busier than ever trying to match that demand.

JASON: People are worried about food security, and many seem to be much more likely to look for food locally now, during the pandemic. Also, restaurants, bars, and breweries are consuming massive amounts of firewood and paying good money for it, since the state's dining restrictions have moved patrons outdoors, often around firepits.

CURRENT: Where does the name "1801 Farm" come from?

EMMILY: We spent a couple of months trying to find a name for the farm that we liked and had no luck, even with a ton of help from friends and family. When we gave people directions to the farm, though, it became obvious that they would remember the farm name and the address if we combined them, hence, 1801 Frankfort Highway became the name, "1801 Farm."

CURRENT: How have you seen your work grow and change? How do you hope that it will continue to grow? What is next? Have you had any collaborations?

EMMILY: I am always surprised, looking back, at not only the growth but also how our farm is always changing. The farm grows faster than we are ready for. In the future, we hope to raise more beef cattle; we have none at the moment, but we have raised six in the past. Farming is all about collaboration. We have been lucky to gain knowledge by helping out with chores at The May Farm, just a few miles away, down [Lobb Road], and have enjoyed providing a hog roast for the certified local event Lively Lands Music Festival in Empire in previous years. We look forward to more small collaborations like these and consider most of our work a collaboration with other local farmers and our local community. We love that we are able to participate in a fairly old way of raising hogs that involves input from a broad community of farmers, investors, and consumers. Many participants in our little community play several of those roles at once. For instance, it is a very old tradition for a village or town to reserve its pumpkins and other Halloween decorations like hay bales for the purpose of feeding the group of hogs that they intended on eating throughout the coming winter. Often, the extras from orchards were used in this same way. Breweries, bakeries, and cheese-makers had nowhere else to dispose of their food-based waste products, except to the local hog farm. In this exact way, we collaborate with our neighbors and local small businesses to create a product we can all share in, like our ancestors did.

JASON: We started with zero experience, land, or equipment. We both have farming in our family backgrounds, but a few

generations back, so there is definitely a generational gap that kept that information from being passed down. We are just now getting to the point that we are equipped well enough to make things happen somewhat effectively. Our goal is to grow into larger parcels of land around Frankfort, in order to facilitate our growing herds of livestock. There are hundreds of unused or poorly used acres around Frankfort that look, to us, like great places to raise livestock and, in turn, can increase soil fertility in those places. We are constantly seeking out landowners in hopes of striking an agricultural land agreement that is beneficial for the landowner, the producer, the consumer, and the surrounding community, including neighbors and wildlife: we lease land from you, we rotational graze our herd, you end up with a field that is more verdant, our consumers end up with healthy, local food on their tables. The overarching idea is feeding local people the best food possible—a well-fed community is strong and resilient.

CURRENT: What is your favorite thing that you produce? What are the top three sellers?

EMMILY: I enjoy the work involved in raising piglets, and I also enjoy raising cold-weather vegetables, like beets, carrots, and greens.

JASON: I really enjoy raising livestock. We take a lot of pride in constantly improving and expanding the pasture that they live on. Our biggest sellers are definitely pork, eggs, and firewood.

CURRENT: Who are some of your clients that we would know? How can our readers get their hands on your food?

EMMILY: In the past, we've worked with Jim Barnes [of Crystal Lake Catering Company and formerly Elberto's Taqueria] for Grow Benzie's Bayou in the Barn event at St. Ambrose Cellars; we provided sweet Italian sausage for one of his cajun dishes that was served at the fundraising event. The Manitou restaurant, my former employer, has been a faithful patron of our spring salad mix, and if you have enjoyed the warm fire on their patio in the last couple years, there's a very good chance that the wood was supplied by 1801 Farm. I also mentioned Lively Lands music festival already. As far as individuals, a lot of our clientele are private households who purchase a half or whole hog for their freezer—Janel Farron/Paul Gerhart, Emery/Liz Gyr have enjoyed many sides of pork for their freezers from 1801 Farm, and it was a joy providing the roasting hog for Emery and Liz's wedding two years ago. Anyone who is interested in placing an order for a side of packaged pork or a roaster pig for an event should call to make arrangements. We sell animals directly from the farm to the customer and deliver the animals to a custom butcher to be cut and wrapped. We sell eggs directly from the farm, as well, in the spring. Sometimes in the summer, we will have some vegetables or pumpkins for sale at the end of our driveway, by our firewood stand.

CURRENT: How have you seen Benzie County/Northern Michigan change since you grew up here? What are your hopes for the area in the future? What are the biggest challenges and rewards of living/working here? What is the best or most rewarding part of your job?

EMMILY: I would like to see land use changes in Benzie County—the area that surrounds Benzie has significantly more agricultural activity, and part of the reason for that is zoning. One of the most rewarding parts of living/working in Northern Michigan is being surrounded by natural beauty. Two of the biggest challenges of living/working here can

be the small local economy and the weather.

JASON: I've seen a lot of barns fall down and a lot of million-dollar homes built for seasonal use—I'd like to see that curve flatten out some in the future. In general, challenges almost always end up being rewarding. For me, the most rewarding part of my job is seeing my children smile while consuming food that they helped to produce and considering the advantage that the food and knowledge connected to it represents.

CURRENT: What could Northern Michigan do to attract more talented young people to this area?

JASON: Northern Michigan should put more effort into producing talent and less into importing it. Vocational training needs to be available locally for young adults, who are soon to be entering the workforce.

CURRENT: What else does Northern Michigan/Benzie County need?

EMMILY: If you're asking the farmer, we need more hay fields and more butchers.

JASON: Yes, hay fields and butcher shops.

CURRENT: What kinds of things do you do for fun, when you are not working? What other things are you involved with? How did you get involved with them, and why are you passionate about these causes?

EMMILY: Like proper Frankfortians, we enjoy going to the beach in the summer. I also have some agricultural-related hobbies—cheese-making, seed-saving, and making charcuterie—that keep me happy in the winter.

JASON: All of my hobbies are directly related to agriculture. I really enjoy spending time helping neighbors and talking with people who are more than twice my age. "Spare time" is not something that we have, but if I find an opportunity for recreation, I try to spend it gleaned wisdom or providing a smile. I am passionate about the ecological and economic impacts that my actions have on the world around me.

CURRENT: What are your favorite local events and activities? Any favorite dining, recreation, hiking spots?

EMMILY: We love the local food trucks—Upriver Wood-Fired Pizza in Honor is our summertime fave! East Shore Market has been on our lifelong lunch menu. We are excited for a new Italian restaurant that is opening soon in Frankfort, Vita Bella. We enjoy foraging, especially for mushrooms; we usually find oyster mushrooms, chicken of the woods, cinnamon caps, and morels. We also love foraging for leeks, black raspberries, and wild blueberries.

CURRENT: What does your perfect winter day look like in Benzie County? How would you spend it?

JASON: When the sun hits our southern-facing slope on a calm winter morning, there's really no better place to be. Feeding and caring for a beautiful, bountiful, diverse herd of round, shaggy swine is the perfect winter day for me.

Visit "1801 Farm" on Facebook or @1801farm on Instagram to learn more and see inventory. Call Jason 231-930-7990 or email 1801farm.emmily@gmail.com for more information about pasture-based proteins, delivery options, bulk and/or custom orders. Contact Jason Sheffield, Sheffield Carbon Farms LLC, for land, resource, and livestock-management needs.



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Inspiration Point - Arcadia

Heading north on scenic highway M-22, you climb an ear-popping 370 feet to a parking area overlook. You can climb another 80 feet to the viewing platform for an inspiring view across Lake Michigan and over the small village of Arcadia.

Elberta Turn-Around - Elberta

Heading further north to Elberta, you will find one of the best overlooks in Michigan. To get there, head down Frankfort Avenue (turns into Furnance Avenue), and then turn left onto Bye Street (there are signs pointing to the beach). From the view, you will see both piers and the Frankfort Lighthouse, as well as miles down the coast and across Lake Michigan. You can drive down to the beach area, when weather permits, and even walk out on the pier (at your own risk).

Point Betsie Lighthouse

From Frankfort, go north on M-22 for four. Turn left on Point Betsie Road and continue to the end of the road. (If you are on Pilgrim Highway and you reach Crystal Downs Drive, you have gone about a half-mile too far.) Point Betsie Lighthouse is right on the shoreline of Lake Michigan and is just south of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. The lighthouse was originally built in 1858, and the buildings are managed by a non-profit now. Park along the road and walk just a short distance to the lakeshore, where you will be able to see the lake, the lighthouse and the effects of high water all season. Visit PointBetsie.org for more information.

Mouth of the Platte River

After Point Betsie, get back on M-22 and keep heading north. Once you see Riverside Canoe Trips on your left, cross the bridge over the Platte River and turn left onto Lake Michigan

Empire Beach

This is a great stop to get a view from the ground and from the beginning of the Manitou Passage. You can see some of South Manitou Island, but most of the view is the vast span of Lake Michigan. They have a cute lighthouse on the beach—the Robert H. Manning Memorial Lighthouse. Across from the parking lot is South Bar Lake.

The Secret Overlook

From Empire, if you head east on M-22, and then north on 677 for just under a mile, you will climb a fairly large hill. At the top, on the west side of the road, is a hidden drive. Pull up there, and you will have an overlook that is beautiful year-round.

Glen Haven

Head north on 667 and then catch M-22 into Glen Arbor. Take 109 west and then turn right on to Glen Haven Road. The view from the Glen Haven parking lot includes the Manitou Islands and a view of the Manitou Passage.



The Northern Lights did not pop back in December, but someone left the lights on inside the Glen Haven Cannary. “Exploring the park in pitch black until 2 a.m. looking for Northern Lights was epic,” says teh photographer. “I did the full loop at Pyramid Point, and it was absolutely gorgeous. I fully recommend night hiking especially when the stars are out.” Photo by Noah Sorenson.

Road and follow it until it dead-ends in a parking lot. From here, you can see where the Platte River enters Lake Michigan in a much different way than the hustle and bustle of summer.

Empire Bluff Trail

If you are looking for a short hike—1.5 miles, round trip—this is a perfect one. There is a better view from Pyramid Point (keep reading below), but this trail is much easier.

“The view of the Lake Michigan shoreline and South Bar Lake from the Empire Bluff Overlook is spectacular. On a clear day, you will also see South Manitou Island. On this 1.5-mile-round-trip hike, you will also find six numbered posts, which correspond to an interpretive description of the area along the trail. Be sure to pick up a trail map brochure at the trailhead and take it along with you on your hike.”

-National Park Service

supplied fuel to steamers along the Great lakes. Glen Haven is the best preserved cord wood station on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan and perhaps the entire Great Lakes. Glen Haven was a company town and eventually diversified into farming, canning of fruit, and tourism. The beautiful beaches of Lake Michigan are right there, so take time for a walk along the beach.”

-National Park Service

Learn more at NPS.gov/SLBE/PlanYourVisit/Glen-Haven-Historic-Village.htm online.

Pyramid Point

Only accessible on foot, but this is likely the best view in Northern Michigan. The trip to the overlook is only 0.6 miles (1.2 miles, round trip), but the last 0.2 miles is a steep uphill walk. From this view, you get a panoramic view of Lake Michigan, including the Manitou Passage, the Manitou Islands, and even the Fox Islands. To access the trailhead, take M-22 to Port Oneida Road, which is 3.7 miles north of Glen Arbor. Follow Port Oneida Road until it ends at Basch Road. Follow Basch Road east to the trailhead parking lot.

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Area Skating

Northern Michigan’s outdoor ice rinks

The Benzonia Ice Rink, the subject of our cover story, is one of only a handful of outdoor rinks in the area:

ALMIRA TOWNSHIP: This rink—currently maintained by volunteers from the Almira Township Fire Department—was originally constructed in 1990, though the location has changed slightly, and there was a period of time that it did not happen at all. For the past five years, however, the 80-foot-by-80-foot rink has been located between the township offices and the recycling bins. Daniel Mosholder, the township’s EMS Lieutenant for the past two years, says that they are building the base now for the current season, since there are extra-cold temperatures predicted for the next eight nights, and he expects it to be up and running by the first week of February. There are lights, so the rink can be used at any time, and it is free. Stay tuned to the Fire Department’s Facebook page for updates.

CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN: The rink is free for guests, or \$5 per non-guest. Rentals are available at a price of \$9 for one hour or \$12 for two hours. The rink’s capacity is limited to 15 during the COVID-19 pandemic, and all skaters must wear a mask and keep six feet of distance from other skaters.

CITY OF FRANKFORT: For many years, there was an outdoor ice rink at Tank Hill, where Lakeside Shakespeare Theatre company performs during the summer. However, right around the turn of the century, the city stopped creating this ice rink. And while, two decades later, there is still no ice rink in Frankfort, city superintendent Josh Mills says that the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is being updated to include the possibility of an ice rink in the future, according to a recent article in the *Benzie County Record Patriot*.

VILLAGE OF ELBERTA: In the beginning of 2014, the village’s Parks and Recreation committee—along with volunteers like Eric Pyne, Bill Soper, Bill O’Dwyer, Ken Bonney, and others—created an outdoor rink on Betsie Bay, after it froze over with more than 16 inches of ice depth. The rink was located at the juncture of M-22, old M-168, and the Betsie Valley Trail on the “mini-pond” between the Farmers’ Market at Penfold Park and the old marina, where the new restrooms are located. According to *The Elberta Alert*, the group cleared the pond with a snowblower, shovels, and a broom before flooding the space with a pump and a hose. People took turns clearing the rink. A few weeks later, they even had a “Fire and Ice Party,” in which more than 100 people came to skate and commune: Pyne and Emily Votruba made torches to line the path to the rink from the village; Sue Oseland brought cocoa, tea lights, and luminaries; Soper maintained a bonfire; Jeannie Sikes brought skates that she had picked up at resale places; donations were collected. Nothing like it has happened since, but then again, we have not seen a winter like it since.

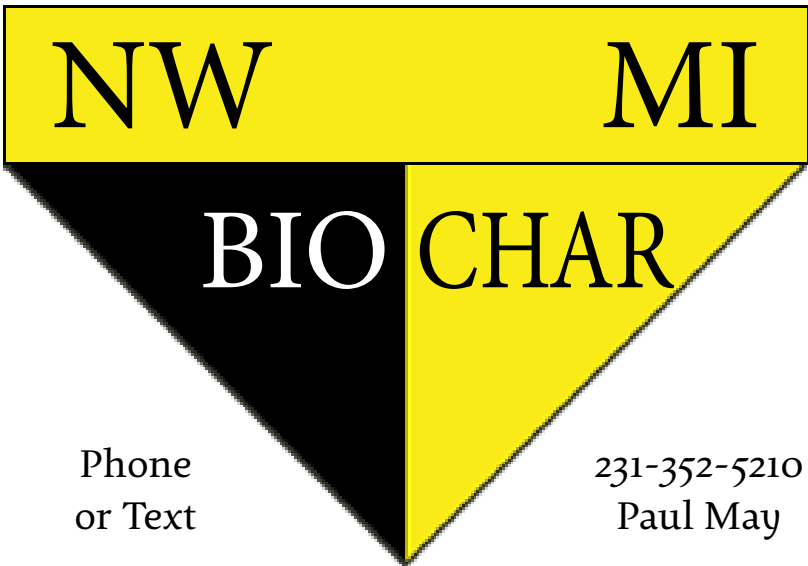
HOMESTEAD TOWNSHIP: A rink opened behind the Fire Department, next to Platte River Elementary, in December 2013, after the township put out a survey to residents about what they wanted to see in recreation facilities. The top three responses were playground equipment, walking trails, and an ice rink, according to then-supervisor Jessica Wooten. The rink was free for use during day or night, since it was lit. Businesses, community volunteers, and the township donated time and resources; Consumers Energy was to put in a light pole at no cost, according to an article in the *Record Patriot*; Jack Rineer facilitated the construction process and continued daily maintenance. However, this rink is not operational now, though, when asked about it, current supervisor Tia Cooley told *The Betsie Current* that she was very interested to look into it and learn more.

Further Afield:

- **Traverse City** maintains three outdoor rinks, two with warming houses. All are available at no charge. The Thirlby Field (14th & Pine Street) and Traverse Heights Elementary (Rose Street, near Carver) locations have warming stations; F&M Park (State Street, between Railroad and Hope) does not.
- **Grand Traverse Resort** has had an outdoor ice rink in the past, but not this year or last year.
- **Suttons Bay** has a lit rink with benches and porta-potties, located on the corner of Broadway and Lincoln Avenue. Typically, the rink is host to a “pond hockey” tournament in mid-February.
- **The Homestead in Glen Arbor** has an ice rink that is free to use. There are skates available for rent from Mountain Flowers at a rate of \$8 to \$12 for two hours, depending on if you are a resort guest or not.
- **Ludington** has a 30-foot-by-45-foot synthetic surface in the heart of downtown. The \$8,500 rink was paid for via donations from 30 Ludington businesses that supported the Downtown Development Authority’s vision to attract more people through recreation. No hockey is allowed on the rink. There is a skate check-out program through Mason County District Library.
- **Mt. McSaubia Recreation Area in Charlevoix** has a \$2 fee to use rink and skates are available to rent for only \$1—or get a season pass for \$30, which includes skate rental.
- **Winter Sports Park in Petoskey** has two large outdoor rinks—one specifically for hockey—as well as a warming house, concessions, free Wifi, restrooms, board games for check out, and a nearby sledding hill. Free to use; \$7 skate rentals and \$7 skate sharpening.
- **Boyne Mountain** has a rink that is free for anyone to use, and free rentals for resort guests.

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Skating

Continued from page 1

community of hard-working and caring people. The Benzonia Ice Rink is, in fact, a testament to the heart of this community to create something that is so ephemeral, yet has held more than half a century of joy for hundreds of young and old each year.

New Era

Chris Howard, who has a cottage on Platte Lake and lives in Traverse City, remembers skating on the outdoor rink in Benzie County when he was younger.

“My grandparents lived here all their lives, so I grew up in downtown Beulah in the summers, and we visited in the winter. And we would skate every chance we got—even played a little hockey.”

Now, Howard sees this as his chance to give back to the same community who helped to raise him. He first contacted government officials more than a year ago, in hopes of helping with the rink during the 2019-20 winter, but the weather did not cooperate. This year, however, his team has been able to get the rink up and running twice now: at the end of December and again in the middle of January, after a brief thaw.

Howard says it takes 24 hours of nonstop flooding the park to get it started. It requires his workers to stay out all night long on the coldest nights to get a solid base of ice. Some have noticed that the rink seems larger than usual: a quick, likely inaccurate measurement done by this writer puts the rink at about 150 feet by 350 feet.

“It’s pretty much the size of a football field,” Howard says. “We thought we were doing the community a neat little favor. We bought six new hockey nets, too. But we had no idea that everyone missed the rink as much as they did. We’ve had people coming out of the woodwork to thank us every time that we’re there working on it: they wave, stop by and thank us, honk their horns. It’s an awesome feeling. I knew that it was missed, but not as much as people are showing.”

Howard says that he has been on the ice himself once this year, along with his wife and their two teenage daughters. In the future, he hopes that they can keep adding to the ambiance.

“I feel like we’re just getting our feet wet this year, pun intended,” he says. “Adding a warming station for next year, maybe concessions, or food trucks on the weekends.”

He also commends Musgrave on her efforts with the new skate-check-out program.

“I was trying to think of a way to do something like that, and it’s brilliant.”

The idea to partner with the library to provide skates to the public, free of charge, came to Dr. Lisa Musgrave (50) when she was asking patients if they had heard about the ice rink being back after a three-year hiatus. She was dismayed with two back-to-back answers that she heard within about 10 minutes.

“They said to me, ‘Awesome, but we don’t skate, because it’s too expensive,’ or ‘We have three kids, and they grow too fast to buy skates,’” Musgrave recalls. “It made me pause and think.”

With COVID-19 looming, hosting a “skate swap” seemed too daunting. There had to be a better way, Musgrave thought to herself. Then she drove over to the rink and parked her car.

“And there was the answer, right in front of me—the library is right next door,” says Musgrave, who adds that her mother was an elementary school librarian. “But it wasn’t just about the books for my mom. She would always find a way to send other things home: a board game, a puppet, whatever. So, why couldn’t we send home skates?”

She adds: “I grew up with a lot of mentors who believed in the power of ‘the ask.’ Everything is possible, and it never hurts to ask.”

So, Musgrave did just that. She says that her two sons love to skate, but they are picky about what skates they like to wear. Bauer are among the favorite hockey skates on many “best of” lists, including those of the Musgrave boys. So she called to see if they might be willing to sponsor a program like the one that she had in mind.

“I must have gotten the right person on the phone,” Musgrave says. “Next thing you know, she’s emailing me back that they would sell us the skates at cost—we’re getting these for 10 percent of the retail price.”

As for partnering with the library, Musgrave says that one of her favorite quotes about libraries is from R. David Lankes: “Bad libraries only build collections. Good libraries build services... Great libraries build communities.”

“It is so much more than a place that holds books,” she says. She adds that her husband has teased her about being a dentist who is sponsor-

ing hockey skates, but she has done her research. “Ninety-three percent of all hockey injuries to the mouth are from the sticks, so I’m encouraging people to wear mouthguards while they skate. But we can’t rent those out from the library. Especially during a pandemic.”

Meanwhile, Boylan’s family moved to Benzie County in 1989, and she remembers using the ice rink when it was at the Beulah beach, and also after Rineer moved the rink back to Benzonia.

“My dad played hockey in high school, so he’s always been a skater, and he taught us girls,” says Boylan, who now lives behind Champion Hill Golf Course and takes her four-year-old son and 10-year-old daughter to the rink. So far, they have been skating three times this year, including when she brought goodies to the park—something that she plans to do again in the near future..

“It’s been great. The kids love it. Families have come from all over,” she says, noting that she met people from Chum’s Corners, from Suttons Bay, and from Manistee one afternoon. “People are hearing about it being back up and running. People are on Facebook looking for skates. It really brought this community together, right at the right time, when everybody’s had to stay indoors for so long. This gives people, especially young kids, a care-free moment of getting to be themselves. We’ve had lots of giggles, lots of laughs. It’s been great to have that.”

This article would be remiss to not mention how this community asset is funded.

Beginning in the 2010-11 winter, Dr. Dennis Pace—a local optometrist, community activist, and philanthrope—took it upon himself to raise funds for the Benzonia Ice Rink. Pace had already helped thousands of Benzie kids to play soccer over the course of two decades; he had found the funds and cut through the red tape of creating Benzie County’s first dog park; and this selfless, 6-foot-four gentle giant was not daunted at the idea of trying to raise \$5,000 to \$7,000 per year for the rink. (We profiled Pace back in September 2015, and we also broke our own rule and ran his obituary in November 2017; you can find both in our online archives.)

For instance, during the 2013 and 2014 winters, Pace convinced Jonathan Clark to have L’Chayim Deli in Beulah host a “Skate Swap and Sale” that benefited the Benzonia Ice Rink. A fee of \$5 per pair was suggested for swapping; a minimum suggested donation for those who wanted to sell, not swap, was \$15. Leftover skates were then donated to Benzie Area Christian Neighbors (BACN). All skate shoppers and swappers were given coupons for 10 percent off at L’Chayim during the event.

“This event was Dennis Pace, all the way,” says 62-year-old Clark, who grew up in Beulah. “Dennis needed a place to do it, so I volunteered our front window. We stacked them up in the window. And it was dirt cheap: a pair of skates for \$15!”

Clark adds that, not only did the event raise money, it also helped to get people out onto the ice.

“We’re big supporters of the rink,” Clark adds. “Hell, I skated on the rink, for crying out loud, and that was 50 years ago! It’s a great little treasure.”

Now, that fundraising mantle has been taken up by Barb Skurdall (68), who has been on the Benzie County Parks & Recreation Committee for more than a decade. It was almost a year ago when Skurdall first expressed an interest in fundraising, networking, and making connections to get the rink back up and running.

Skurdall has been a member of the Benzie Sunrise Rotary Club for more than 10 years, and she remembers when Dennis would come in annually to ask for \$500 for the rink. Looking at county treasury records, Skurdall says that the Village of Benzonia and/or Benzonia Township would normally throw in up to a few thousand dollars, plus water, plus liability insurance. There were also donations from businesses and individuals: some were for bigger amounts—\$100, \$200—but the majority were smaller donations of \$20 or \$25.

This year, she says, The Cottage Pros are covering all of the expenses of their own equipment and employee time, just as Rineer’s team did for



By the first week of February, the Benzonia Public Library will have 40 pairs of brand new skates—sizes 10 kids through adult sizes—available to check out for up to 48 hours, thanks to a new program, sponsored by Dr. Lisa Musgrave. Photos courtesy of Lisa Musgrave.

decades.

“But if something breaks down—like the water pump from the village, or something—we want to have a fund to just jump in and cover it, not have to wait for the funds to come in,” Skurdall says. So they have created a special account where people can send donations.

Howard adds: “There’s a pump down underneath, and if that goes bad, they’re not cheap. I know that Jack Rineer bought one and maintained it. So to have some donations saved up for major repairs in the future is important for keeping this going.”

Skurdall emphasizes that this community asset is used by so many people.

“I haven’t been by there when there hasn’t been someone on it [besides those days that it thawed],” she says. “The last time that I drove by, it was so cold, but there were three little hockey net courts set up.”

Hockey Puckers

“I have been using the ice rink since before it was in its current location,” says 34-year-old Emery Gyr, who claims to have been on the rink about 75 times each winter when he was growing up.

Now a busy new father and a young business owner (see our June 2020 Q&A with him in our online archives), Gyr has still been able to find four occasions to get on the ice over the past month. This is the third winter since Gyr and his wife, Liz, moved home to Northern Michigan after living out West—but this is the first year that the rink has been open.

Gyr mostly uses the rink to play hockey, and he works hard to get others to join in pick-up games.

“But I would go and just skate, if I had the free-time and nobody wanted to play hockey,” he says.

People of all ages and abilities show up to the Benzonia Ice Rink to play.

“A few of my friends from growing up; people who have played there as long as I have. A few from our parents’ generation,” Gyr says. “And one time this winter, [middle-aged] DeeDee Gorno showed up with friends... She plays on an actual team up in Traverse City. We had eight women, all padded up, full helmet, full gear, ready to play.”

Even after moving out West, Gyr continued to

play hockey—and it was actually during this time that he came to realize what a distinctive experience he had had at the Benzonia Ice Rink.

“It’s uniquely large for a community ice rink. That makes it so that we can have multiple hockey games, like last weekend, we had two separate games going, while people are learning to skate, or figure skaters are also on the ice,” Gyr explains. “Everyone who I’ve ever told about this rink, nobody has this same type of story. Everybody either played on real hockey rinks—with refs, it costs lots of money—or they’re like my dad, who grew up on a little lake.”

Gyr says that it was his father, Jack (also profiled in our Q&A archives, back in 2014), who recently made him aware of another nearby hockey game that he is hoping to be invited to.

Scott Barker (46), his wife, and their four children moved to Benzie County from Wisconsin in 2012. Upon leaving for Michigan, Barker had to strike a deal with his kids.

“I’d built an ice rink at our house in Wisconsin, and we’d had it for six years,” Barker explains. “One of the stipulations of moving here was that the kids told me that we needed to build our own ice rink again.”

But when they arrived and heard about the Benzonia Ice Rink, Barker thought to himself, ‘Why build something that’s just a few miles down the road?’ So, for the first three years, the Barkers used the public ice rink, but only a couple of times each year. Barker chalks this up to various reasons: weather, the lights not being super bright at Academy Park.

“Ultimately, I wanted to do more skating with my kids, and I knew that would happen if it was just in our backyard,” says Barker, who built a 105-foot-by-75-foot hockey rink—com-

plete with boards that he had hauled from their Wisconsin home—five years ago. He had to cut trees down, plus pay someone to take out the stumps and level the ground.

Barker’s technique is different from that employed at the Benzonia Ice Rink: he has a plastic base that he fills up with two to five inches of water and then allows to freeze. In the past, this process was a little harder than it is now, because he had essentially two sections of ice that he had to merge, but last year, he asked the “regulars” who showed up for game nights if they would pitch in on buying a \$700 plastic sheet to create one freezable section, rather than two. Because of the expensive plastic, this means that, if there is a thaw, Barker is not starting from scratch, like what happens at the Benzonia Ice Rink, because the water doesn’t run off.

“I end up with a little pond, but it might freeze over again by the next night,” Barker explains. He adds that he has since purchased a lot of equipment to maintain the rink: a big snowblower to clear the ice, as well as a big brush sweeper to keep it really clean. He also has his own “little zamboni” set up: a 250-gallon agricultural sprayer that he has modified with PVC tubing that has holes in it. “I pull it out and drag it behind my four-wheeler. It creates a very smooth surface.”

Barker says that it takes him about an hour or so to clean the rink after each use, and right now, during the pandemic, it is getting used five days a week, “since there isn’t anything else to do.”

Who shows up to these games? The first couple of years, it was mostly people that Barker had met at the Benzonia Ice Rink, or people that he knew from when he coached the Benzie Central Boys Varsity Soccer team, or from substitute teaching at the high school.

“We already have six of us in our family, so we only needed a couple more to make a game of it,” Barker laughs. In the past, he has had about 20 people on his text invite list; that list is now up to 40. He says that they average 12 to 20 people per night, though that is pushing the limits on the rink size. Some are a few years older than Barker, several high schoolers show up, and even a few small kids who come with their dad to play.

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Not Getting Hank Aaron’s Autograph

Reconciling with the past

By Norm Wheeler

Current Contributor

When I was eight years old in 1960, I rode with my grandparents, Hattie and Pe-

ter Brondyke, from Muskegon, Michigan, to Bradenton, Florida, so that they could look for a house trailer for them to buy in a trailer park upon his coming retirement five years later.

that said “Colored,” and the little motels where we stayed said “Whites Only.” I was wide-eyed, taking it all in and marveling at the broadening southern drawl.

In Bradenton, we went to the ballpark

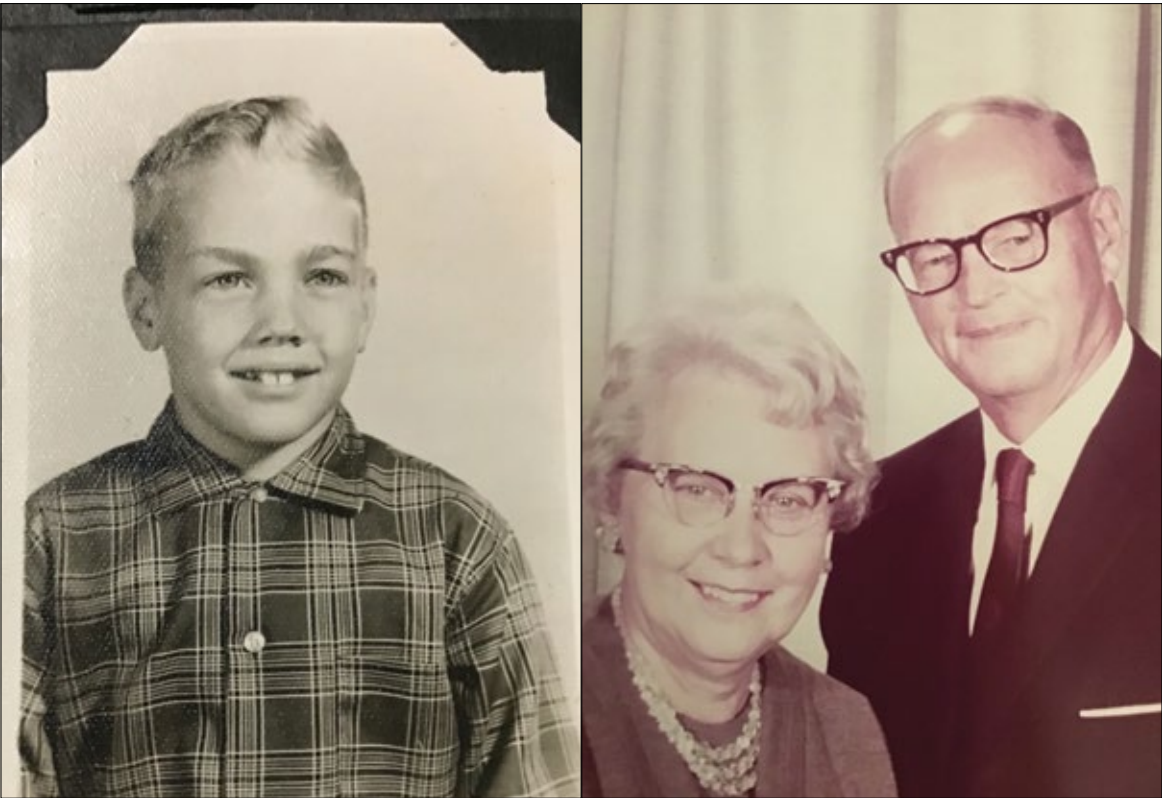
the names are hard to read. It has Warren Spahn, Eddie Matthews, Del Crandall, Red Schoendienst, Chuck Dressen, and some of the 1960 Chicago White Sox—including Luis Aparicio, Al Lopez, and Early Wynn—from when we went to see them practice just down the road in Sarasota.

One day, Hank Aaron was walking by with Billy Bruton. My grandpa called out, “Hey boy, come sign my grandson’s ball!” Aaron gave him the side-eye, shook his head, and kept on walking. Subsequent days, he still refused to acknowledge us or sign the ball. My grandmother scolded my grandfather, and I learned right there in Braves Park about the toxic, icy nightmare of racism and how it poisons us. I will never forget the look in Hank Aaron’s eye. I have long since forgiven my grandfather, and I have ever since admired the dignity and strength of Hank Aaron and all of the people he inspired.

I hoped someday to show him that ball, to apologize to him, and to tell him my

story. Now it is too late. May he rest in peace.

*Born in Alabama, Henry “Hammerin’ Hank” Aaron was an American professional baseball player, a right fielder, who played 23 seasons in Major League Baseball, from 1954 through 1976; 21 seasons were with the Milwaukee/Atlanta Braves and two were with the Milwaukee Brewers. He also spent time in the Negro American League, from when baseball was still segregated. Aaron—who died on Friday, January 22, at the age of 86—is easily considered one of the greatest baseball players of all time, with 755 career home runs. He was the first to break the home-run record that had been set by Babe Ruth 32 years earlier—though this was not without controversy, since Ruth was a white man. Aaron received death threats and hundreds of thousands of “hate mail” letters during the 1973-74 season for his accomplishment. Having faced racism both before and after this record-breaking season, Aaron was a champion of the civil rights movement throughout his life, and he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom from U.S. President George W. Bush in 2002. Even so, when Aaron spoke to **USA Today** in 2014 about the fact that he had kept every piece of “hate mail” he had ever received, a new batch of the same vitriolic letters were sent to the newspaper’s office, proving that we still have a long way to go toward overcoming our age-old problems of race in America.*



In 1960, at the age of eight, Norm Wheeler (left) traveled to Florida with his maternal grandparents, Hattie and Peter Brondyke (right). He had with him a rubber-coated softball that he was able to get many professional baseball players to sign—but not Hank Aaron. Photos courtesy of the Wheeler family archives.

ter Brondyke, from Muskegon, Michigan, to Bradenton, Florida, so that they could look for a house trailer for them to buy in a trailer park upon his coming retirement five years later.

Grandpa had bad eyes, so Grandma drove the Chevy on two-lane roads all the way—down through Kentucky and Tennessee and Georgia, through every Main Street town and village, and past old country general stores, where hams were hanging from porch rafters and old Black men rocked and smoked their corncob pipes. It was the Jim Crow South, so there were separate bathrooms

where the Milwaukee Braves were having spring training, as my grandfather was a huge baseball fan. There was only the one diamond with the old stands around the infield, and all of the players were out there doing drills, playing pickle, and practicing their slides as they took turns with batting practice. I chased the foul balls back behind the stands when they escaped the diamond and threw them back onto the field.

We had a rubber-coated softball along, and we would call out to ask the players for their autographs. I still have that ball, though the ink has faded over the 60 years and some of



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