

May 2026

Ridgewood

& HO-HO-KUS

HONORING
WOMEN
THROUGH ART

KRISTINA FILLER

REMEMBERING
A WWII HERO

THOMAS B. MCGUIRE

*Finding
Moments
of Joy*

THE COMPASSION
OF CAREGIVING

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MAY 2026



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Mark Porro graces our May cover.

Photograph courtesy of Mark Porro

EDITOR'S NOTE

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PHOTOGRAPH BY MARJORIE RAGGO

country. Porro shares the deeply personal story behind the book—one rooted in family, caregiving, and the complicated blend of love and laughter that often accompanies life's most challenging chapters.

Creativity takes center stage as well with Ho-Ho-Kus artist Kristina Filler. Her recent exhibition at the Worth-Pinkham Memorial Library honors inspiring women through striking and thoughtful artwork. It's a reminder that art has a unique ability to tell stories, spark reflection, and celebrate the figures who shape our lives.

Finally, this month's Q&A has a very special connection to my own heart. About a year ago, my brother, Bill, an accomplished Air Force veteran and commercial pilot, recommended I write an article about Thomas B. McGuire, a decorated World War

II fighter ace born in Ridgewood in 1920. Sadly, Bill passed away in December. Thus, I felt there was no better month than May to celebrate the courage of our veterans with this piece that so poignantly illustrates the true meaning of Memorial Day.

"They are not dead who live in the hearts they leave behind." — Tuscarora Proverb

This Memorial Day, may we all strive to live lives worthy of their sacrifice.

Warmly,

Kris Pepper

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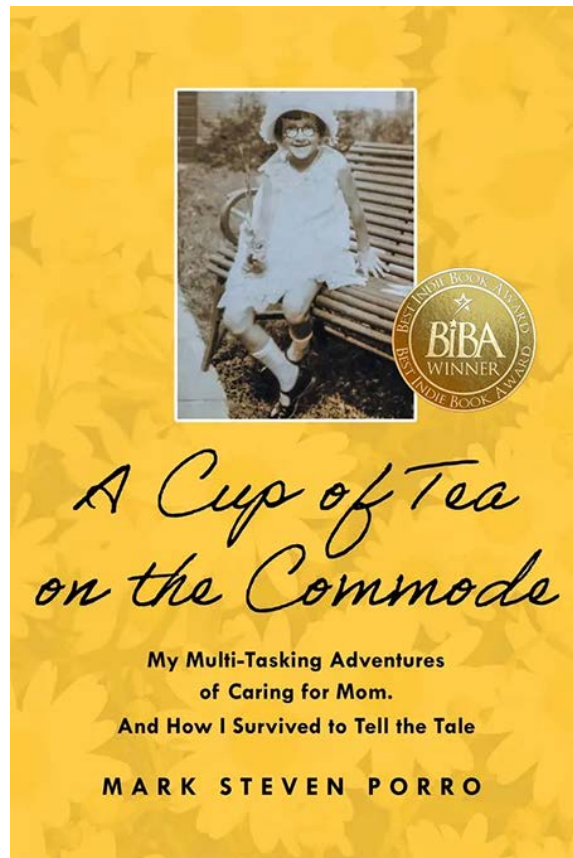
Griff Dowden

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AFTER MONTHS OF cold-weather hibernation, the longer days and warmer air invite us to reconnect—with our community, our creativity, and one another. This month's issue of Ridgewood Magazine is filled with stories that celebrate meaningful connections.

We begin with a closer look at the Ridgewood Police Department, highlighting the many ways officers engage with residents beyond the badge. From education initiatives to everyday moments of community outreach, the department's work reflects a commitment not just to safety, but to building relationships and trust within the village.

You'll also meet author Mark Porro, whose heartfelt and humorous memoir, "A Cup of Tea on the Commode," has resonated with readers across the



Brewing a Lifetime of Love

Mark Porro's memoir offers a reminder that love is often found not in grand gestures, but in showing up day after day with patience, humor, and, yes, sometimes, a cup of tea.

BY KRIS PEPPER

WHEN MARK PORRO became the primary caregiver for his nearly 90-year-old mother, Genevieve, in 2011, he stepped into a role still more commonly associated with women. He didn't see himself as exceptional; he simply saw himself fulfilling a much-needed role for his family—and his dear mother.

"Yes, the role of caregiver generally falls on the women of the family, but the men are catching up," he says. "I didn't think too much about the distinction, nor did I let it affect me. Many thought I was a hero. I didn't agree. To me, this was how our parents raised us. It was the right thing to do."

Determined to care for her as fully and respectfully as possible, he immersed himself in learning. "I wanted to learn

how to best take care of her for as long as she wanted to be here, days, weeks, or months," he says. "So, I spent a lot of time with the hospice nurses who taught me the tips and tricks of eldercare. I knew a bit of what I was getting into."

Upon making the decision—supported by his siblings and his mother—there was no half-measure. "Once I decided to move back to take this on full-time, I jumped in 100%."

Drawing on his background as an actor, Porro learned to manage his own emotions so as not to burden his mother. "Yes, I'm still her son, but I'm also her caregiver, and I didn't want my mother to feel guilty about me taking on this role. I did my best to keep my discomfort and my emotions out of the room."

Genevieve and Mark enjoy the day together. Mark's memoir, "A Cup of Tea on the Commode," is available on Amazon.



Genevieve shows off her silly side at granddaughter Rachel's wedding.

RESTORING DIGNITY, ONE GESTURE AT A TIME

If Porro's caregiving philosophy could be condensed into one word, it would be dignity. He was determined to bring back what age and illness had slowly eroded.

"My approach might be unconventional," he says, "but what can I say? I'm a romantic. I wanted to restore her dignity, which I felt had been whittled away over the years."

That meant buying his mother a new wardrobe—an experience that delivered its own experience of

wry humor. "What I didn't take into consideration as a middle-aged man shopping for his 90-year-old mother was dealing with the curious stares that accompanied my transactions. Not so much fun, but I had a job to do."

It also meant recreating the beauty parlor rituals his mother loved.

"I tried to give her a real beauty salon experience at home. I called it 'Day of Beauty,'" he says, listing a routine that included sponge baths, Epsom salt foot soaks, shampoo, massage, fresh nightclothes, and carefully styled hair.

Post-makeover, Porro caught his

mom beaming at her reflection in the mirror. "The effect on me was profound because I realized that the small gestures we often take for granted are not small for others. I also realized that wanting to feel pretty doesn't end at 90 years old. We all deserve dignity, and that desire also doesn't fade with age."

"My mother's favorite beverage was a cup of hot tea, skimmed milk, no sugar," he recalls. "Mobility was an issue, so to make things easier for all involved, I set a commode in her bedroom. One day, when Mother Nature took longer than was comfortable for either of us, I asked her, in jest, if she'd like a cup of tea while we waited. She, of course, said, 'Yes.' It was a hit and became one of our morning rituals."

What emerged from that tender moment became the title of his memoir and a symbol of a journey that reshaped his understanding of love, dignity, and devotion.

Empathy and patience became essential as Porro cared for his mother. "She was no longer as mentally sharp as she once had been, though every so often she'd surprise me with a perfectly timed zinger. Once she asked, 'Why do you treat me so well?' I replied, 'Because you're my mother, and you deserve to be treated like a queen.' She promptly burped. 'But queens don't do that,' I said. Without missing a beat, she shot back, 'How do you know?'"



247 Emmett Place. The Porro family's former home address in Ridgewood.



Left: Genevieve as a child.

Above and below: The Porro kids in the early days

After a cognitive test, a doctor told Porro that he believed his mom had Alzheimer's. Porro recalls, "I turned to Mom and asked, 'You don't have Alzheimer's, do you?' She looked at me, paused, and said, 'I don't remember.' It was priceless."

THE EMOTIONAL CORE

Porro's memoir balances humor with piercing emotional honesty. One such moment was when his mother asked a question that stopped him cold.

"After a particularly stressful day, Mom shot me a curious look and asked, 'Why are you doing this?'" His response came without hesitation. "Because it's an honor for a son to take care of his mother."

Her surprise—"It is?"—forced Porro to examine the deeper meaning of caregiving. He writes candidly about stalled careers, missed opportunities,

and the longing for purpose, arriving at a simple truth: "She never once gave up on me. So, I committed myself not only to her but to my five siblings. The rewarding experiences spoke for themselves, and her smile, a witty comeback, or a warm kiss consistently reaffirmed Porro's life choices.

"My parents always taught us all to do the right thing. When I stepped up for Mom, I didn't think it was a big deal. It was just the right thing to do."

Caregiving, Porro cautions, can easily consume you if you let it. Professionals consistently stress the importance of self-care and stepping away when needed—much like the familiar airplane instruction to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others. A caregiver has to be mentally, physically, and emotionally steady to do the job well. Porro admits he didn't always follow that advice, and had

a health crisis of his own during his caregiving days. "My mother almost outlived me," he says, "so it's important to take breaks."

He's equally candid about emotional boundaries. If certain tasks feel overwhelming or uncomfortable, he believes it's better not to take them on—or, if you must, to manage your reactions privately. "You do not want your loved one to feel guilty or think they're a burden," he says. At its core, caregiving is an honor.

RIDGEWOOD, THEN AND NOW

For Porro, caregiving also meant coming home—literally and emotionally—to Ridgewood. His parents moved to 247 Emmett Place in 1950, where they raised six children over 65 years.

"I was very fortunate to grow up in the Village of Ridgewood," he says,



Left: Starting the day with a fresh look out the window.

Above and below: A quiet moment with Mom. Vive La France—complete with French beret and French Toast!

recalling mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, summers and winter ice hockey at Graydon Pool, Veterans Park concerts, fishing in the Duck Pond, and being a student at Ridgewood High School.

Moving back into his childhood home was “a bit surreal,” but nostalgia brought back memories of places that shaped them both. “Mama Rosà’s Pizza, Dairy Queen (his first official job), and Fishel’s Bakery cream donuts and strawberry shortcake were amazing! Sealfon’s candy counter was always tempting, and I remember Woolworth’s had balloons with prices for their banana splits inside. I once picked and popped one for 25 cents. And, most of my clothes came from Mac Hughs!”

WRITING AS HEALING

Porro didn’t set out to write a book. He began by taking notes, wanting to

preserve moments for his siblings. But when his experience helped a friend beginning her own caregiving journey, he realized the story might serve a wider purpose.

“This was my way of processing my grief,” he says. “I had little time to grieve during my journey.”

Distance helped—both emotional and geographic. After moving to France, writing helped clarity emerge, and he finished the memoir overseas.

A LASTING MESSAGE

What does Porro hope readers take away?

“I hope to inspire, educate, and entertain readers,” he says. “It’s not a ‘how-to’ book, it’s a ‘what I did book.’”

Along with a long resume of patient care skills and expertise, Porro came away from the experience recognizing what it taught him. “Even

though patience is not a New Jersey virtue, I believe I’m now more patient with myself and others. I’m certainly more empathetic toward older adults and seem to gravitate to them. Looking back, I found a lot of joy in the process.”

And if his mother could read the book? He laughs. “Well, as a seasoned proofreader who had a long career at the Bergen Record, she would first read it for errors! There was one small error in the book that got past my editors, the publisher, and me. She most definitely would have caught it. As for content, she would have objected to my including her stealing my ice cream and cheating at cards.”

After all, Mom always has the last word.

For more information on Porro’s book, visit: acupofteaonthecommode.org