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**CONTINGENCY**  
A condition that must be met in  
order for a real estate contract  
to be finalized.



**DOWN PAYMENT**  
The amount of money that a  
buyer must pay upfront as part  
of a real estate transaction.



**ICE DAM**  
Ice dam  
formation formed at the roof edge  
due to the thawing and re-freezing of  
snow on the overhang.



**JOINT TENANCY**  
A legal term for when two or  
more people own equal shares of  
the same piece of property.



**LISTING PRICE**  
A list price is the price of a  
home for sale set by the seller  
and listing agent.



**WALK-THROUGH**  
The final inspection of a home  
by a buyer before finalizing a  
deal to purchase the home.



**YIELD**  
The interest or return earned by  
an investor stated as a percentage  
of the amount invested.



**ZONING**  
Designated areas to enforce  
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## INSIDE Singletree

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**AREA DIRECTOR** Holly Proctor | 303-859-3369  
 holly.proctor@n2co.com

**PHOTOGRAPHERS** Olga Barron | 970-445-0750  
 olga@olgabarronphotography.com  
 Jeff Hulse | 970-343-0997  
 jeff@jeffreyhulse.com

**AD STRATEGIST** Rachel Ness | 612-730-9947  
 strollsingletree@theadjunkies.com

**SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER** Emily Challis | 970-343-2871  
 emily.challis@n2co.com

**CONTRIBUTORS AT LARGE** The Residents of Singletree

**NOTE:** When community events take place, photographers may be present to take photos for that event, and they may be used in the publication.



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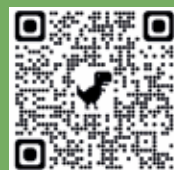


**Greg Pasco**

Project Consultant With Renewal  
By Andersen.

**303-883-3849**

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PUBLISHERS NOTE

# Hello Singletree Residents!

As we celebrate our 2024 graduating seniors, we extend our heartfelt congratulations and best wishes for their bright futures. Here, each graduate shares their memories, accomplishments, and aspirations, reflecting on their individual journeys with insight and wisdom. Be prepared to be impressed!

Where are our Singletree graduates now? In this issue, we highlight Britney Brown, a Battle Mountain High School graduate, who led the girls' volleyball team to success on the court in 1986, went on to travel internationally to pursue her passion professionally, and has ultimately returned to Vail Christian High School to coach the girls' volleyball team, encouraging her players to pursue their own dreams with enthusiasm and determination.

We feature the inspiring journey of Margo Thomas, who found solace and healing through her art, using creativity to

embrace and recover from the grief of losing her mother. Her story serves as a testament to the transformative power of art and resilience in the face of adversity.

Join us on an extraordinary adventure with the Robbins family as they explore the breathtaking landscapes of New Zealand, from its sun-kissed beaches to its majestic glaciers. Once again, Rohn relays a tale of discovery and exploration while capturing the spirit of adventure and the beauty of new cultures and landscapes.

Following several years as a volunteer, Patrice Ringler has recently joined the board of Roundup River Ranch to continue supporting families of children battling cancer, diseases, or disabilities. Her commitment to spearheading new initiatives for the organization will ultimately make a significant difference in the lives of others.

Congratulations again to our 2024 graduates! May your journey be filled with endless opportunities, remarkable achievements, and boundless success. Wishing you all the best as you pursue your dreams and make your mark on the world!

Warm regards,

*Holly Proctor*  
Publisher and Area Director  
303-859-3369  
holly.proctor@n2co.com



# MAY CONTRIBUTORS

YOUR STORIES. OUR PAGES.



**JEFFERY HULSE**  
Photographer



**DEB ROBBINS**  
Content Advisor



**BRITNEY BRANSON**  
Where Are They Now?



**PATRICE RINGLER**  
Who's Making a Difference



**ROHN ROBBINS**  
Travel Tales



**MARGO THOMAS**  
Celebrating the Arts

**CONGRATULATIONS and thank you to the Singletree graduates for participating in the 2024 graduation issue of your neighborhood magazine!**

**On The Cover (L To R) - Bottom Row: Viviana Oram, Claire Serbinski; Middle Row: Lily Suman, Molly Kessenich, Savannah Desportes, Piper Sassi, Maggie Rothenberg, Jeep Meyier; Back Row: Tieg Wachter, Thomas Dekanich, Cash Case, Carter Georgopolis, Brooklyn Depriest**

Roundup River Ranch offers children with life-altering diagnoses, and their families, opportunities to embrace joy, create connection, foster independence, and build hope through free, medically-supported camp programs.

**Save the date for upcoming events at our campsite – tickets on sale soon!**

**THE BULLSEYE ROUNDUP**  
Thursday, August 8

**AGRATEFUL HARVEST**  
Saturday, August 10

Join us at the campfire this summer!  
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**Leslie Grooters**  
KW Luxury Broker, Vail  
970.376.0705  
leslieg@kw.com  
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## MOUNTAIN ROOTS

Founded by Alyse Piburn, a seasoned horticulturist with a deep-rooted passion for sustainable practices and environmental stewardship, Mountain Roots is dedicated to crafting unique, natural, and enduring high-altitude perennial and annual gardens in Eagle County.



Alyse grew up on the Front Range spending most of her time outdoors exploring nature. She fondly remembers her days in the gardens of both her grandmas, starting to learn about Iris, Cosmos, Lilacs, Geraniums, growing tomatoes, and much more, and later helping her mother take care of gardens in the Grand Lake area during the summers. Having followed her love for snowboarding to Summit County in 2001, Alyse returned to Fort Collins to study horticulture and ultimately launched a business plan for Mountain Roots which started to bloom in 2011.

Alyse is passionate about using sustainable practices and is mindful about water conservation, sourcing locally, and not using harmful chemicals. She selects only plants, products, and practices that have minimal effects on the

environment. With a wealth of experience and accolades, including being recognized as an Environmental Champion by the Summit Chamber of Commerce, Alyse brings a blend of expertise and innovation to every project.



In 2022, Alyse relocated to the Vail Valley where she is excited to enjoy a little less winter, a longer gardening season, and growing new varieties of plants.

Mountain Roots offers personalized and comprehensive consultations, including tailored recommendations for garden design, plant selection, and maintenance plans, to meet your specific needs and environmental goals. Alyse and her team provide a full spectrum of services, including garden beds and containers, edibles, and personalized maintenance plans, all with meticulous attention to detail and sustainable practices every step of the way.

To learn more, please visit [mountain-roots.com](http://mountain-roots.com) or contact Alyse at **970-485-0339** to schedule your consultation.

## MOUNTAIN ANIMAL HOSPITAL CENTER

Pet care is our passion. At Mountain Animal Hospital Center, we understand the importance of comprehensive veterinary care to ensure the health and happiness of your beloved pets. Our dedicated team, led by experienced veterinarians Dr. Michelle Branton, DVM, and Dr. Kathryn Ziegner, DVM, is committed to providing quality, affordable, and compassionate services tailored to meet your pet's individual needs.

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Mountain Animal Hospital is a full-service vet, offering a wide variety of pet care services, including internal medicine, pain management, cardiology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, endocrinology, health certificates, hospice and euthanasia, laser therapy, behavioral counseling, and breeding and reproduction. Additionally, we offer our mobile veterinary service to provide in-home care for your maximum convenience.

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At Mountain Animal Hospital Center, we treat your pets like our own. Our treatment philosophy is aimed at prevention with early diagnosis and treatment. Ensuring the well-being of your pet is our top priority, and we are dedicated to utilizing the latest advancements in veterinary medicine to provide the best possible care.

We would love to partner with you in helping your pet live a long, happy, and healthy life. To learn more or to schedule an appointment, please visit [mountainanimalhospitalcenter.com](http://mountainanimalhospitalcenter.com) or call **970-328-7085**.



## GUN JOCKEY AUTO REPAIR

Recognizing a definitive need for timely quality auto repair in Eagle County, Victor Pena and Victor Meneses opened Gun Jockey Auto Repair in 2023. As two industry veterans with more than 28 years of combined experience, the team stands as a testament to passion, skill, and dedication in automotive craftsmanship.

Victor P. oversees the managerial and operational aspects of the business. He is responsible for ensuring the business runs smoothly, including performing such tasks as estimating, scheduling, managing inventory, streamlining processes, and delivering exceptional customer service communication and coordination.

Gun Jockey Auto Body takes its name, in fact, from the term "gun jockey", referring to the skilled technician who operates the spray gun to apply paint to vehicles. Enter Victor M., a self-professed "tool junkie" who brings years of expertise in all aspects of the industry to the newly founded business. That said, he is renowned throughout the valley for his skill in applying automobile paint and passionate about his chosen specialty.

Backed by a handpicked crew of four highly skilled body techs - Juan, Carlos, Oscar, and Martin - Gun Jockey prides itself on delivering unparalleled quality and precision. From

domestic vehicles to luxury imports, their comprehensive services include collision repair, calibration, windshield repair and replacement, refinishing, and detailing.

With the largest paint booth between Denver and Grand Junction, the team can handle even the largest vehicles, such as sprinter vans and shuttles, using only eco-friendly water-based products. Unlike many local shops, Gun Jockey caters directly to individual car owners, allowing for swift turnaround times of just a couple of weeks - or less.

A collision can be a daunting experience. In the unfortunate event of needing auto repair, you can trust Gun Jockey Auto Body to restore your vehicle with expertise and efficiency, ensuring you receive unparalleled support and satisfaction when you need it most.

To learn more or to schedule an appointment, please contact Victor at **970-706-8536**.



## MOUNTAIN WEST LENDING

Introducing Mountain West Lending, where expertise meets personalized service in the heart of the Vail Valley. As the founder, Drew Wachter, I bring nearly two decades of mortgage banking experience to the table and have closed over \$2 billion in residential loans. Powered by Pinnacle Home Loans, our focus is on providing tailored solutions for the ski resort market, specializing in loan sizes of up to \$30 million.

With a deep-rooted commitment to our community, we take pride in assisting both locals and second homeowners in financing their dream properties. Operating across 38 states in the U.S., we offer comprehensive mortgage solutions with a keen eye for detail and my personal passion for problem-solving to serve my clients' home financing needs.

Beyond my professional life, I am deeply ingrained in the Vail Valley having

been here for more than 20 years, 15 of which I have lived in Singletree. As a devoted father to my two sons, Tieg and Skogen, I cherish the opportunities afforded by life in the mountains, indulging in my love for snowboarding, mountain biking, golf, and surfing. I am blessed to share these experiences and this lifestyle with my boys.

Mountain West Lending isn't just about numbers; it's about building relationships and helping our clients achieve their homeownership dreams while embracing the unique lifestyle that defines each ski resort community. I look forward to helping you and your family find your special place wherever your heart takes you.

To learn more, please visit [www.Pinnacle-Loan.com](http://www.Pinnacle-Loan.com) or contact me at [awachter@pinnacle-loan.com](mailto:awachter@pinnacle-loan.com) or **970-471-4916**.



What reliable and professional reliable business would you recommend to your Singletree neighbors? Please email your referrals to [holly.proctor@n2co.com](mailto:holly.proctor@n2co.com).

**We hope you can join us and your neighbors at the  
Singletree Community Center...**

|                     |   |              |
|---------------------|---|--------------|
| Saturday, May 4     | Community Pride Highway Cleanup               | 9 AM         |
| Thursday, June 13   | Singletree's Summer Concert                   | 6 to 8 PM    |
| Tuesday, July 9     | Family Fun Night – Bouncy House & Bull Riding | 4 to 7 PM    |
| Friday, July 26     | Bravo! Vail Music Box Concert                 | 5:30 to 7 PM |
| Saturday, August 17 | Singletree's Summer Party                     | 4 to 7 PM    |

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**HUDSON O. TURNER**

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School  
**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Competing in Nordic States!  
**Greatest Accomplishment:** Graduating in the top 10% of my class.  
**Post-Graduation Plans:** This summer I am planning on traveling to Spain and Portugal with some friends. I am also planning on attending CU Boulder in the fall.  
**Aspirations:** One of my biggest goals is to become fully bilingual in Spanish.  
**Favorite Part about Living in Singletree:** Its location! I am able to quickly get to school and events, it is close to Vail and Eagle.  
**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** Join clubs and sports, just get as involved as you can, because it really does make it more fun!

**TIEG WACHTER**

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School  
**Family:** Drew Wachter - Father, Shawna Reddington - Mother, Skogen Wachter - Brother (Freshman at BMHS)  
**Most Memorable High School Experience:** Surviving AP Physics.  
**Greatest Accomplishment:** Succeeding in all my classes and bringing positivity to the classroom. Captain of golf team and playing lacrosse for BMHS. Very accomplished snowboarder and surfer.  
**Post-Graduation Plans:** Head North to Montana State University!  
**Aspirations:** Architecture is my passion, so to be a successful architect.  
**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** Living in Singletree has been a life changer, as we live on the golf course that couldn't be better.  
**Words of Advice for the Class of 2024:** To not get caught up in the small stuff and keep straight arrows.



ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE (R to L - Top to Bottom): Brooklyn DePriest, Lily Suman, Carter Georgopolis, Piper Sassi, Claire Serbinski, Thomas Dekanich, Vivian May, Molly Kessenich, Cash Case, Maggie Mae Rothenberg, Jeep Meynier, Viviana Oram, Savannah Desportes, Tieg Wachter, and Turner Hudson



## CARTER GEORGOPOLIS

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School

**Family:** Andrea Georgopolis (mom), Marcus Georgopolis (dad) & Sammie (dog)

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Making the Varsity Basketball Team at BMHS

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Being part of the top 20% percent of the senior class at BMHS

**Post-Graduation Plans:** Working at the Kind Bike Shop this summer, College in the fall

**Aspirations:** To get into the Landscape Architecture field

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** All the bike trails outside your door

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** Work hard in school, be yourself & have fun

## SAVANNAH DESPORTES

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School

**Family:** Kathy, Willy, Sienna, and Midgie!

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Every single cross-country race. They are awesome and horrible at the same time, but I will always remember them with happiness.

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Getting into the University of Arkansas to study Interior Design and Architecture.

**Post-Graduation Plans:** College! I plan to travel abroad my junior year in Greece and learn about architecture there.

**Aspirations:** I want to own my own interior design business in Austin when I graduate!

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** Being so close to so many of my best friends and growing up playing on the golf course (don't tell anyone!).

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** Don't rush this last year and take it for granted, this will be the last time we are all together.



## JEEP MEYNIER

**High School:** Vail Christian High School

**Family:** Charlie, Atlanta, Berkeley, Price and Mabel

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Getting My Drivers License

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Post-Graduation Plans: Class trip to Greece then Italy and France with my family then off to The College of Charleston!

**Aspirations:** Actor or Content Creator

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** The location and so many friends in the neighborhood

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** Have Fun and Put yourself out there



## PIPER SASSI

Hello! My name is Piper Sassi, I am a senior at Battle Mountain High School and plan to attend Clemson University next fall. My mom and dad are my biggest supporters and help me through everything. I have an older brother who will be a sophomore at Clemson next year, and he is one of my best friends! Last but not least, my dog Moxie! She is the best thing that has ever happened to my family.

My most memorable high school experience was the first day of senior year when all the girls and I took pictures on the field wearing our senior pants we had spent all summer decorating. This will be a moment and day I will never forget; it was the start of a new chapter and an opening to so many adventures. My greatest accomplishment is being where I am today. Where I am today is a representation of all the obstacles I have overcome and all the achievements I have made. I am so proud to call myself a captain of the varsity girl's lacrosse team and to say I will be attending Clemson University next year. My hard work has paid off and has got me to where I am today.

Singletree has been my nurturing home for 18 years, where the community's unwavering love and support have shaped me. While leaving my familiar surroundings may seem daunting, I'm confident I can thrive. To my fellow graduates, I say, embrace the journey ahead; the past is behind us, and our futures are brimming with new experiences, connections, and knowledge. Here's to embracing new beginnings and seizing every opportunity that comes our way.



## BROOKLYN DEPRIEST

**High School:** Vail Ski and Snowboard Academy

**Family:** Jarrod (Dad), Courtney (Mom), Beckett (Brother), Zeach (Cat #1), Tindy (Cat #2)

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Spending time with my senior class in our senior lounge.

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Making the US Snowboard Team / Making Youth Olympic Slope/Big Air Team.

**Post-Graduation Plans:** I am going to continue Snowboarding while also pursuing my Bachelors Degree.

**Aspirations:** I am going to achieve my Business Degree and then use that to get into Law School to work my way into becoming an attorney.

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** My favorite part about living in Singletree is being in such close proximity to things like fishing, golfing, the Sonnenalp Club, the skatepark, and mountain biking.

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** Remember what's important and always work hard.

## LILY SUMAN

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School

**Family:** My parents are Michael and Tarrah Suman, I have a younger brother named Beau and a Cockapoo named Weezy.

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** While it's hard to pick just one, I would definitely say that my time on the Battle Mountain Volleyball Team is my most memorable high school experience. I am so thankful for my coaches and my teammates who are all my best friends. All the games we played against Eagle Valley are valuable memories that I will look back on forever. Especially, when we played them at home this year and won in the 5th set after being down 2-0. The student section and all of the spectators made the energy in the gym electric. I also loved the weekends my team would spend at Colorado State University sleeping in the dorms, team bonding, and playing volleyball all day. I won't miss all the injuries it gave me, but I am very grateful for my experience on my high school volleyball team.

**Greatest Accomplishment:** My senior year I was awarded the Most Valuable Player of that season, which was a very proud accomplishment of mine. This award served as recognition of my skills, dedication, and contributions to the team. This award is one of my biggest accomplishments because it reflects not only my individual performance but also leadership qualities, teamwork, and my ability to elevate the performance of the team. I also have been recognized as All-State Honorable Mention my senior year as well as Academic All-State first team for the past three years which I am proud of because I was still able to prioritize my grades and school on top of the commitment I made to my team.

**Post-Graduation Plans:** This summer after I graduate, my family is taking a trip to Greece! I am so excited to go to Europe as I have never been before. I will continue to work at Harvest at the Sonnenalp Club where I am a server. I also plan to play lots of golf, spend time with friends and enjoy all the fun outdoor activities the Vail Valley has to offer. I love hiking, swimming, rafting, and camping!

**Aspirations:** In the fall of 2024, I will be attending Clemson University in South Carolina as an English major on a pre-law track. After I graduate from Clemson, I want to go to law school and become a lawyer! I hope to work at a firm somewhere on the East Coast with warm weather.)

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** I love living in Singletree because of its proximity to Edwards, Battle



Mountain, the mountains and all my friends! The community here is supportive, active, and enjoyable, making it a beautiful place to live. Whether it's hiking, spending time at the Sonnenalp Club, golfing or enjoying the peaceful neighborhood, there's always something to do. The friendly atmosphere and strong bonds among neighbors make Singletree feel like home, and I treasure the memories made here.

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** Enjoy the time you get to live in this Valley and take advantage of everything it has to offer. This place is like no other and when you are graduating and moving away, you really come to appreciate how lucky you are to have grown up here. Also, be thankful for your family and spend all the time with them that you can. As someone who is moving across the country for college, I am going to miss my family more than anything.

## VIVIAN MAY

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School

**Family:** Jennie (mom), Steve (dad), Savina (sister)

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Playing the lead role of Donna in my school's production of *Mamma Mia! the Musical* in spring of 2023.

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Pushing through to senior year and finishing out strong in school, dance, and all of my extracurriculars. Making the most out of my 17 years!

**Post-Graduation Plans:** I will be going to college in the fall to study Biology and Biomedical Sciences. I have not committed to a school yet but it will happen!

**Aspirations:** My goal is to work in the medical field as either a surgeon or a physician's assistant. I hope that dance and music continue to be part of my life in college and beyond and I also plan to travel as much as possible. Most of all, I want to spread kindness and inspire others to do the same.

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** The proximity to everything important in my life: school, my dance studio, my friends, the mountain.

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** Your high school years are going to pass before you know it, and even if it seems like you live in the smallest town and you can't wait to get out, there are a lot of things about your life now that will never be the same after you graduate. Maybe you won't miss school, but try not to take the other things for granted, like your family, your friends, your team, or the beautiful place we live in. Make the most of every day and always be kind.



## MOLLY KESSENICH

Hi! My name is Molly Kessenich, a senior at Battle Mountain High School, eagerly awaiting what lies ahead. My family – Mom, Dad, older sister Katie, brother PJ, and our dog Millie – have been my unwavering support system.

Throughout high school, I have made so many memories from laughing with my friends to volleyball and lacrosse games! High school has been a roller coaster, but this year, I have seen my hard work pay off. I'm off to pursue biomedical engineering at the University of Virginia.

Before heading off to college, I plan to savor every moment of summer with travel, work, and making memories. To the class of 2025, my advice is to embrace new beginnings and make the most of the time you have left together! Singletree and its tight-knit community are something I'll always hold dear as I venture into the future.

## CASH CASE

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School

**Family:** Chris and Brenda Case (parents) and Jasper and Major Case (brothers)

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** A varsity lacrosse game in 2023, where I was playing goalie, and we beat Eagle Valley High School in double overtime!

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Teaching myself how to fly fish, first during COVID lockdown, then through the rest of my high school years.

**Post-Graduation Plans:** Attending Montana State University in Bozeman, MT.

**Aspirations:** I'm looking forward to playing lacrosse and studying business at MSU.

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** There's awesome Hunting, Fishing, Snowmobiling, and Golf, right out my back door!

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** When in doubt, call your mother!



## MAGGIE MAE ROTHENBERG

**High School:** Vail Christian High School

**Family:** Katie and Rob; parents, Hazel and Leo; siblings, and Quincy the cat.

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Going to all the school dances across the valley

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Winning Head of School award at VCHS

**Post-Graduation Plans:** Attending the College Of Charleston to study Political Science

**Aspirations:** Profession undecided but ideally doing PR for a politician

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** Living so close to Edwards and all my friends

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** High School is only what you make it.

## THOMAS DEKANICH

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School

**Family:** Joel and Elizabeth, Joseph (17), Kate (21), Jazz the dog, Kramer the cat

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Prom 2024

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Playing on the #1 Colorado Club lacrosse team for 5 years, Denver Elite

**Post-Graduation Plans:** Attend college with the NROTC scholarship or attend the US Naval Academy

**Aspirations:** Serve my country through the Navy after a 4 year college experience

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** Gas money.... My school is less than 2 miles away

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** Quit the whining and keep grinding!



## CLAIRE YVONNE SERBINSKI

**High School:** Battle Mountain High School

**Family:** Parents: Karmen and Justin Serbinski. Siblings: Hannah and CJ Serbinski. Pets: dogs: Roscoe and Ditka

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** Beating Denver East in soccer my junior year, and not letting them score one goal.

**Greatest Accomplishment:** Switching high schools sophomore year and still having a super successful high school career!

**Post-Graduation Plans:** I plan to attend college and study Architecture.

**Aspirations:** I am excited to see what college has waiting for me, and to dive deeper into the study of architecture. I am also excited for my Senior soccer season!

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** I love being so close to the Sonnenalp Club, especially in the summer, I can walk to the pool or to work out.

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** In the long run little mistakes don't matter, always remember to live in the presence it goes by quicker than you think.

## VIVIANA ORAM

**High School:** Vail Ski and Snowboard Academy

**Family:** Parents John and Michelle Oram, older sister Malena Oram, pet dog Nollie

**Most Memorable HS Experience:** My most memorable high school experience was winning Powder Puff with my senior class.

**Greatest Accomplishment:** My greatest accomplishment is maintaining a balance between snowboarding, soccer, and school while achieving good grades.

**Post-Graduation Plans:** This summer I plan to work as a camp counselor in Tahoe, California. In the fall I will attend college. I am waiting to hear back from schools.

**Aspirations:** I aspire to attend law school and have weenie dog puppies.

**Favorite Part of Living in Singletree:** My favorite part about living in Singletree is that it is very centrally located and close to a bunch of my friends.

**Words of Advice for the Class of 2025:** The best is yet to come!



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- John Heilmann, Singletree

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Britney with her varsity team at Vail Christian High School

## COACH BRITNEY BRANSON ELEVATES VAIL CHRISTIAN GIRLS' VOLLEYBALL TO WIN A LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP

Born and raised in Singletree, Britney Brown Branson returns to the valley following a professional volleyball career to lead the VCHS girls' high school team to winning season

CONTRIBUTED BY BRITNEY BROWN BRANSON, FORMER SINGLETREE RESIDENT  
ARTICLE COMPILED BY ALLIE DECENT, SINGLETREE RESIDENT

If you've lived in the valley these last twenty years and raised kids or followed local sports, you probably know about the 2006 Battle Mountain Huskies Girls' Volleyball State Championship team. The Huskies recorded a 90-0 record with sets won in 4A and posted an overall record of 30-1, thereby capturing a Regional, District and State Title. Their one loss was to a strong 5A Doherty high school team during the regular season. It was an impressive feat for the program and BMHS' first and only State Championship crown for girls' volleyball. The teams of Eagle County have been chasing that high ever since, and Singletree's own Britney Brown at the time, who won in 2006, is leading the charge at Vail Christian High School as their head coach to relive the memories from that glorious season.

"Volleyball had been my life for so long, it was my passion growing up and it was so incredible in 2006 to have so much community support as a high school athlete; everyone was pulling for us!" Britney fondly recalls. "The feeling of success and the memories our families and community created for us was so defining in my life that I knew I wanted to come back to our valley and provide that same opportunity for the young girls in our community today."



2006: Celebrating a point with BMHS teammates

### WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Britney's childhood home was on Rawhide Road in Singletree. Her parents, Bob and Lori Brown, still live in the same house. She grew up experiencing a variety of different sports including youth soccer, basketball, dance, softball, tennis, golf, and volleyball. Beginning in 5th grade, she played for the Avalanche Volleyball club. Once in high school, Britney, along with three other Battle Mountain players, committed to playing at a Denver club called Colorado Performance.

"We would travel to Denver three times a week for practices and then usually have tournaments on Sunday. It was a big commitment, and my family made a lot sacrifices for that to happen. It was the best decision I made for my volleyball career. I truly believe I was recruited due to my club experience and exposure to college coaches through club volleyball." To this day, Britney feels beyond grateful for the opportunities her coaches and parents made possible so that she could enjoy the full experience as a young female athlete. Britney wholeheartedly believes she would not be where she is today without those wonderful people in her life.

### FROM BATTLE MOUNTAIN TO CHINA AND SWEDEN

After her winning season as a Battle Mountain Husky, Britney continued her athletic career as a Husky for the collegiate Division 1 Northeastern University volleyball team on a full ride athletic scholarship. Britney had a remarkable career as a four-year starter. She earned All-Conference in 2008, 2009 and 2010, and was named the Colonial Athletic Association Player of the Year in 2010 as well. Britney began her coaching career as a Student Undergrad Assistant Coach for the 2011-12 season at Northeastern after completing her collegiate career. Reflecting on that experience, Britney remarks, "I learned so much about coaching that year. Since I had been a starter my whole career, it was incredible to see the



2012: Outside the Olympic Center in Colorado Springs for Team USA tryouts



2012: Setting the ball for Lindesberg Volley in Sweden

game from the bench. I discovered a different perspective of the game and understood the game strategy from another viewpoint."

After Britney graduated with a bachelor's degree in business marketing, she was invited to try out for the United States Olympic Team in

Colorado Springs for the 2012 Olympics. With the final roster pretty much solidified, the Olympic team was only looking for alternates. Britney sparked some interest from the staff and was presented the opportunity to play for two weeks in China with the USA National Developmental Team.

Once Britney returned, she prepared for another international opportunity, playing professional volleyball in Sweden for Lindesberg Volley. Britney explained the options at that time, "If you wanted to continue playing volleyball after college, the only opportunity was the Olympic team or playing professionally overseas. As of this year, the United States has its own professional league called Pro Volleyball Federation."

Britney had an incredible experience playing professional volleyball for a year. "It was pretty exciting to be playing your favorite sport and to be receiving a paycheck all while traveling the world," she says looking back. Besides playing all over Sweden, they traveled to France and Denmark.

As Britney was completing her first year of professional volleyball, it was her fifth year in a long-distance relationship with her now husband, Matt Branson. They were both ready to be in the same zip code and Britney remembers calling her mom and saying, "I am ready to be on my own, get a job, pay bills and prove to myself and others that I can survive on my own."

### TIME TO RETURN TO THE USA

With that goal in mind, Britney ended her professional volleyball career in the summer of 2013 and moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming, where Matt was residing. They purchased their first house together and Britney accepted an assistant coaching position at Laramie County Community



Coaching is a family affair for the Bransons

College. Britney was excited to give back to young women and to be a part of their journey as she could relate on personal, academic, and athletic levels. She spent four seasons at LCCC and helped start a volleyball club for the high school athletes in Cheyenne called Windy City Volleyball Club. Even though her own volleyball career had ended, she loved being still involved in the game and working with young female athletes.

It was always Britney's desire to get back to the Vail Valley. A year after Matt and Britney were married at the Sonnenalp Golf Club, they welcomed their first daughter, Avery. In 2017, an opportunity came along from a former Singletree resident that they couldn't pass up. Matt, Britney and Avery moved back to the valley and in March of 2018, the young couple purchased the well-established windshield repair and replacement company, Novus Glass, from Steve and Dennie Moore.

Over the next five years, the Bransons would navigate how to run a business, raise their family, and give back to the Eagle County Community. Matt and Britney welcomed two more daughters during this time, Olivia and Remy. Britney jokes, "We have half a volleyball team!" When asked if she will encourage her girls to take up volleyball, she chuckles. "Only if they want to. Secretly I hope they all like volleyball, but I will be supportive in whatever brings them the most joy, growth, and success."

### TAKING THE REINS AT VAIL CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

After five years of adjusting to their new life here in the valley, when the VCHS opportunity became available this past spring, she finally felt it was the right time to take on a head coaching position. "I always wanted to lead a high school volleyball program in this valley but wanted to make sure I could give 110%. If I was going to be able to make a difference, have success, and build a program, it would take a full-time



Celebrating the League Championship at Vail Christian in 2023



Soaking up hugs from Olivia after winning the League Championship



Britney and Matt were married at the Sonnenalp Golf Club

year-round commitment." Britney accepted the position and took over the Saint's girls volleyball program this past fall (2023).

As a former collegiate/professional athlete, an independent business owner, and a mother of three daughters, Britney brings invaluable skills and

experience to her role as coach for the VCHS girls' volleyball program. The first step in leading a program is building a foundation and that would start with recreating the culture at Vail Christian. To participate in the Saints volleyball program under the direction of Coach Britney, each athlete and their parents are required to sign a six-page culture contract that details the culture rules, expectations, morals, and values.

Britney has a very intentional vision for the future at Vail Christian, and for it to become successful and to happen naturally, there must be rules and expectations for that foundation to be solid. "I told the athletes and parents that I want our gym to be the most professional, sharp, business-like, and friendly gym every opponent comes into, and I want our competition to enjoy playing us because it's such a positive experience." Britney believes in the importance of holding young adults accountable, creating challenges, and pushing athletes beyond their limits in a healthy way, to help them grow on and off the court.

"The most important goal of mine is to help build these young females into strong, confident, independent adults that can be successful in life when they graduate from high school. I love coaching this age group. I believe this is when you see the most growth from an athletic and personal development standpoint. I feel so lucky that I get to give back to our community and to these young high school student athletes. There were so many memories on and off the court created by my coaches, family, and community, that I wanted to make sure to bring in some new traditions that



Well earned recognition as Coach of the Year

would create lasting memories for our Vail Christian student athletes," Britney explains.

Some of those new traditions included game day meals provided by the parents for every home game, decorating the gym for a variety of themed nights, different colored spandex for the seniors at the homecoming game, staff appreciation night - where each athlete invited a staff member at VCHS to honor and thank, parents' appreciation night, breast cancer awareness night when we donated funds to the Shaw Cancer Center, and many more.

In addition to introducing traditions, Britney initiated a team volleyball camp, led by a college coach. She brought on a nutritionist to discuss nutrition and athletic recovery with her Vail Christian athletes. She also hired a member of the Vitality Collective to run a foam rolling class for her athletes as a recovery method. Britney says, "I think it's important to use the wonderful resources offered in our valley as well as to utilize the connections I have developed over my years in the volleyball world. We were able to offer these resources to our athletes because we added fundraising to our program. It's so important to teach our young adults that if you want perks and privileges, you must earn them and work for them, they don't just come to you."

Britney has enjoyed experience with success at all levels and she exhibits a deep understanding of what it takes to be successful - what works and what doesn't. "Each coach has taught me a variety of different skills from playing to coaching, and I have put the skills that I believe work in my coaching toolbox - which I plan to use with each group at Vail Christian."

### A MEMORABLE FIRST SEASON

In Britney's first season, the Saints went undefeated in the Western Slope and were League Champions. They hosted Regionals and fell just short in a fifth set to go in the State tournament. Vail Christian finished the season with an 18-5 record. The team posted 3 First Team All-Conference honors,

3 Honorable Mention All-Conference honors, 2 All-State honors, and a 2A Western Slope Coach of the Year honor. That would be Britney!

"To say this first season was memorable is an understatement, it was the most amazing three months, and my family absolutely loved this fall at Vail Christian. We have a great group here and I love my staff and feel like we are starting to build something incredible here at VCHS. Even though we were successful this first season, we are not satisfied. My end goal is to win State. I told our athletes and parents that it will happen one day and I intend to be a part of it. But until then, we go to work and keep getting better every day. I plan on continuing to use my resources to make this the most special, meaningful, and intentional experience for my athletes, staff, school, and community. I was fortunate to experience it in our valley when I was in high school, and I plan on giving back to this community to be able to provide forever memories for these young student athletes."



Avery, Matt, Remy (2), Olivia (4), and Avery (6)

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# “Superhero Volunteer” Patrice Ringler Expands Her Role to Embrace the Essence of Roundup River Ranch

Roundup River Ranch welcomes Patrice Ringler to the Board of Directors

CONTRIBUTED BY PATRICE RINGLER, SINGLETREE RESIDENT

Patrice Ringler, a cherished member of the Vail Valley since 1993, exemplifies a deep-rooted connection to our wonderful mountain community. Her unwavering commitment to giving back enriches the lives of those around her and leaves an indelible mark on the community she loves. Dedicated to making a tangible difference, Patrice’s supportive endeavors extend far and wide. She stands as a pillar of support for numerous organizations, each one playing a vital role in shaping the fabric of the Vail Valley community.

One organization holds a special place in Patrice’s heart - Roundup River Ranch. Nestled in a canyon along the Colorado River, the campsite sits on 125 acres at an elevation of 6,300 feet in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. Roundup River Ranch offers children with life-altering diagnoses, and their families, opportunities to embrace joy, create connection, foster independence, and build hope through free, medically supported camp programs. Guided by a profound sense of empathy and compassion, Patrice wholeheartedly embraces the essence of Roundup River Ranch, epitomizing the spirit of a “Superhero Volunteer.”

### Embodying Inspiration, Passion, and Dedication

My journey with Roundup River Ranch was catalyzed by my dear friend, Sarah Johnson, when she became President and CEO of the organization in October 2022. Her passion and dedication to the mission of Roundup River Ranch inspired me to become more deeply involved in supporting their cause. I was excited



to take on a more active role, and I am proud to announce that I officially joined the Board of Directors in February 2024. This opportunity allows me to continue contributing to the incredible work of this organization, ensuring that children facing serious illnesses receive the care, support, and opportunities they deserve. Here are some of the volunteer passion projects I’ve been fortunate to be involved in:

### Raise A little Hell Club

Sarah initiated a “Shark Tank” style idea competition among internal staff to generate innovative concepts. She invited me to serve as a “coach” for a group that emerged as a top finalist. Recognizing the excitement of the opportunity, I eagerly stepped in and provided guidance to this team, ultimately contributing to the successful launch of Roundup River Ranch’s inaugural giving membership program. As of today, we have 69 members (aka Hellraisers)!



Patrice Ringler and Amy Casey enjoying a Roundup River Ranch cultivation event

Raise a Little Hell Club is a dedicated society of stakeholders (the Hellraisers) that contributes philanthropic support to Roundup River Ranch with access to opportunities to enjoy camp through exclusive events (like a No-Hands Spaghetti Dinner), merch apparel, and more!

To learn more, please visit [RoundupRiverRanch.org/hellraiser](https://RoundupRiverRanch.org/hellraiser).

### The Bullseye Roundup Inaugural Event

The dedicated team at Roundup River Ranch embarked on a bold initiative to introduce a fresh event called The Bullseye Roundup, tailored to engage the next generation of donors, sponsors, and volunteers. Their goal was to welcome new supporters in an enjoyable setting, offering a firsthand experience of a core camp activity – the Archery Contest – in a spirited, perhaps even competitive atmosphere, all while deepening their understanding of Roundup River Ranch’s mission. When Sarah reached out to me for assistance with brainstorming new ideas and refining event details as part of The Bullseye Roundup Committee, I eagerly answered the call. Together, we collaborated to ensure the event’s success. It brings me great joy to report that in its inaugural year, The Bullseye Roundup surpassed all expectations, raising over \$319,000—a testament to the unwavering support and dedication of our amazing community.

### Ways YOU can get involved and EMBRACE JOY with us this summer...

#### Sign Up to Volunteer

Each year, we rely on the support of a diverse group of hundreds of volunteers at camp and in our administrative offices. So no matter what your experience or skills, if you have a passion for helping campers and their

### SAVE THE DATES!

Join us this summer at Roundup River Ranch’s Signature Events.

**The Bullseye Roundup** – August 8, 2024  
– [TheBullseyeRoundup.com](https://TheBullseyeRoundup.com)

**A Grateful Harvest** – [AGratefulHarvest.com](https://AGratefulHarvest.com)

Sponsorships and Tickets Available!



Roundup River Ranch President and CEO Sarah Johnson, along with Patrice Ringler and friends shopping & supporting Roundup River Ranch at the Valbruna Warehouse Sale

families, we’ll find a way for you to join in. Our volunteer jobs range from working outside on our beautiful grounds, helping in the kitchen, cleaning up after meals, serving as a counselor to a cabin full of adoring kids, and of course offering support and encouragement at all of our camp activities.

Regardless of one’s availability, there are volunteer opportunities tailored to accommodate any schedule. Whether it’s dedicating a single day, committing to a week during a Summer Camp session, or offering support over a weekend during Family Camp sessions, there’s a role suited for everyone. Beyond the tangible impact on operations, every volunteer departs from their experience at Roundup River Ranch enriched, having forged meaningful connections and contributed to a cause greater than themselves.

Visit the Roundup River Ranch website for details about volunteer opportunities and to apply! [www.RoundupRiverRanch.org/volunteer](https://www.RoundupRiverRanch.org/volunteer)



Guests enjoying A Grateful Harvest event at the Roundup River Ranch campsite



Campers getting ready for s'mores at Summer Camp

**Take a Tour**

Since words can only capture a fraction of the magic experienced at the camp, I encourage you to embark on a scenic drive to the campsite this summer and witness its beauty firsthand. By scheduling a tour during a camp session, you'll have the opportunity to immerse yourself in the vibrant atmosphere and even join the campers for a delightful lunch at Trent's Cookhouse.

During your visit, you'll have the chance to explore Roundup River Ranch's incredible facilities, including Equestrian, Boating, Archery, Challenge Course, Zipline, Art Yurts, Medical Center, and Cabins. Yet, what will truly stand out in memory is the joyous belly laughs, lively songs, camp dancing, and countless other delightful moments. To arrange your visit, please contact Kathryn Weller, VP of Advancement, at [kweller@roundupriverranch.org](mailto:kweller@roundupriverranch.org).

Join us at the Campfire!

*Patrice*



**About Roundup River Ranch:**

Roundup River Ranch offers children with life-altering diagnoses, and their families, opportunities to embrace joy, create connection, foster independence, and build hope through free, medically-supported camp programs. Annually, thousands of children coping with cancer, blood disorders, organ transplants, and other serious conditions and their families benefit from Roundup River Ranch's intentional and empowering year-long camp experiences. Roundup River Ranch is located two and a half hours from Denver near Gypsum, Colorado along the Colorado River. Roundup River Ranch is proud to be a member of SeriousFun Children's Network, a growing global community of innovative camps and programs that provide life-changing support to children with serious illnesses and their families founded by Paul Newman. For more information about Roundup River Ranch, visit [RoundupRiverRanch.org](http://RoundupRiverRanch.org) or call 970-524-2267.



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# WHERE SHEEP & HOBBITS ROAM: NEW ZEALAND

CONTRIBUTED BY ROHN K. ROBBINS, SINGETREE RESIDENT

On the Fox Glacier

About one-third of the five and a half million population of New Zealand lives in its largest city, Auckland. For scale, the next largest city, Christchurch, is one-sixth that size.

Besides the maritime vibe - it hosts the largest marina in the Southern Hemisphere - and its Māori influence, the size of its population and the feel of it is not unlike metro Denver; only 30 years or so behind. While there is much to commend it, particularly the lovely Quay, the stunning black sand Piha beach with sand as soft as flour, and the thick-as-a-dream Arataki rainforest, Auckland misses the whole point. What is impressive about New Zealand - the land of the long white cloud - what is truly awe-inspiring, is the countryside.

Other than Auckland, which is after all a city - and I suppose every country must have at least one - if there is any part of New Zealand that is not take-your-breath-away beautiful, the Kiwis had done a clever job of concealing it. From tip to tail, stem to stern, from the north of the north island to the especially stunning south, the natural beauty is one lovely eyeful after the next.

A great jumping off place for adventure is Queenstown in roughly the middle of the South Island. Hard beside the broad and beautiful Lake Wakatipu (New Zealand's largest



Sunset over Lake Wakatipu



A stop in Fjordland National Park along the way to



Bungee jumping at the Kawarau Bridge



The lovely Milford Sound

lake), Queenstown, with a population of about 30,000 souls, is framed by the apply-named Remarkables, a mountain range like up-thrust dragon scales (skiable for the brave and hearty in winter) which are chameleons of rock and grit that change shape and color with the shifting light winked from the lake. Although we visited in January - the Southern Hemisphere's dead-of-summer - the Remarkables gave the foreboding impression that even an accomplished skier with Vail legs would have his hands full in taming them.

The lake is ringed with eateries, buskers, sun-worshippers, and craftspersons selling hand-mades from

rough stalls, and just a few steps off the lake front, are boutiques with a heavy emphasis on mountain wear and gear. The sunsets are spectacular.

A short, steep walk from the lake is the Skyline Gondola which ports mountain bikers, view-gazers, the hungry, and would-be paragliders up a steep slope where one may dine with

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The Wanaka Tree



Monro Beach - all to ourselves

an incredible forever view high above the lightning bolt shaped lake at lunch or dinner. The lunch selection and quality are excellent but pale in competition for the views.

After lunch, we waddled our overfed way to the luge track where we rode a chairlift up, mounted our wheeled steeds, and wove our way back down a winding, high-speed course to the restaurant aerie below. What better way down to terra firma far below, than to paraglide the 2,000 or so feet which most, but not all of us elected. The "us" in this instance were the usual suspects, my sons, Asch & Parke, their SOs, Natalie and Abby, and, of course, my SO/wife, Deb, who is always game for some rattling new adventure.



The Pancakes

After some well-deserved breath-catching, back up the hill we went to the Kiwi Park wildlife sanctuary which boasts, among other exotic members, a klatch of Kiwis in a pretty good facsimile of their natural environment.

The next morning, off to Fjordland National Park at the southwest tip of the South Island, the gem of which is Milford Sound which Rudyard Kipling called the eighth wonder of the world. Hillsides bewhiskered with too many thundering waterfalls to count, cloud-haloed dunce caps of sheer rock jugged from the crystal waters whose broad hips define the sound. We boarded our forty-or-so passenger ship for a sun-and-sea-and-waterfall-splashed cruise into and upon the Sound which is a slice of heaven upon which God has bestowed special favor.

The full day Queenstown-to-Milford back-and-forth confirms the adage that it is the journey, not the destination as, although the Sound outlasts adjectives to describe its beauty, the way to its wonders, through gorgeous countryside offering a thousand stunning vistas and leg-stretching stops which could have been destinations in their own right, made the trip itself a blessing.

On our next day, back in Queenstown, after eating dust on rented ATVs up the steep slopes near the Skyline, we dined along the quay, and then took a sunset cruise on the TSS Earnslaw, a vintage coal-fired steamship

(the only remaining commercial steamship in the Southern Hemisphere) that has been plying the waters of the lake for more than a century. It chugged and huffed and charmed across Lake Wakatipu to Walter Peak High Country Farm, a gracious low-slung red-roofed farm complex that offers farm tours, dining, hiking, and more arrayed before a muscular range of protective mountains.

The next morning we picked up our rented van and were off first to Kawarau Bridge in Gibbston, the bungy-jumping capital of the world. To not stop here - even if not to take the leap itself - would be akin to shunning the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The bridge, which is beautiful in its own right, spans a rocky gorge through which, draining from Lake Wakatipu, the teal waters of the Kawarau River pulse. One may elect - or not - when leaping headfirst from the bridge to end the

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Our beach at Golden Bay Ward

jump with a bracing head-to-chest dip in the river, after which one is gathered like a mayfly from a spider's silk by the rescue team into a Zodiac then carted back to shore where, on wobbly legs, one makes their way up the stair cased hillside to the jump center. Check.

Next, we were off to Roys Bay and the renown Wanaka Tree which defying physics, nature, and logic itself, sprouts from and holds majestically forth in - not near - the water. Of course, like everywhere else - especially in the South Island - the lake is ringed by mountains. In fact, if I were pressed to define the South Islands in as few words as possible, it would be "mountains and water." To include - let alone describe - every lake, bay, sound, and range - would be too wearying to include.

Around Lake Wanaka we went to Mount Aspiring Park, its river and waterfall, where, besides the natural beauty, visitors have undertaken to construct cairns of the river rocks washed up beside the shore, then on to Whakapohai Wildlife Refuge for a moderately long hike to Monro Beach where rumor hails that penguins are known to roost. While we were disappointed to see no penguins, the hike through the tropical forest was rewarded with the rocky beach which, except for sandflies, we had entirely to ourselves. One thing should be said, New Zealand has no predators at all - not even snakes - and so a hike through the primeval forests, except for the occasional swat of an insect, is a relaxing stroll.

Evening brought us to Franz Joseph/Waiiau where glaciers muscle to meet the sky! After weather cancelled our planned heli-hike on the Franz Joseph Glacier, we used the time to enjoy several short hikes in and around the Westland Tai Poutini National Park, little more than an arm's reach from the small stretch of town. While beautiful on its own, the next day brought the real treat. We drove the short way to the tiny town of Fox Glacier where, after being equipped and coached, we boarded the helicopter that would take us to the foot of the glacier for our climb.

Unlike Argentina where we had glacier-hiked before, where the glacier had the consistency of a sno cone just pulled from a freezer, Fox Glacier was sheer ice. One slip, one fall, one misplacement of your crampons, and, at the least, you were destined for a bumpy slip-and-slide, that you would remember by your bruises. As the day warmed, however, the glacier became more forgiving and our crampons dug with greater surety and ease. It was a sheer and spectacular day on the ice!

The next morning, we hiked the Hokitika Gorge. Although I said above that one would exhaust oneself naming every spectacle of rock and water, Hokitika deserves special mention. A spectacular hike, across suspension bridges and stunning foliage is rewarded with clear teal water and a deep-and-wide pool crowned with rocks suitable for a quick plunge.

In Paparoa National Park, one finds the Pancake Rocks, a curious huddle of rock formations standing in the tidal zone that look more like manmade ruins than a natural phenomenon.

Bed in Westport, then in the morning off to Kaiteriteri Beach for a two-hour boat ride to Abel Tasman National Park across a broad finger of the Tasman Sea where we would sleep, kayak, and hike.

The 20-room Awaroa Lodge was lovely. The seas as we set out to kayak the next morning were rough.

The payoff, though, was when we made our way to a several-miles-long beach where we were (you guessed it) the only inhabitants. Something else that should be noted about Kiwis and their country; there is an apparent respect for the environment and little, if any litter. The broad uninhabited beach showed no signs at all of any prior human contact; it was as pristine as a fairy tale. We hauled up on the beach, found a hiking trail, and after a short hike, plunged back into the roiling waves for the beach at Awaroa, the lodge, and food!

Leaving Abel Tasman by boat back to Kaiteriteri, we were on to Nelson for the short flight across the Cook Strait to the North Island. Domestic flights in New Zealand are a throwback

to a more innocent age; no security checks and, yes, you can bring your filled water bottle on the plane!

Leaving Auckland the next morning, it was on to Waitomo to see the glow worm caves. What, if you are unfamiliar with it, exactly is a glow worm?

The odd lifecycles of the tiny creatures deserve a quick diversion. In their pupal stage, the "worms" live in the walls and ceilings of the tall-roofed caves we ventured into. Plugged into their crevices, their fluorescent light is an LED lightshow to attract prey into the hair-thin tendrils dropped down from their lairs like a fine net or curtain that extends perhaps a foot or so below where they are bored into the earth. Among those attracted to their "webs" are their parents and many of their siblings whom they happily consume. The fluorescence is a beacon attracting the unwary to a glow worm repast. After 11 months or so, the pupae mature, fly off, mate, and unable to eat (as adults, they lack a digestive system), they become their offsprings' meal and die. Notwithstanding the peculiarity of all of this, the sight of glow worms, taken in by both a hike into the caves and a rowboat sized boat ride along an underground stream is akin to the light show at a planetarium.

Rotorua—land of geysers—was our second destination.

Yes, the whole town stinks of sulfur but it is the geysers and the hot springs that one is there for. Natural hot spring spas abound throughout the Rotorua area, but what is especially worth a visit is the Tia Puia Māori Culture Center which offers an excellent buffet with geyser views, an instructive and entertaining Māori cultural presentation, and free roam of the grounds, dotted with geysers (including the largest in the Southern Hemisphere), boiling mud pots, sink holes and a fog of sulfur-impregnated steam.



Hobbiton

Then, there was the Zorb. What, you may rightly ask, is a Zorb?

It is a twelve-or-so-foot-in diameter clear ball in which a smaller clear ball - a chamber for two - is attached by a bungy-cord-looking apparatus to the outer ball. In go you, your SO, a bucket of highly chlorinated warm water and then, down you go, bouncing and sloshing down a lovely green hillside.

We were next off on an adventure to Matamata which likely means nothing to you but what is found there likely does. Matama is the home of Hobbiton, the fully maintained movie set home of the Hobbits where the Lord of the Rings movies were filmed. Not only are the grounds beautiful and wonderfully maintained but part of the tour includes a visit to a Hobbit Hole, a Hobbit dwelling which was surprisingly expansive and well-appointed, and then refreshments at the Green Dragon Inn, the pub where Hobbits bent both ears and elbows in drink.

Then, it was off to Auckland where, after visits to the rainforest, the black sand Piha beach, and walks along the lovely quay, it was time to end the dream and point our way home. Without exception, the Kiwi folks were warm and welcoming. Crime, littering, and vagrancy are all but unknown. In 16 days of British side driving about the islands - both north and south - we never encountered a rude or aggressive driver. Courtesy appears to be the norm.

New Zealand is an outdoorsperson's paradise. With its laid-back ethic, a thirst for adventure, and scenery that stuns at every glance, it is a special, verdant corner of our varied planet not to be missed. To me at least, New Zealand evokes a simpler time where the sun hangs long in the summer sky, where the rivers, lakes, coasts, and mountains dazzle, and where, if one closes one's eyes tight, Hobbits lurk among the sheep upon each rise and fall of the enchanted landscape.



Inside a Hobbit Hole



Piha Beach - almost all to ourselves

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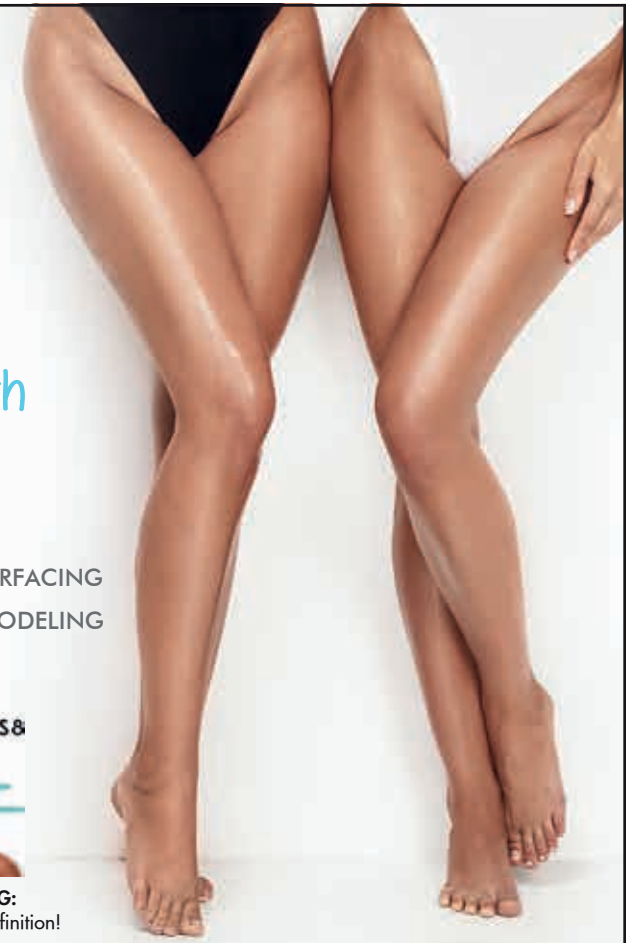
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Enso: Grief. The calming colors represent hope of a peaceful tomorrow.



Enso: Calm. I found stillness and calm by attending Zazen Buddhist ceremonies each day



Enso: Saying Goodbye. "Mom, I love you. I miss you. Thanks for the inspiration."

## Transformation Through Visual Experiences: Accepting Loss With Art

Margo Thomas moves from grief to calm to saying goodbye to mom

CONTRIBUTED BY MARGO TALBOT, SINGLETREE RESIDENT

"It wasn't until October 2022, 10 months after my mom passed away, that I said goodbye. I went on a 6-day silent retreat at the Crestone Mountain Zen Center. There I lived the meaning of the Enso (Zen circle of togetherness) through daily meditation and reflection. Three Ensos came to life in the form of art: Grief, Calm, and Saying Goodbye." This is my story of transformation: from grief to calm to saying goodbye.

My mom passed away in December 2022 after a long battle with dementia. We were so busy taking care of her, and making care plans, then funeral arrangements during that time. It became factual and mechanical. Like a news story: "My mom passed away about a year ago after a long battle with dementia." Then sadly her husband passed just three months later. Again, a flurry of arrangements for the funeral, double internment, estate sale, and a celebration of life. And then my beloved mother-in-law passed just a few months after that.

In October 2022, 10 months after mom died, I was able to say goodbye. The Crestone Mountain Zen Center



An uninspiring view from my cabin lead me on a creative journey to discover the Enso



My cabin at the Crestone Mountain Zen Center

was gracious enough to offer an artist residency for me: a small cabin with just enough room to set up. Crestone Mountain Zen Center is in Southern Colorado above the San Luis Valley on the western slope of Crestone Peak. Zen Practice is the craft of mind and body realized through the experience of stillness and nonduality. Our effort is to make Zen Buddhist teachings conceptually, emotionally, and practically accessible to contemporary Western practitioners. Guests are left alone to meditate, hike, and pray. They served three delicious family-style meals each day, our only chance to interact.

There I sat in my little cabin, looking out the window at a pretty boring view of the San Luis Valley. As I participated in meditation and fiddled around with my art supplies, I drew a blank. I mean, was I going to paint THIS scene? Which I did. And it turned out OK. But not inspirational.

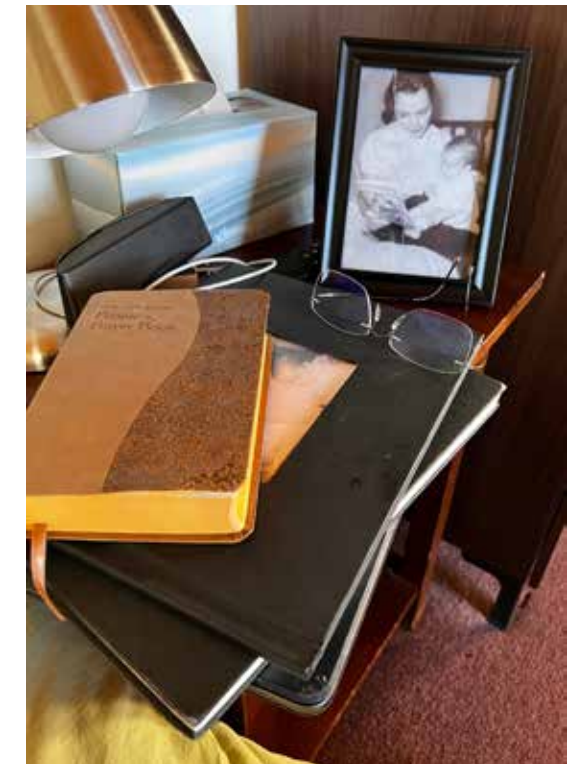
Then, I noticed a photo on the wall of my cabin. It was of an Enso (the Zen circle of togetherness). A plan was starting to form! I thought, "certainly there has been a lot of togetherness over our shared grief!"

And the first Enso came to life: Grief. Teardrops and all.

Notice the horizon line. That was indeed influenced by my San Luis Valley view. This painting is intended to feel disturbing



Stacking stones is a peaceful way to find positive energy during times of grief.



My mom was a devout Catholic. Her lifelong advice was "Keep The Faith".

and complex. Yet I used calming colors. To demonstrate that grief also contains hope of a peaceful tomorrow.

The morning prayer bell woke us up around 5am. We all congregated in the Zendo for morning meditation and the Buddhist ceremony, Zazen. The first time I attended was in the evening. There we were, a small group of people staying at the Zen center and the monks. Zazen took place in their beautiful Zendo building. We sat motionlessly for 40 minutes.

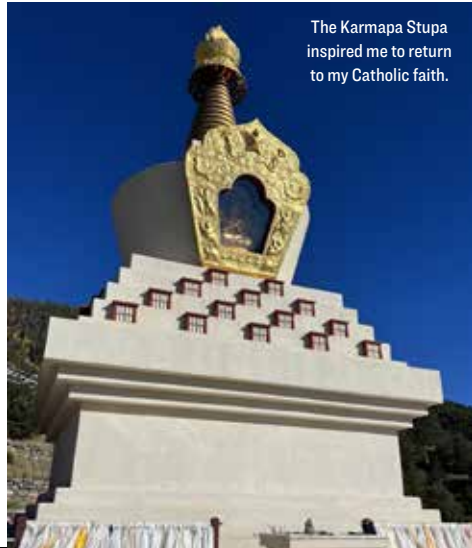
This is not a guided practice. Instead, it provides healing energy to go deep. Which is what I did easily. I know sitting completely motionless for such a long time may seem impossible. But in that environment, it was easy! A calm I've never known. Oh Calm!!! Yes, that shall be my next Enso!!

On the fifth day of the retreat, I visited the nearby Karmapa Stupa after a long hike. It was a beautiful day and I looked forward to sitting peacefully. There was just one other woman there. She appeared to be crying and praying





A hike to the stunning high alpine Willow Lake in the Sangre De Cristo Mountains.



The Karmapa Stupa inspired me to return to my Catholic faith.

“

I went on a 6-day silent retreat at the Crestone Mountain Zen Center. There I lived the meaning of the Enso (Zen circle of togetherness) through daily meditation and reflection. Three Ensos came to life in the form of art: Grief, Calm, and Saying Goodbye.”



Autumn aspen leaves were healing in the quiet moments.



at the same time. I tried not to look. But I just had to watch her! I thought “she must be saying goodbye to a loved one.”

Wait a second, I could do that too! “Mom, I love you. I miss you. Thanks for the inspiration. Sorry, so sorry, you suffered for so long. Ummmm Goodbye.” No tears, just a peace and knowing.

I wondered what I could do as a tribute to her. My mom was a devout Catholic. Her lifelong advise was “Keep The Faith.” I made a promise to her: return to the Catholic faith. When I came home, I joined the

local parish and have begun attending church. My third and final Enso came into focus: Saying Goodbye.

Margo hosted a reception at the Vail Public Library in December to discuss art and transformation. The solo show ran through the month and included her three Ensos and additional transformational pieces of art created right here in our valley. The three Ensos are 18” x 24” oil paintings on canvas and not for sale, but can be viewed by appointment only.

Margo Thomas lives in Singletree full-time. She discovered art in 2001, starting with human figure drawing and watercolors, studying at the Art Students League of Denver and in Chicago at the Palette & Chisel Art Academy. Her goal is to communicate harmony through visual experiences. Inspired by the Colorado mountains, her subjects are based on nature and family. Mediums of choice include oil, alcohol ink, and acrylics. Some of her pieces have been digitized for large scale printing and embellishment to fit taste and room space.



Scan here to receive Margo's newsletter about her adventures in art and our local art scene.

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751 Singletree Road 1 | Townhome  
4 bd | 5 ba | 2,686 sf | \$2,525,000

1123 Berry Creek Road A | Duplex  
3 bd | 4 ba | 3,273 sf | \$3,150,000

10 Prairie Circle | Single Family  
4 bd | 5 ba | 4,604 sf | \$3,299,000

### Under Contract

306 Hackamore Road A | Duplex  
3 bd | 4 ba | 1,955 sf | \$1,300,000

### Sold

260 Buckboard B-1 | Condo  
3 bd | 2 ba | 1,333 sf | \$1,200,000

71 Mesquite Drive | Single Family  
5 bd | 5 ba | 4,965 sf | \$4,125,000

81 Lariat Road B | Duplex  
4 bd | 3 ba | 2,005 sf | \$1,420,000

Source: VMLS 2.15.24 – 3.15.24



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