SWELL LETTER
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Welcome New Members
Kristen Smith and Jim Swenson



Both my wife, Kristen Smith, and I (Jim Swenson) moved to Dubuque in the mid-1980s, but we didn't meet until almost 20 years later. A Nebraska native, she began a career in the Loras College library and I started at the Telegraph Herald, in the sports department, after stints at papers in my home state Wisconsin, Missouri, Wyoming and Idaho. She has worked her way to becoming the Library Director, and will retire at the end of the year; I moved from sports to features and retired about three years ago.

My first gallant wife, Jane Richard, died of breast cancer in 2003 on her 42nd birthday. Kris and I were introduced on a blind date by mutual friends and were married a few years later.

We began our SWELL journey in September after the usual two to three years on the waiting list. She is trying to attend at least once a week until her retirement, while my goal is to make every session (those who know me know that I set high goals :-)

We have two grown sons from my first marriage and three grandchildren. They live in Springfield, Ill., and Kansas City, so we don't see them as often as we'd like. We have one elderly cat, Leah, whose brother, Woody, passed during the summer. We enjoy traveling (the photo is of us at Antelope Canyon, Ariz.), going to movies, reading (for sure!), hiking and are dabbling in pickleball. I have also played five seasons with the Not Dead Yet softball club, along with several longtime SWELL members, who encouraged me to join this group.

Fortunately, my SWELL memories are fresh, because as many of us know, our memories at this stage of life are about as good as our softball skills (they've seen better days). Anyway, we've thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie of the group, and I'm already feeling the benefits.

A fun fact? I'm basically an overgrown kid who still likes to climb playground equipment, boulders, trees and even over fences with the grandkids. Hopefully I'll avoid the IL (injured list).

Carla Gibbons

Greetings! My name is Carla Gibbons and I am 69 years young! I have been a solo mom since 38 when widowed (death by suicide) and orphaned at age 40. I have been blessed with two beautiful daughters, six earthside grandchildren (two newborn babies reside in heaven), and I will inherit three bonus grandchildren when my oldest daughter remarries in 2027. My partner and I have been together for 14 years. He has his place, I have mine, and it works out just fine. I am a graduate of Loras College and University of Dubuque. My youngest daughter is also a graduate of UD (works in rural city government), and my oldest daughter is a graduate of Loyola University of Chicago and Midwestern University (Physician Assistant here at UD).

My career of 42 years spanned work at Finley Hospital, Dubuque Community School District, and University of Dubuque. In 2018, I retired earlier than planned from UD to babysit grandchildren. My daughters and grandchildren have been my life-long devotion/hobby, in addition to my home, some travel, thrifting, taking classes/book clubs, participation in many Emmaus weekends, and ongoing commitment to my spiritual life. A



recent endeavor has been writing my memoires (362 pages done so far)! I've experienced quite a few health issues the past few years, and I am very thankful to be a new member of Swell. We are blessed to be companions on a journey maintaining/improving our health!

A Journey of Faith & History: Exploring Greece and Turkey



On September 15th, 2026, Barbara Blake and a friend from church embarked on an unforgettable 11-day pilgrimage hosted by Father Dennis Quint through Nawas International Travel. Joining a lively group of 40 fellow travelers, their journey spanned across deep biblical roots, ancient wonders, and breathtaking Mediterranean landscapes.

Santorini's dramatic cliffside villages. Source: Santorini-View.com



Key Highlights of the Pilgrimage

The Long Journey East: The adventure began with a 9-hour transatlantic flight from Chicago to Vienna, Austria, followed by a quick 2-hour flight into the historic heart of Athens.



Walking in the Footsteps of the Apostles: At Ephesus (via Kusadasi, Turkey), the group stood where the Apostle Paul lived, preached, and penned his letters. Near Ephesus, they visited the peaceful **House of the Virgin Mary**, where she spent her final earthly years—a sacred site honored by three Popes. **Inspiration on Patmos**: On the island of Patmos, they climbed up to the Monastery of St. John, visiting the sacred cave where John received the visions recorded in the Book of Revelation.

- **The Magic of Santorini**: Cruising through the Aegean, they arrived at Santorini's dramatic volcanic cliffs. Navigating the hillside towns called for steady feet along steep steps, slick marble paths, and ancient cobblestones!



Fun Fact: Despite its monumental place in world and biblical history, the entire country of Greece is geographically smaller than the state of Iowa!



By the time they returned home on September 25th, the group was admittedly tired from all the steps and marble walkways but deeply enriched in faith and spirit—returning safely with wonderful memories and no health issues.

SWELL Picnic



107 SWELL People

"First of all, I'd like to thank all of those who helped with the Swell Picnic. Starting first and foremost with Lisa, my dedicated wife who has been helping me with these picnics from the very beginning. Helping her with food and set up Carol Wyatt, Judy Kalb, Chris Richey, Dale and Joanne Eartham, Linda Sewell, and many others who Organize the tables of food. And for my dedicated parkers who seem to come every year Gary Sewell directing cars



toward the back, Smokey McGovern showing where to park, and valet parking John Richey. I'd also like to thank all of you for attending, a 107 SWELL people made this a wonderful event. There was no shortage of Pulled Pork and soft Fairway buns and many side dishes and desserts that made this the best meal of the year and the weather was beautiful. Congratulations to Lou Cox for producing the best potato salad ever.

I was sitting next to Janet Veach, and she looked into the sky as two jets crossed right above our house making an X. She said X marks the spot. And that was true, It marked the spot of the best event going on that evening. I am so pleased to see so many SWELL members and guests engage in our social connection as we head into our 40th year of SWELL. Our goal is to produce an article that will circulate throughout the world in *Associated Press.* It may be a daunting task but we're going to try anyway. We have more events coming as you will see listed below in this newsletter.

















Upcoming events at SWELL

William Shakespeare's *Tempest, Friday, November 13, 2026, | 7:30 p.m.*



- **Event: *The Tempest* Play (Swell Class)**
- **Ticket Cost: $5 per person**
- **Collection Deadline: Monday, November 9th**
- **Ticket Distribution: Wednesday, November 11th (in class)**

🎭 **Play Summary: *The Tempest***

Overview: A late romance play written by William Shakespeare around 1610–1611.

- **Premise: Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan, lives on a remote island with his daughter, Miranda, and his servants, Caliban and Ariel. He conjures a massive storm (tempest) to shipwreck his treacherous brother Antonio and King Alonso.**
- **Key Themes: Forgiveness, magic (theurgy), illusion versus reality, colonialism, and reconciliation.**
- **Resolution: Prospero breaks his staff, drowns his magic book, forgives his enemies, and prepares to return to Milan.**

The new 2026-2027 photo album and all newsletters can be found by goggling Spartan Senior Wellness.

Blue Violin's Retro Rock & Roll Christmas:



An 80s Holiday Spectacular, presented by Music Maker Foundation, will take stage at **3:00 p.m. Sunday, December 20, 2026, in John and Alice Butler Hall, Heritage Center**.

After sold-out performances from the Sydney Opera House to Prague, Carnegie Hall to Iceland, internationally touring violin sensation Blue Violin returns with Retro Rock & Roll Christmas: An 80s Holiday Spectacular, presented by Music Maker Foundation. This spectacularly electrifying holiday blends the energy of an 80s arena rock show with the magic of Christmas. Featuring a live rock band, soaring choir, breathtaking cathedral projection mapping, and unforgettable violin performances, this cinematic production reimagines Christmas classics alongside the music of legendary artists like Michael Jackson, Bon Jovi, Van Halen, Bruce Springsteen, Kate Bush, Wham! Tears for Fears, and more. We are getting a special SWELL discount and the tickets will only be $30.00 and reserved in the Vineyard section **I will be collecting money through Monday December 14th, we will bring the tickets to class on Wednesday December 16th.**

Shirt, sweater, or Coat Contest Wednesday December 9th at SWELL



The Theme: Wear your most amazing holiday **shirt, sweater, or coat**—get creative with whatever you would like to design or wear!

Voting: SWELL members will vote to select the winners.

Prizes: Three prizes will be awarded for the top creations.

When life Throws You a Curveball Hit It

In his 1994 book, *When Life Throws You a Curveball, Hit It: Simple Wisdom for Life's Ups and Downs* Criswell Freeman shares timeless advice on navigating unexpected challenges. Life frequently hands us difficult situations—times when we feel lost, overwhelmed, or unsure of where to turn.

Recently, I found a powerful daily reminder of this truth in the most unexpected place: a jalapeño plant.

The Lessons of an Autumn Survivor



In my garden in late October, I noticed something strange. While most of the jalapeños were long, slender, two-chambered, and bright green, one particular pepper stood out. It was small, round, four-chambered, and striking dark black.

Curious about what caused this unique transformation, I looked into the science:

- Cold Stress & Natural Defense: Pepper plants thrive in heat between 70°F and 90°F. When autumn night temperatures dip below 50°F, nutrient absorption slows down. To protect itself from the cold, the plant surges with a natural pigment called anthocyanin, turning its skin into a deep purple black.
- The Canopy Effect: Tucked deep under the shaded inner canopy, this pepper received less direct sunlight and warmth than the rest. With restricted energy, its growth stalled into a small, round button rather than stretching long and green.

Against all odds, this jalapeño didn't give up—it adapted. It became a cold-stressed autumn survivor! And as long as it isn't damaged by a hard frost, it remains perfectly edible and tastes just as good as any standard jalapeño.

Hitting the Curveball

We often find ourselves in the very same position. Life doesn't always feel fair. While everything seems smooth for everyone else, a sudden curveball comes our way—a bout of illness, family struggles, financial strain, or simply feeling like we don't fit in.

When those moments strike, step back and look at nature's simple miracles:

1. Adapt and Survive: If a simple plant can adapt to harsh conditions and still fulfill its purpose, so can we.
2. Focus on Solutions: Approaching life with a positive mindset helps us spot solutions, whereas negative thinking makes every burden heavier.
3. Lean on Community: You don't have to face problems alone. We have an incredible community here at SWELL every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday where we can lean on each other for support.

When life throws you a curveball, don't back away from the plate. Keep your eye on the ball, lean onto the pitch, and hit it!

--Gary

THE STAFF

Editor…… Gary
Feature Writer …… Gary
Feature Writer …… Jim Swenson
Feature Writer …… Carla Gibbons
Feature Writer …… Barbara Blake

Thanks to those who submitted wonderful articles to our SWELL newsletter