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From the EDITOR

Mist from the light rain clouded my camera lens as I took pictures of the Beard family.



I didn't realize it until I looked at the photos later, but sort of liked the effect. It seemed fitting for a brief but friendly encounter on that overcast day in early September. Strangers shared a moment in a place we had all come to love, despite the heavy clouds of 2020 under which we were all living.

I met Robert and Rebecca Beard and their 9-year-old daughter Juliana at Ocean Beach Park in New London three days after Labor Day. They had come from their home in Norwich for a respite from computer screens after Juliana's day of virtual schooling had ended. They strolled the boardwalk, watched ferries to Long Island pass offshore and let themselves be lulled by the salt air and surf.

"We came here a couple of times this summer," Robert Beard said.

I told him I lived just a mile and a half away, but this was my first time here all summer. Past summers, I visited the beach often. This year, discomfort with being in large groups during the pandemic kept me away.

"I understand," he said, nodding.

But being back at Ocean Beach now reminded me how much I'd missed it. It's a welcoming space for all kinds of people with all kinds of ways to enjoy being outdoors. You'll see women in saris wading into the water, hear families speaking Chinese or Spanish as they search for crabs in Alewife Cove, and mix with families of all colors finding their own place to belong near the sea. Along the boardwalk there's miniature golf, kiddie rides and a splash park, and at the western end a lovely nature trail through salt marshes along the cove.

Later, I remembered I *had* been to Ocean Beach once this summer, but not to swim or sunbathe. On June 28, I had joined about 100 others, our chairs widely spaced and our faces masked under a covered pavilion. We came to listen to the mother of Eric Garner, whose death in 2014 sparked the "I Can't Breathe" police reform movement, talk about her work since then to prevent similar tragedies. Gwen Carr's appearance there was the local NAACP's alternative to the Black Lives Matter protests that had arisen since the death of George Floyd in late May, one that brought together a wide cross section of the community.

"Just looking at all of you under one roof, this is the way it should be," she said. "We do all live under one roof, and we should be treated as one."

Like the pandemic, effects of the national reckoning sparked by Floyd's death spilled into many corners of our lives. I joined an online book group to discuss Ibram X. Kendi's book, "How to be an Antiracist." At work, CT Sea Grant Director Sylvain De Guise and Associate Director Nancy Balcom made time for the staff to have heartfelt discussions about what we were feeling and how our organization should take more proactive steps to walk the walk of diversity in all we do, a continuation of an initiative that started several years ago. These discussions were sometimes difficult, but made me grateful to work with such caring, thoughtful people. As James Baldwin, author of "Notes of a Native Son," "Go Tell it on the Mountain," and other significant works exploring race and racism once said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

As I write this, my co-workers and I are still having those discussions and deciding our course. I expect this will always be a work in progress. But this issue of *Wrack Lines* is one in a series of actions. With the theme of "Diverse Perspectives in the environment we share," we bring in the voices and talents of writers and photographers of different ages, races and backgrounds to tell stories we hope can help build bridges across the things that divide us.

This isn't about political correctness. It's about making a better world for everyone by recognizing, seeking and embracing a diversity of perspectives.



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Above photo: Robert and Rebecca Beard and their daughter Juliana enjoy the view from the boardwalk at Ocean Beach Park in New London on an early September afternoon. Photo: Judy Benson

Cover photo: Taylor Mayes, who talks about improving diversity in the sciences on page 6, leans on a viewing scope at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven in the central portrait photo by Teala Avery. Surrounding her are images of the writers, photographers, sources and places found in this issue. Cover design: Maxine Marcy

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TALK TO US

Send comments and questions about this issue to: judy.benson@uconn.edu. We'll share as many as possible, along with our responses, at: seagrant.uconn.edu

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Teala Avery is a freshman at Spellman College in Atlanta and 2020 graduate of Norwich Free Academy, where she studied photography for three years. In April the Otis Library exhibited a collection of her photographs titled, "Acts that Shape Us: Photographs by Teala Avery of Norwich Youth Making a Difference." She won the Gold Key Award in the Connecticut Regional Scholastic Art Awards competition and a bronze medal for photography in the National NAACP's ACT-SO contest. She has been active in the local NAACP Youth Council, traveled with People to People and participated in ALA Girls State.



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JUDY BENSON

Judy Benson has been communications coordinator at Connecticut Sea Grant and editor of *Wrack Lines* since 2017. Before that, she was a newspaper reporter and editor, concluding her journalism career at *The Day* of New London covering health and the environment. Her creative nonfiction essays and opinion articles have been published in *Appalachia*, *Connecticut Woodlands*, *Connecticut Hearst* newspapers, the *Connecticut Mirror* and *The Day*. She earned both a bachelor's degree in journalism and a Master of Science in natural resources from UConn. She and her husband live in New London.