

Our Stories—David Damon

Dave Damon has very fond memories of summers spent at Point Judith as a child—being able to walk everywhere, the beach at Sand Hill Cove, ice cream at Aunt Carrie's, the lighthouse, and excitedly waiting on Friday nights for his father to arrive from his work week in Wellesley, MA. So in 1984 when he found himself divorced and raising his young daughter on his own he returned to that very same house, his place of comfort.

Dave Damon had trained as a chef at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) after high school but while he was, and still is, a really good cook, the pressure of being a chef was just not a good fit for him. After a couple of years he decided he needed to do some growing up so he joined the army. Three years of his stint in the army was spent in Germany where because of his training and experience he served as a cook—rising quickly to the status of sergeant. His wife, whom he had married while at the CIA, moved to Germany with him and it is where their daughter was born.

Life was good in Rhode Island. He had arrived jobless but soon found construction work. He had met his future second wife, Linda, before he moved to RI and for five years they had a long distance relationship, traveling back and forth between RI and Watertown, MA. In 1989 they married. Unfortunately, when they returned from their honeymoon Dave was in a bad car accident and was unable to work for six months. Still recovering and unemployed, he was driving around one day wondering just what he was going to do next when he saw a sign for a Job Placement Center. Thinking it offered career advising he pulled in and began the journey to what he feels was finally the work he was meant to do.

The Center, run through Perspectives in North Kingstown, actually provided assistance and job support for adults with disabilities. Dave began working as a job coach, then soon progressed to assistant director of the day program. He felt it was work that he was really good at and he went on to work at another company and serve as the director of two group homes. It was during this time that he became more interested in his spiritual self. He became a Reiki Master and started embracing a more metaphysical approach to life. He decided to return to school and he enrolled in a Master's Degree program in Holistic Counseling at Salve Regina. He envisioned going into private practice offering an integrated approach to healing. The Universe had a different idea for him.

While attending Salve Regina, Dave had to continue working so he took a job at Bridges (since merged with Looking Upwards) in Jamestown. In a therapy based group home he was again working with intellectually and developmentally disabled adults and again he was really good at it. He graduated in 1998 and went to work for the Justice Resource Institute. There he provided outpatient therapy to individuals with borderline personality disorder who were either hospitalized or living in a restricted environment. It was hard work with a difficult clientele but it was work where he felt he could really make a difference in someone's life.

The Universe still had several curve balls to throw at Dave. In 2010 he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and prostate cancer AND he had a heart attack requiring four stents. He immersed himself in exercise and doing what he needed to do to stay healthy. In 2013 he was forced to take an early retirement as the symptoms of Parkinson's worsened. Then in 2016 the biggest blow of all befell him. His dear wife of 27 years was diagnosed with lung cancer and passed away two months later. He was bereft; he had lost his best friend and his beloved wife. Linda had been the social director in their

marriage and it seemed most of their friends were in Massachusetts as was his daughter. He felt alone in the world.

He continued his devotion to his exercise regimen now taking Zumba classes and participating in Rock Steady Boxing, a program created to help people with Parkinson's and other movement disorders and offered at the YMCA. He credits Rock Steady Boxing with helping him to achieve a much higher quality of life. Trying to find solace spiritually he attended Sunday services at a Science of Mind Church. He began to converse over the phone with Elaine Airozo who had been Linda's best friend in college and whom he had known for over thirty years. He invited her for a visit to Rhode Island. It turns out they had a lot in common and they were very comfortable in each other's company. Neither one of them liked living alone and in a short amount of time they decided to live together in RI. Dave flew out to Oklahoma where Elaine was living near her daughter. They rented a U-Haul truck and had quite the adventure driving across the country. Happily their relationship has deepened over time into a true loving partnership.

Not finding the comfort he craved at the Science of Mind Church, Dave decided to come to a service at UUCSC. He right away spotted people he knew and liked—Jane and Lou Rubenstein, whom he had met in work settings, and Rene who taught the Rock Steady Boxing class. Over the next few weeks he realized he had found what he was looking for—comfort, a community, the feeling of home. He and Elaine both decided to become members, the first time he had ever joined a church officially.

The Pandemic has been difficult for Dave—all of the classes at the Y had to be cancelled and are just now starting back up. Church services and activities like the Men's Breakfast and the Gong Bath had to be cancelled. He is not much of a computer person but at least he is a homebody so that part hasn't been too difficult. He and Elaine have a lovely yard and gardens to putter around in and a fenced in area for their little Cairn Terrier Daisy whom they both dote on. Dave is eager to get back to his routine of classes to better his health and will be glad when he can again be in the company of the community where he has found home.

P.S. Elaine confirms that yes, he is an excellent cook and he does most all their cooking. Learn more about Elaine in a future story.

Elizabeth Donovan, September 2020