

# **PASSION**

# **PURPOSE PEACE**

By

Nicole Mescia



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# DEDICATION

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To my beloved daughter, Elara.

You bring such profound meaning to my life. From the moment I learned I was pregnant with you, everything changed. You inspired me to fight for freedom and gave me the strength to persevere through some of my darkest days. I hope you recognize how brave, intelligent, talented, loving, special, and gifted you truly are. When my spirit revealed to me while you were still in my womb that you would help change the world, I believed it wholeheartedly. Always remember that you hold the power within you to create the life you envision. You have been one of my greatest teachers, and I am incredibly grateful that you chose me to be your mother.

To my adoptive parents, Nick and Elaine Mescia.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to both of you. Your desire to adopt a child changed the course of my life in ways I cannot fully express. I am eternally thankful to have been chosen by you. You have provided me with a strong foundation through your unwavering support, love, and guidance. You are a shining example for Elara, and I appreciate everything you've done for our family and want you to know that the love I have for you will never know any bounds.

Thank you for being such incredible parents.

To my favorite Cowboy.

Thank you for seeing me and helping me unpack.

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**To all these people,**

**Be great, as you have taught me to be, so unapologetically.**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nicole Mescia is a heart-centered healer, nature lover, and advocate for personal transformation. With a background in Geography, Earth Science, and Environmental Studies, she has always been drawn to the ways people connect with the world around them. Her journey has taken her from assisting top brain surgeons to becoming certified in somatic work — helping others regulate their nervous systems and create lasting change in their lives.

Passionate about empowering others, Nicole works with the *Home Grower Show* startup TV project, supporting education around plant medicine and self-sustainability. She partners with the NEUROFIT app and hosts wellness retreats, guiding people to discover what's possible when they reconnect with their bodies and hearts.

Whether she's soaking in nature, sharing a glass of wine, or simply holding space for someone on their healing journey, Nicole believes in choosing love — and showing others that they can too. Her mission is to be a mirror, reflecting back the beauty and potential within every person she meets.

**For more details and to stay connected, visit the official website:**

**<https://authornicolemescia.com/>**



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## CHAPTER I:

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# THE GIFT OF TRAUMA

The events that shape our lives often feel like an intricate dance of choice and chance. Sometimes, the paths we walk reflect the seeds we've planted; other times, they seem to sprout from forces entirely beyond our control. Moments—those fleeting, transformative fragments of time—stand as the true architects of our stories. They emerge in the instant before the collision, in the seconds before life alters irrevocably, defining us more than any deliberate plan ever could. They are the electric currents that make us or unmake us—the moment a mother meets her child for the first time, the gut-wrenching farewell to someone gone too soon, or the simple, profound realization of falling in love. Moments like these linger, shaping not only the outcomes of our actions but the fabric of who we become.

I often trace my story back to my earliest memories, searching for the roots of who I am. I see myself as a little girl in the back seat of a '70s Chevrolet, staring up at the stars, wondering where my parents were. Even then, I felt a strange mix of comfort and disquiet. I knew I was cared for, but something in the silence between those stars told me something was missing. That unease bloomed into questions I couldn't yet articulate: why wasn't I with my parents? What was wrong with me?

When I was finally sat down and told I was adopted, it wasn't news to me. Deep down, I had always known. What followed was a cascade of questions I'd carry with me for years. Why had I been given

up? Who did I look like? Whose laugh echoed through me when I was happy? In the absence of answers, I began to seek my identity in everything and everyone around me, trying to piece together the puzzle of myself.

### ***A Life of Searching***

Growing up in the fold of a closed adoption meant that my origins were locked away, unreachable. My adoptive parents loved me deeply, yet the gaps in my story made me feel like a puzzle missing its corner pieces. My father, a self-made man with a sharp work ethic, instilled in me the value of dedication. He was a practical man, the kind who memorized gas prices and drove across town to save a few cents per gallon. His laughter, when it came, was rich and unfiltered, a sound I would chase for the comfort it brought.

My mother, a 4'11" firebrand of Sicilian descent, carried her own history of resilience. She had survived an abusive first marriage and emerged stronger, a woman unafraid to fight for what she believed was right. She taught me the art of self-preservation, but also the weight of unspoken emotions. "Don't upset your mother," people would caution, and so I learned early to swallow my feelings, to make others comfortable even at my own expense.

Their love was unwavering, but even in the warmth of their embrace, I felt a quiet yearning. I wanted to know where I came from, whose hands and feet I had inherited, and why my laugh sounded like an echo from another life. This yearning, coupled with my natural curiosity, pulled me into the woods and fields of upstate New York, where I found solace in nature. I would crawl out of my playpen to chase freedom, build forts in the woods, and bring home animals I had befriended along the way. Nature became my sanctuary—a place where questions didn't need answers.

### ***The Weight of Uncertainty***

Childhood wasn't always kind to me. Fevers, infections, and respiratory issues dogged my early years, tethering me to doctors and treatments that often felt more traumatic than healing. I remember the ice baths and the needles, the nights spent steaming in humid bathrooms, and the countless trips to the hospital. Even as a young child, I sensed something was fundamentally wrong with the way care was administered. I longed for gentler solutions, ones that didn't leave scars on my body or my spirit.

In those years, I learned to be adaptable. My mother's mindfulness journey later in life mirrored the one I had begun early—a necessity born of survival. She and I both worked on breaking through generational curses, facing our reflections in the mirror, and confronting the patterns we'd inherited. These were lessons in resilience that I carried with me, even as they sometimes felt heavy.

### ***The Unfolding of Identity***

As I grew older, the tension between nature and nurture played out vividly in my life. My father's discipline and my mother's tenacity shaped me, but so did the invisible threads of my biological heritage. Though I didn't know them, I felt their presence in subtle ways—in my love of freedom, my resilience, and even the questions that drove me to seek answers.

I've come to see my adoptive parents as the ones who were meant to raise me, and who equipped me with the tools I would need to navigate life's complexities. They gave me roots and wings, even if the weight of unanswered questions sometimes made flying feel impossible. And through it all, I learned that our origins don't solely define us. It is the moments—those life-altering collisions—that shape who we become and lead us to the next chapter of our story.

### ***A Fork in the Road***

Life has a way of presenting crossroads when we least expect them. For me, one of the earliest came in the form of a schoolyard confrontation. I was ten years old, all knobby knees and oversized dreams, when a classmate made an offhand remark about "real parents." Those words stung more than I could have anticipated, not because they were cruel but because they were laced with the same questions I carried silently.

That evening, I asked my adoptive mother about my birth family. Her answer was measured but distant, as though she were pulling from a well of pain she rarely touched. "You were loved," she said, her voice trembling slightly. "That's all you need to know."

But I needed to know more.

It was then I realized that my quest for answers would be mine alone to undertake. My adoptive parents, as loving as they were, couldn't fill the spaces left by absence. They could only offer their support as I stumbled forward, piecing together fragments of a puzzle I wasn't sure I'd ever complete.

### ***Trauma as Teacher***

Trauma, I've learned, is both a burden and a gift. In those early years, it taught me to navigate the world with a heightened awareness. I became a keen observer of people—their habits, their emotions, the unspoken tensions in a room. This skill would serve me well later in life, but as a child, it often felt more like a curse. I could sense the pain my questions caused my parents, even when they tried to hide it. So, I stopped asking.

Instead, I turned inward. I wrote stories and kept journals, pouring my confusion and curiosity onto paper. Writing became my lifeline, a way to process emotions I couldn't yet name. My journals

were filled with letters to the parents I'd never met, questions scrawled in shaky handwriting: "Do I have your eyes? Your smile? Do you think of me?"

The pages held my secrets, my fears, and my dreams. They became a mirror in which I began to see myself more clearly—not as a victim of circumstance, but as someone capable of shaping their own story.

### ***Nature's Healing Embrace***

The woods of upstate New York remained my sanctuary during those turbulent years. Among the trees, I felt a sense of belonging that eluded me elsewhere. There was a quiet rhythm to nature that mirrored my own—a cycle of growth, decay, and renewal. I spent hours lying in the grass, watching clouds drift lazily across the sky, imagining the lives of the people who had come before me.

It was in these moments of solitude that I began to understand the interconnectedness of all things. The roots of the trees, the flight of birds, the gentle ripple of a stream—they were all part of a larger tapestry. And so was I. Even if I didn't know where I fit, I took comfort in the idea that I belonged to something greater.

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## CHAPTER II:

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# GETTING OUT OF THE DARKNESS

### *Early Realizations*

Growing up, I always knew I was adopted. The knowledge was never a mystery, but understanding it was another matter entirely. There were days I felt like a puzzle missing its most crucial piece. I could feel the questions in my bones, gnawing at me when I least expected it. Who were my birth parents? Did they think of me? Did I matter to them? These thoughts became my constant companions.

The first time I truly grappled with the weight of abandonment, I was about eight years old. I overheard a conversation between adults—a whispered remark about “not being wanted.” They weren’t talking about me, but in that moment, it felt as if they were. The words lodged in my chest like a stone, and I couldn’t shake the sting.

For years, I carried this invisible burden, a constant ache that no one seemed to notice. The world around me moved forward, but inside, I wrestled with a silent storm of emotions: sadness, anger, and a longing for something I couldn’t even name. It was like searching for keys you’ve misplaced—you know they’re somewhere, but the not knowing leaves you restless and uneasy. The longing was most acute at night, in the stillness when the world seemed to pause, and all that remained was the echo of my thoughts.



### ***Adoptive Family Influence***

Despite this internal struggle, my adoptive family was a beacon of stability and love. My parents worked tirelessly to provide for me, their dedication instilling in me a fierce work ethic and resilience. From my mother, I inherited a love for creativity—she painted, gardened, and turned every meal into an event. From my father, I learned discipline and the importance of standing by your commitments.

I remember the warmth of Sunday mornings when my mom would hum softly as she made pancakes, her voice blending with the sizzle of batter hitting the griddle. My dad would read the newspaper, the rustle of pages punctuating the calm. These small moments built a fortress of love around me, a safe haven where I could momentarily forget the void inside.

They never hesitated to show me their love, but I could tell that they sensed my restlessness. My mom would often remind me, “Blood isn’t what makes a family; love does.” I clung to those words, yet I still felt the pull of my biological roots. No matter how much love surrounded me, the question of “Who am I?” refused to fade.

I realize now how much of their nurturing shaped who I am today. The resilience they modeled gave me the courage to face my demons. Their unwavering support taught me how to hold on to love, even in the face of life’s hardest questions. I am their daughter in every way that matters, and yet, the curiosity about my beginnings never left me.

### ***Quest for Belonging***

The day I decided to take a DNA test, I was lying in bed, scrolling aimlessly through my phone. It was 2016, and I was running a farm full-time, working tirelessly to make ends meet. The void inside me had grown, a constant hum of questions I couldn’t ignore. When my results finally came in, it felt like opening a door to a world I’d only dreamed about.

Eastern European, Italian, French, Irish, Middle Eastern, and even a sliver of Ashkenazi, Papua New Guinea, and Aborigine, Jewish heritage—the mosaic of my identity spread out before me. But the most shocking revelation wasn't my ethnicity; it was a match. A living, breathing connection to my biological family.

My first connection was with my birth father's brother. He sent me a photo of my father, and when I saw his face, it was like looking into a mirror. The resemblance was uncanny. His strong jawline, the curve of his nose—features I had searched for in the mirror all my life—were there. My uncle told me that my father had passed away a few years prior. I held my phone tightly that night, tears streaming down my face as I sat in the tub. The grief was raw, but there was also an inexplicable sense of closure. For the first time, I knew where I came from.

Soon, I connected with my birth mother, and my story began to take shape. I discovered that I had five half-siblings, two from my father's side and three from my mother's. Meeting them was both exhilarating and overwhelming. I was the oldest among my sisters, a position that came with its own unique challenges and joys. I remember meeting my sister for the first time; she had my eyes, dark black with a shade of olive green that mirrored my own. And not just that but seeing us together, anyone could tell that we had the same eye shape and laugh. Later, I found out that we apparently also shared the same propensity of leaving the fridge open. It was a moment of recognition that words cannot capture.

The journey wasn't without its pain. One of my brothers shared a memory that haunted me. When he was seven, he had stood between my pregnant mother and her abusive boyfriend, knife in hand, to protect her and me. The weight of his words left me speechless. "I'm so glad you weren't raised with us," he said, his voice thick with

emotion. It was a stark reminder that while my adoptive life hadn't been perfect, it had been safe.

Over time, I built tentative relationships with my newfound family. Some grew strong, while others faded. I flew to meet them, walking into rooms filled with faces that felt both familiar and strange. The air buzzed with nervous energy, laughter mixed with tears as we shared stories and pieced together the fragments of our lives. The connections were not always smooth; there were misunderstandings and moments of tension. But the most profound gift was knowing. The void that had defined so much of my life was no longer empty. It was filled with stories, faces, and truths that helped me make peace with myself.

I remember one night in particular, standing under a vast sky, stars stretching endlessly above me. I thought about all the pieces of my life coming together—the love of my adoptive parents, the revelations of my biological roots, and the resilience I'd gained along the way. In that moment, I felt whole.

In the end, my quest for belonging wasn't just about finding my biological family. It was about reconciling the many pieces of myself: the adopted child, the daughter of loving parents, the sister, the seeker. It was about understanding that identity isn't a single thread but a tapestry woven from countless experiences and connections. And for the first time, I felt the weight of that tapestry settle comfortably on my shoulders, grounding me in who I was and who I could become.

### ***Dark Night of the Soul***

In the years following my reconnection with my biological family, life threw challenges my way that tested the very core of who I was. The elation of discovery was soon tempered by the realities of navigating complex relationships, not only with my newfound family but also with myself.

The fall of 2018 marked the beginning of what I now call my "dark night of the soul." By then, I had known my biological family for two years, but the emotional toll of trying to integrate those connections into my life proved heavier than I anticipated. Trauma from their pasts began to surface, dragging me into a whirlwind of emotions that were not entirely my own. It was overwhelming, and I found myself retreating into survival mode, shutting down and isolating from many of the people I had fought so hard to find.

On the farm, life was equally tumultuous. I was juggling the demands of running a business, raising my daughter, and maintaining relationships. My partner at the time, Joe, was struggling to adapt to the intensity of farm life, and his inability to contribute meaningfully only added to my stress. The weight of everything—the farm, my family, my own sense of purpose—pressed down on me, suffocating and relentless.

There were moments of light amid the darkness. The animals on the farm became my sanctuary. Alpacas, goats, and chickens filled my days with a rhythm that felt grounding and purposeful. Each sunrise over the mountains offered a fleeting sense of hope, a reminder that even in the depths of despair, life continues. My daughter, Elara, was my anchor. Her laughter, curiosity, and boundless energy gave me a reason to keep going, even when I felt like giving up.

It was during this time that I found a blue stone on the farm's driveway. Smooth and cool to the touch, it bore the faint inscription of Isaiah 40:31: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." I had no idea where it came from, but in that moment, it felt like a message meant just for me. I slipped the stone into my pocket, carrying it as a talisman of hope.

My faith became a lifeline during this period. Nights spent in silence on the back porch, under the endless expanse of stars, became a sacred ritual. I would pray, not for answers, but for strength. And slowly, I began to rebuild—piece by fragile piece.

Looking back, I realize that this dark night was a crucible, a painful yet necessary transformation. It taught me the value of resilience and the power of surrender. It reminded me that even in the depths of despair, there is beauty, growth, and the possibility of renewal. And as I emerged from that darkness, I carried with me a newfound sense of clarity about who I was and the life I wanted to create.

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## CHAPTER III:

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# CHILDHOOD ADAPTATIONS

### *Coping Mechanisms*

From an early age, I developed coping mechanisms that shaped the person I would become. Growing up in an environment where questions about my origins loomed large, I unconsciously adopted tendencies that helped me navigate the complexities of being an adopted child. These strategies were not intentional at first, but over time, they became essential tools for survival, shaping my personality and my approach to relationships.

People-pleasing became second nature. It was as if I carried an unspoken need to prove my worth, to ensure that I was loved and accepted. I would go out of my way to make others happy, afraid that anything less than perfection might jeopardize my place in their hearts. My parents were loving and supportive, but the fear of abandonment lingered, a shadow that influenced my every interaction. I strived to be the perfect daughter, excelling in school and social settings, yet I often felt invisible in my own life. The weight of these expectations, both real and imagined, left little room for me to explore my own desires or assert my boundaries.

The cost of this relentless drive to please others was a silence around my own needs and emotions. I became skilled at suppressing my feelings, burying them deep beneath a polished exterior. Smiling through discomfort, agreeing when I wanted to dissent, and prioritizing others over myself became habits I didn't even realize I

was cultivating. There were moments of internal rebellion, but they were fleeting, quickly squashed by the overwhelming need to maintain harmony.

Independence also emerged as a defining trait. While other children relied heavily on their parents for guidance and support, I learned to navigate challenges on my own. This wasn't born from a lack of love but rather from a deep-seated belief that self-reliance was the only way to ensure stability. I took pride in solving problems, whether it was figuring out school assignments or managing my own emotions when I felt misunderstood. Yet, this fierce independence often felt isolating. I rarely sought help, convinced that doing so would reveal a vulnerability I wasn't ready to show.

The duality of these coping mechanisms—people-pleasing and independence—shaped my interactions with the world. On one hand, they made me adaptable, empathetic, and resourceful. On the other, they created an internal conflict that would take years to unravel. The fear of being seen as flawed or unworthy loomed large, and it wasn't until much later in life that I began to understand the toll this took on my sense of self.

### ***Impact of Parents***

My parents' love and resilience were foundational in shaping my life. They were my anchor, providing stability and guidance as I navigated the complexities of my identity. Their influence was profound, not only in the lessons they taught but also in the ways they modeled strength and perseverance.

My mother's creative spirit was a constant source of inspiration. She had a way of finding beauty in the mundane, transforming ordinary moments into celebrations of life. Whether it was crafting a handmade decoration for a holiday or preparing a meal with thoughtful detail, she showed me how creativity could infuse joy into everyday existence. Her garden was her sanctuary, a place where she nurtured not only

plants but also her own sense of peace. Watching her hands carefully tend to flowers and vegetables taught me the value of patience and the rewards of dedication. Her creativity wasn't confined to tangible projects; it extended to the way she approached life—with an open heart and a willingness to see possibility where others might see limitation.

My father, in contrast, embodied discipline and steadfastness. He believed in the power of hard work and the importance of honoring one's commitments. His quiet strength was a steadying force in our family. When challenges arose, he faced them head-on, rarely wavering in his resolve. I remember watching him balance the demands of work and family, often sacrificing his own comfort to ensure we had what we needed. His actions spoke volumes about what it meant to be dependable, to show up even when it wasn't easy.

Their struggles, though, were equally instructive. My mother's occasional bouts of anxiety revealed the vulnerability behind her strength. Her ability to navigate those moments with grace showed me that resilience isn't about the absence of struggle but the courage to face it. My father's stoicism sometimes masked his emotions, but when glimpses of his inner world emerged, they were a reminder that even the strongest among us carry burdens. These glimpses of their humanity made their lessons all the more powerful.

Through their unwavering support, I learned what it meant to love and to be loved unconditionally. They taught me that strength lies not in perfection but in perseverance. Their resilience became a blueprint for my own, guiding me through life's uncertainties and challenges.

### ***Navigating School and Social Dynamics***

School presented its own set of challenges and opportunities for growth. As an adopted child, I often felt a subtle sense of being different from my peers, though it wasn't something I could easily articulate. I became acutely aware of family dynamics during parent-



teacher conferences, class presentations, and school events. While my classmates' families seemed to reflect a uniformity of shared features and traditions, mine was a mosaic of love and difference.

To navigate these social dynamics, I leaned heavily on my adaptability. I became a chameleon, blending into different social groups and environments with ease. My people-pleasing tendencies served me well in forming connections, as I instinctively knew how to make others feel comfortable. I was the friend who listened, who empathized, who often placed others' needs above my own. Yet, this ability to adapt sometimes felt like a double-edged sword, as I struggled to assert my own identity in the process.

Academically, I threw myself into my studies. I saw education as a way to prove my worth, not just to others but to myself. I joined clubs, participated in school plays, and volunteered for activities, always eager to contribute and excel. But beneath the surface of my achievements was a yearning for validation, a quiet hope that success might fill the void of unanswered questions about my origins.

Friendships, while fulfilling, also brought moments of vulnerability. I often wondered how much of my story to share. Should I talk about being adopted? Would it make me seem strange or different? These questions lingered, shaping the way I presented myself to others. Over time, I learned to balance openness with discretion, sharing pieces of my story with those I trusted while keeping other parts close to my heart.

### ***Resilience in the Face of Challenges***

Life's challenges, both big and small, demanded resilience. From grappling with identity questions to managing the pressures of school and relationships, I learned to draw strength from the lessons instilled by my parents and my own inner determination.

One of the most significant challenges was reconciling the duality of my identity. On one hand, I was deeply rooted in the love and

support of my adoptive family. On the other, I carried an intrinsic curiosity about my biological roots. This internal conflict often felt like walking a tightrope, trying to honor both sides of my identity without losing my balance. It was a journey that required patience and self-compassion, as I learned to embrace the complexities of who I was.

There were moments of profound growth during difficult times. I remember struggling with feelings of inadequacy when I didn't meet my own high expectations. It was in those moments that I learned the importance of grace—the ability to forgive myself and move forward. My parents' unwavering support during these times reinforced the belief that I was enough, just as I was.

Resilience also manifested in small, everyday victories. Overcoming a challenging math problem, navigating a disagreement with a friend, or simply finding the courage to share a piece of my story—each of these moments added to the reservoir of strength I carried within me. I began to see resilience not as a grand, sweeping trait but as a collection of small acts of perseverance.

Through it all, I discovered the power of reflection and self-awareness. Journaling became a refuge, a way to process my emotions and make sense of my experiences. Nature, too, became a source of solace. Long walks in the woods, the sound of rustling leaves, and the warmth of sunlight on my skin reminded me of life's beauty and my place within it.

These experiences taught me that resilience isn't about never falling; it's about rising each time with a deeper understanding of oneself. They laid the foundation for a strength that would carry me through life's inevitable storms, reminding me that even in the face of uncertainty, I had the tools to persevere and thrive.

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## CHAPTER IV:

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### THE LEAP OF FAITH

These experiences taught me that resilience isn't about never falling; it's about rising each time with a deeper understanding of oneself. They laid the foundation for a strength that would carry me through life's inevitable storms, reminding me that even in the face of uncertainty, I had the tools to persevere and thrive.

I didn't know it at the time, but that lesson had been woven into me from the very beginning. I was eight years old the first time I learned about visualization. I was taught how powerful it could be and how much it could help me call in the seemingly unsurmountable things that I could achieve. How alone it was just a tool but with my brain I could make it one that would help me accomplish many things in life.

I vividly remember one of the times where I used this technique in a moment of immense pressure and with hundreds of eyes on me. It was at one of the swim tournaments that I participated in, during my school years. The memory of the natatorium buzzing with the sounds of competitors and spectators is still etched in my brain. How my heart had pounded in my chest as I stepped onto the block, preparing for the start of the 200-meter butterfly. The gunshot had cracked through the air, and before I could even register what was happening, the whistle resounded in my ears once more.

False start. Mine. I still could feel the prickles of the heat of embarrassment that had spread across my skin as I had stepped back,

the weight of a hundred eyes pressing down on me. I could have walked away right then, let the moment swallow me whole. But something deeper inside me resisted. I closed my eyes, visualized myself getting back up and standing on the starting block once more in front of everyone with as much confidence as an Olympic winner carries.

And once I saw myself standing on the block like that in my head, it felt as if I could do not just this minimal task but bring the gold home too. So I did. I got back up. I dove in. I finished the race. Though I did came in last, but that never deterred me from participating and standing up for myself, even if the one I was standing up to was the me of the past moment.

That moment cemented itself inside me, a quiet vow that I would carry forward: no matter what, I would always get back up.

Years later, I found myself standing at another kind of starting block, this time in the medical field. It had been a carefully constructed path—years of discipline, a relentless pursuit of success. I had climbed the ranks in pharmaceuticals and launching three drugs to market. Then I climbed even higher to the pinnacle of success and into medical devices, where I worked for thirteen years, before switching to pre-IPO technologies, and not long after that, I was working alongside some of the most brilliant neurosurgeons in the country. I had done everything I was supposed to do. And yet, a nagging discontent followed me. It started as a whisper, a question I couldn't quite form, growing louder each time I handed over a prescription knowing it wouldn't cure anything, only mask symptoms. We weren't healing people. We were keeping them in the system.

The moment of reckoning came when a friend—a sorority sister—reached out, her voice thick with desperation. Her son had a brain tumor, and she was searching for anything that might bring him

relief. “I saw your posts about the oils,” she said. “I don’t know what else to do.”

I hesitated. The science-minded part of me resisted, but something else—the part of me that had always searched for answers beyond the ones I’d been given—pushed me forward. I sent her a blend of one the Young Living oils that I had been working with.

Days later, she called me. Her words tumbled out between tears. “Nicole, he’s feeling better.”

I sat in my car and wept. Not because I thought I had cured him because I can’t make claims like that, but because, for the first time, I had done something that felt real. That was the moment I knew I couldn’t stay in the western medicinal system any longer.

Leaving medicine wasn’t just a career change; it was a complete unraveling of the identity I had built. I walked away from the six-figure salary, the stability, the recognition. I cut my hair into a Mohawk so I wouldn’t be tempted to turn back. I tattooed my arm as a permanent reminder that I had chosen another way. I sold nearly everything in order to reach for something new and tangible, not because I had a solid plan, but because I knew I needed to create something different. A place where healing wasn’t dictated by corporate interests. A place where people could come back to themselves.

Later on, the farm became my sanctuary, not just for others but for me. My daughter, Elara, thrived in the wildness of it. She grew up with her feet in the dirt, her voice unwavering in face of adversity. When we faced opposition during the court cases—when the accusations came, when the system pushed back—she met it head-on. “I’m not a damsel in distress,” she told them. I saw myself in her, but stronger, more sure-footed. Watching her made it easier to breathe, to trust that I had made the right choice.

But the fight wasn’t over. When I stepped into holistic medicine, I became a threat. The FDA, the Board of Pharmacy, government

agencies—they all came knocking. Warning letters, investigations, attempts to shut us down. We weren't just questioning the system; we were doing something entirely new and different that could make others question the present-day Western medicine too. And for that, they wanted us gone.

There were nights when I lay awake, wondering if I had made a mistake. If I had burned down my old life only to find myself standing in the ashes. But every time doubt crept in, something—some small moment of relief, a patient's story, a mother's gratitude—pushed me forward.

I recently returned from my second Dr. Joe Dispenza retreat, another step in my own healing. Before that, I spent three weeks in Mexico with Lucas, my Cowboy. And not only that but with everything that has happened, Elara and I have a bond that feels closer than ever before. I have watched her step fully into her own voice, unafraid, unshaken. And I realized that every battle, every leap of faith, every moment of doubt had led me to exactly where I was supposed to be.

This wasn't the life I had planned. But it was the life I was meant to live. And for the first time, I wasn't afraid of what came next.

Because I knew, no matter how many times I fell, I would always get back up like I did that time on the starting block in a swim meet—a defining moment in my life.

This leap of faith, leaving the world of success and medicine behind and walking towards the path that called to me—that led me towards the farm that I eventually built, that became my sanctuary, my cage, and for a long while, my home.

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## CHAPTER V:

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# FINDING GOD DOWN ON THE FARM

Life often changes direction like a sudden gust of wind, nudging you down paths you never expected to tread. After stepping away from the human side of medicine, entrusting Chad with the cases and the distributorship, I sought something simpler—a flexible schedule that allowed me more time with Elara. A lower-paying role supporting veterinary practices with blood testing systems felt like a step back financially but a leap forward for the life I envisioned. I still had income from the distributorship, so the decision felt safe, even if uncertain.

Training for the new job sent me to Asheville, where I shadowed a local rep. Her story of searching for a farm to house her horses was a spark that reignited my long-dormant dream of creating a space for people to gather. Driving through the rolling countryside, it was as if the land itself whispered an invitation, soft yet persistent. The idea burrowed into my heart like seeds carried on the breeze.

On the third day, she handed me her phone to show a property she found on Craigslist. As I scrolled through the photos, something deep within stirred. The barn, the arena, the gentle curves of the hills—they looked like a dream I'd forgotten I had. "This feels like the kind of space I'm searching for," I told her, my voice tinged with a blend of hope and disbelief. I wished her luck and tucked the images into the recesses of my mind.

Back home in Raleigh, life resumed its familiar rhythm. The new job was practical, but it didn't spark joy. Time with Elara was a gift, yet my thoughts often drifted to those photos. I reached out to the rep and learned the farm was still available; her dream had taken her elsewhere. Compelled, I dove into Craigslist, sifting through countless listings, my heart quickening when I finally found it again. The price tag was daunting. How could I manage two properties? Yet the pull was undeniable. With a hesitant hope, I reached out to the owner and arranged a visit around Thanksgiving.

The trip to see the farm unfolded like a story written in the stars. Joe and I left Elara with Chad and headed west, spending a morning in Asheville wandering through Woolworth's art vendors. A particular painting caught my eye: a woman standing on a cliff, her essence meeting and pushing through incoming comets. It mirrored the strength I felt I needed for this journey, so I bought it. "First thing I'll hang in the farmhouse," I told Joe, who chuckled and said, "If we get it."

As we drove through Canton, the quaint mix of mill town grit and unpolished potential struck a chord. Music filled the car, my personal playlist of dreams and resilience—"Solsbury Hill," "Country Roads," and Fleetwood Mac—setting the tone for what felt like destiny. Then we rounded a bend and saw it: rolling hills bathed in golden sunlight, the river meandering alongside. My breath caught. It felt like stepping into heaven's embrace.

Meeting Jeff, the owner, and touring the property cemented the magic. I stood in the arena, the mountains framing my view, and bent over to catch my breath. As I rose, it already felt like mine. The connection was visceral, undeniable. Even as practical concerns loomed, I couldn't shake the feeling that this place was meant for me.

Returning home, I wrestled with doubts but began considering the logistics. Selling my beloved blue house became a reluctant



necessity. A casual conversation with a neighbor led to an unexpected turn: a prospective buyer showed interest before I could even list it. Within days, they made a full-price offer, bypassing the need for a realtor and clearing the path for my dream.

By May 2015, the farm was mine. We rented it back to Jeff temporarily, and by July, as the moving truck arrived, it snagged a low-hanging power line, plunging the neighbors into darkness. Embarrassed, I delivered flowers and apologies, unknowingly planting seeds of future friendships.

The farm's pull was magnetic, drawing me back every weekend. Elara loved the open space, her joy radiant as the morning sun. Together, we settled into the rhythm of farm life, sharing simple moments like watching sunrises that painted the sky in hues only God could imagine.

The first additions to our farm family were two rescue donkeys, Sheena and Jolene. Their wary eyes mirrored the hesitance I sometimes felt about this new chapter. But day by day, trust blossomed. Sheena's eventual eye contact felt like a divine breakthrough—an unspoken connection reminding me that healing and faith often walk hand in hand.

As the seasons turned, I threw myself into building a community. I organized events, rallied support for the local firefighters, and began weaving a network of vendors, musicians, and townsfolk. Each connection, each challenge—even an unexpected tangle with local politics—was part of a larger tapestry. Naming the farm “Gaia Arise Farm” was a nod to both history and hope, solidifying its place in our lives and hearts. Though it wasn't much later when we had to rename our farm to “Arise farm” because of Gaia herbs who had served us a legal notice of having copyrights of the name Gaia.

By November 2015, we made the farm our full-time home. Moving there felt like shedding an old skin, leaving behind the burdens of the past to embrace a future brimming with promise. Elara thrived in the fresh air and freedom, her laughter echoing through the hills. For me, the farm became a sanctuary, a place where dreams took root and grew.

Every sunrise since has been a prayer answered, every challenge a lesson in resilience. God's presence is tangible here—in the quiet hum of nature, the community we've built, and the unyielding faith that this is exactly where we are meant to be.

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## CHAPTER VI:

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### THE AIRBNB'S TO FREEDOM

I found myself in a season where the winds of change carried both trepidation and hope. Life had led me to a labyrinth of Airbnb's, each serving as a temporary sanctuary while I pieced together the fragments of my heart and rebuilt a life for Elara and me. These homes became more than just walls and roofs; they were cocoons, cradling us as we emerged into something stronger, something freer. In every creak of the floorboards, in every sunbeam that spilled through dusty windows, I whispered my gratitude to God for shelter, for Elara's resilience, and for the quiet moments of clarity where I could dive into my inner work.

There, amidst borrowed furniture and unfamiliar spaces, I surrendered myself to the process. Each day was a pilgrimage into my own soul—a devotion to healing my nervous system, absorbing Dr. Joe Dispenza's teachings, and unearthing the strength to write, to trust, to keep moving forward. I clung to the belief that the impossible could be made possible.

Yet, woven into my healing were echoes of past struggles. Years of relentless storms, battles that threatened to drown me, and nights where giving up seemed like the only option. But I didn't. I clawed my way back to myself, reclaiming my soul piece by piece. I no longer sought validation in others; I no longer reshaped myself to fit their expectations. For the first time, I was unapologetically me. The shift was seismic, an earthquake within my spirit that rebuilt my foundation.

But healing isn't linear. The weekend Elara's trembling voice reached me from a gas station bathroom, begging not to return to her father's home, was a fissure that nearly shattered my resolve. Her words carried the weight of fear and uncertainty, a child desperate for safety. It was then I realized the stakes were higher than ever. I called attorneys incessantly, fighting for her voice to be heard, knowing that this battle could pull us into deeper waters before it could bring us to shore. When false allegations arose, resulting in a warrant for my arrest, the air seemed to grow heavier, suffocating.

It was a season of upheaval, a time when chaos seemed to weave itself into every fiber of my existence. Brian, who was our sponsor came out to inspect the hemp fields, his face shadowed with concern. "Your grower's not ready for this," he told me, gesturing toward the languishing plants. I knew he was right, but the confrontation with Brian, the grower, spiraled into disaster. Triggered by our decision to bring in help, he stormed out in the dead of night, leaving the barn in shambles. The grow room, cloaked in darkness, was perilously close to destroying what little we had left. The air felt heavy, as if the farm itself was mourning.

Then came Greg—a savior in dusty boots and a worn flannel shirt, his presence as grounding as the soil beneath our feet. When he stepped onto the farm, it was as if the land itself exhaled in relief. He walked through the fields with a deliberate calm, his hands brushing over the leaves like a painter evaluating his canvas. His eyes, steady and kind, took in every detail—the drooping plants, the uneven rows—as though he could feel their struggle. There was an unspoken connection between him and the earth, a quiet understanding that brought a sense of order to the chaos. Even the animals seemed to sense his grounding energy, gathering closer as he spoke in his low, measured voice. In that moment, Greg wasn't just a grower; he was a lifeline, someone who could coax life back into the farm and, by extension, into me. Sherry,

always resourceful, introduced us. He had the steady hands and quiet confidence of someone who'd worked the earth for decades. His eyes carried a kindness that set me at ease, though his past was not without shadows. Years ago, he'd served time for cultivating marijuana. The irony stung: the one person who could save the farm couldn't legally hold a license. Yet, with Greg's expertise, our hemp flourished. The inspectors marveled at our crop, declaring it among the best in the state. Greg became more than a grower; he became a cornerstone of hope amidst the swirling uncertainty.

Life on the farm teetered between breakthroughs and breaking points. Sherry sought solace from her back pain at Dr. Stone's clinic, a place where her husband's paranoia simmered. "He's afraid I'll stray again," she confided, her voice heavy with regret and tension. Meanwhile, Joe, my partner, retreated further into himself, his heart anchored elsewhere. One drunken evening, he stumbled into the barn, disrupting the staff and underscoring his growing estrangement from our shared vision.

Amidst this turbulence, the farm became a sanctuary for more than just plants. Sergeant Peppa and Chuck Berry, our rescued pigs, charmed visitors and added a layer of joy to our days. The Airbnb thrived as we expanded and grew, guests drawn to the rustic charm and the sense of renewal that seemed to radiate from the land. And before we knew it, I had four Airbnb under my name. But beneath the surface, my own foundations were cracking. I knew I needed to end things with Joe, yet the timing felt as precarious as a storm-laden sky.

The storm, both literal and metaphorical, arrived with the harvest, its winds howling like a chorus of despair and rain lashing against the barn as if the heavens were shedding their own tears. The sky churned, a chaotic swirl of greys and blacks, mirroring the turmoil within. The fields, once vibrant and hopeful, seemed to bow under the weight of the tempest. Inside, the air was thick with the mingling scents of damp

earth and desperation, as we raced to salvage what we could from the wrath of nature. It felt as though the storm sought not just to ravage the land, but to test every ounce of resolve I had left. Hurricanes loomed, caterpillars attacked, and we scrambled to save what we could. Greg and his crew worked tirelessly, their hands stained green from the plants and sweat dripping from their brows. I remember collapsing on the cold barn floor, the weight of it all pressing down until the world seemed to dissolve into a haze. Even the simplest instructions from Greg sounded like garbled noise. My feet found solace in the pasture, barefoot and untethered, as if the earth itself was trying to ground me amidst the chaos.

As the harvest drew to a close, a reporter's voice echoed in the barn. "You're front-page material," he said, snapping photos of the drying hemp. The article brought attention to our work, but it also drew unwelcome scrutiny. Chad, my ex, hovered on the edges of my life, his presence a constant reminder of past wounds. He offered help but delivered none, leaving me to weather the storm alone. My father's words rang in my ears: "Don't let him get involved. He'll only make things worse."

Exhaustion became my companion, yet there was no room to falter. Animals needed care, plants needed tending, and the weight of the farm pressed against my shoulders. When the hurricane finally passed, and the last of the hemp was hung to dry, I thought I might find a moment's peace. Instead, Joe's betrayal surfaced—drunken missteps, mismanaged funds, and a growing distance that could no longer be ignored. The final straw came when I discovered he'd been sabotaging my efforts, taking money meant for contractors and leaving a trail of disarray in his wake.

I made the decision swiftly. With Elara safe with my parents, I packed my bag, tossed it out the bathroom window, and left Joe a letter. It was a bittersweet goodbye, thanking him for what we'd shared

but acknowledging that our paths had diverged. By the time I returned from visiting my birth family in New York, the air on the farm felt lighter, though the burden of its upkeep still rested entirely on me.

October arrived, bringing with it a sense of foreboding. On the eve of my adoption birthday, Elara and I visited Dr. Stone, sharing frozen yogurt in a rare moment of levity. Her words were unexpected but pure: “Dr. Stoney, I like you. You’re nice to Mama. You’re nice to me. You like to help people, like Mama does.” Her innocent endorsement of him felt like a ray of sunlight piercing through the dark clouds.

The next day, everything changed. Chad took Elara, and for 40 days and 40 nights, I was plunged into darkness. My father’s call came like a thunderclap: “You have a problem. He’s not giving her back.” Accusations flew, unfounded and venomous. The weight of Chad’s control and jealousy bore down on me as I scrambled to prove my worth as a mother.

Each day without Elara felt like a lifetime, a relentless ache that settled into my chest and refused to leave. My thoughts spiraled in endless loops, replaying moments with her—her laughter, her small hand in mine—as though clinging to those memories could bridge the unbearable void. Sleep became elusive, and every corner of the house seemed to whisper her absence. I found myself wandering aimlessly through the farm, the animals offering quiet companionship, their soft eyes reflecting my sorrow. The nights were the worst, a hollow silence filling the spaces where her voice used to be. I spoke to the “angels in the sky,” pleading for strength, their faint glimmers the only comfort in the suffocating darkness. My animals became my solace, their steady presence a balm for my frayed nerves. I found myself speaking to the “angels in the sky,” the unexplained lights that appeared at night. In my isolation, they became symbols of hope, a reminder that I was not entirely alone.

But the darkness deepened. Sherry's husband, consumed by his own fears, struck out in the cruelest of ways. One evening, I found Joy Joy, my baby alpaca, struggling to breathe, her neck unnaturally bent. I dropped to my knees, cradling her as life slipped away. The pain was unbearable, a raw, gaping wound that seemed to echo the chaos surrounding me. Her loss became a turning point—a symbol of the destruction wrought by those I had trusted.

Through the tears and the turmoil, I resolved not to let the darkness consume me. The farm, the animals, and my daughter needed me. I pushed forward, fueled by a fierce determination to reclaim what had been taken. When I finally held Elara in my arms again, 40 days after our separation, it felt like emerging from a long, dark tunnel into the light. The battle was far from over, but in that moment, I knew one thing for certain: I would endure. The darkness would not win.

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## CHAPTER VII:

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### ELARA COMES HOME

The morning air was thick with anticipation as we set out to bring Elara back. Zeb, the mayor, had been our guide through this labyrinth of legal struggles, but even his measured advice had its limits. He suggested hiding Todd away until the custody battle with Chad was resolved. But I knew that choice would only tighten Chad's grip on my life, giving him the false assurance that he could dictate my every move.

Zeb had explained the harsh reality: once a judge makes a ruling, even flawed, it's almost impossible to reverse. The judicial system, like so many others, seemed designed to protect its own interests rather than the people it purported to serve. This wasn't the justice I'd grown up believing in. Instead of being innocent until proven guilty, the system painted you guilty until you could muster the resources to prove otherwise. Todd's story, marked by unjust rulings and relentless barriers, was proof enough of that.

As the legal battles wore on, I couldn't help but see parallels in other systems I had once trusted—medicine, education, government. Each one seemed designed not to empower or heal, but to create dependence, extracting money and energy from those it claimed to help. It was no longer just a fight for Elara; it was a fight for our dignity, our freedom.

The moment we pulled into the Statesville parking lot, my heart raced. I clutched the balloon and small treats we'd brought for Elara,

but the weight of the situation pressed heavy on my chest. Austin sat beside me, steady as always. “I’m here,” he said, his voice grounding me.

Chad’s car arrived shortly after. The moment Elara saw me, her cries pierced the air. “Mama!” she screamed, thrashing in distress. My whole body tensed, my instincts roaring to scoop her up and run. But I stayed rooted, breathing through the storm inside me. Chad and Karen looked bewildered, offering feeble excuses for her behavior as though they couldn’t fathom the trauma they had inflicted.

Elara was inconsolable. She screamed for me with her entire soul behind it, her tiny frame swaying with the force of her cries. I stayed near, murmuring reassurances, doing everything I could to mask my own turmoil. “It’s okay, baby. Mama’s here,” I whispered. Finally, I managed to get her into the car. As we drove away, she asked for ice cream, and Austin and I quickly obliged, doing everything we could to comfort her. But the damage was evident. My vibrant, curious child had returned to me broken and afraid.

In the days that followed, I threw myself into rebuilding her world. Play therapy, tutoring, a new school close to the farm—I did everything in my power to create a sense of normalcy. But even as I focused on her healing, the attacks didn’t stop. DSS showed up, accusations of neglect and abuse flying thick and fast. Each claim was more absurd than the last, but the sheer volume of them wore me down. Chad’s manipulations extended far beyond the courtroom, seeping into every corner of our lives.

Then came the day I was kicked by the mare, Bailey, in the barn. The force behind my ear sent me reeling, blood trickling down my neck. My first thought was that I’d been shot. Somehow, I stumbled back to the house, trying to stay calm for Elara’s sake. Todd patched me up, but the incident served as a grim metaphor for everything

else—no matter how much I tried to protect myself, the hits kept coming.

Legal battles piled on, draining what little strength I had left. The financial burden was crushing, the emotional toll even greater. I could see the strain wearing on everyone around me—my parents, Austin, Levi, even Elara. And yet, through it all, I clung to the belief that there had to be a way forward.

Winter came, wrapping the farm in a quiet stillness that felt at odds with the chaos of our lives. One night, during a heavy snowstorm, I went out to feed the rescue horses. Elara watched from the window, her little face pressed against the frosted glass. As I carried the feed buckets, I marveled at how life could feel so heavy and so beautiful at the same time. The snow sparkled under the moonlight, and for a fleeting moment, I felt a sense of peace—a reminder of why I was fighting so hard.

When Todd finally left, unable to bear the weight of his own battles, it felt like the end of an era. The shop we had built together, the community we had nurtured, the dreams we had shared—all of it seemed to crumble in his absence. Closing the shop was one of the hardest decisions I've ever made. But as I told Elara, sometimes you have to let go of the old to make room for the new.

Through it all, I found solace in small moments—the laughter of friends, the quiet strength of nature, the unconditional love of our rescue animals. Elara and I leaned on each other, finding light in the darkest of times. I spent hours walking the farm, the crunch of leaves underfoot grounding me. I journaled by the fire late at night, pouring my heart onto the pages as Elara slept soundly nearby.

The day we planted a new garden together felt like a turning point. Elara giggled as she pushed tiny seeds into the soil, her hands covered in dirt. “Mama, this one’s for the butterflies,” she said, pointing to a

patch where wildflowers would soon grow. I nodded, the lump in my throat too big for words. In that moment, I realized how much she had taught me about resilience and hope.

I fought for my child, for myself, and for the belief that even in the face of unimaginable hardship, we could still rise. And in the end, that fight became its own kind of freedom.

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## CHAPTER VIII:

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### A SOLACE FOUND, A STRENGTH FORGED – 24TH JULY

The hearing, like a distant ship perpetually delayed by a storm, kept drifting further from my reach. As the days stretched on, Elara flew off to Turkey, leaving me adrift in a sea of uncertainty. Her calls painted a mosaic of discomfort and realization—Karen’s biting words, Chad’s overbearing presence—each detail a crack in the carefully constructed facade of her world. It was as though she was awakening from a dream, glimpsing the truth that had always been obscured.

In these moments, I found solace in surrender. Isolation became my cocoon, a sanctuary where God’s voice resonated louder than the noise of my fears. Each morning, I practiced heart-brain coherence, igniting a radiant joy within that needed no external fuel. This was my armor, my shield, as I navigated the turbulence of life. The reflections of this inner work began to glimmer in my outer world, like sunlight catching on rippling water.

While Elara wandered through Turkey’s storied streets, I embarked on a solitary pilgrimage of my own to Florida. Honeymoon Island became my cathedral, where I walked the secluded stretches of sand, the salty breeze carrying whispers of divine reassurance. Each encounter—the kind souls at dinner bars, the conversations with energy healers, and even the silence—felt like breadcrumbs guiding me toward hope. I immersed myself in prayer, asking for guidance and protection, each request another thread in the tapestry of faith.

Returning to the mountains, my heart lightened as I prepared to reunite with Elara. The journey back was marked by the mundane—a flat tire on a winding mountain road—but even in these moments, grace found its way. Strangers offered help, their kindness a reminder that angels often work through human hands.

When Elara returned, her updates brought both relief and heartache. She was weary, her spirit bruised by Chad's reckless behavior and Karen's sharp edges. I watched her, my warrior child, grappling with feelings too big for her small frame. "You are safe now," I whispered, wrapping her in a mother's embrace. But safety was a fragile thing, threatened by Chad's escalating actions—erratic driving, emotional manipulation, and a ceaseless need to control.

The storm came to a head one evening as we sought refuge in an Airbnb, Chad's emails piling up like storm clouds. Elara, trembling but resolute, faced her father's messages with a strength that belied her years. Her voice, once hesitant, grew firm as she pointed out his gaslighting and guilt-tripping. I was equal parts proud and shattered, watching her carry burdens she should never have known.

Eventually, the weight of Chad's fear and fury forced my hand. With a warrant for my arrest and a pick-up order for Elara, I drove her to the sheriff's office, each mile a wrenching goodbye. "Have faith," I told her, my voice trembling as much as my hands. "This is not the end."

Leaving her there felt like tearing my soul in two. The drive away blurred with tears and disbelief. Seeking solace, I called Cowboy. His steady presence was a balm, his laughter a faint reminder that joy still existed. That night, we shared stories and quiet moments, his guitar strumming notes of comfort. The darkness of the day gave way to the warmth of human connection, however fleeting.

The days that followed were a blur of court hearings and unanswered questions. Chad's accusations were as relentless as they were unfounded, but my resolve never wavered. With each court appearance, I grew stronger, the fire of my inner world burning brighter against the cold machinery of the legal system. When the judge dismissed Chad's most egregious demands, it felt like a sliver of justice piercing through the shadows.

Life, in its unpredictability, continued to weave moments of grace and growth. My walks became prayers in motion, each step a meditation on resilience. On one such walk, I encountered an eagle, its majestic flight a symbol of freedom and perspective. It reminded me that even in isolation, I was never truly alone.

As time unfolded, Cowboy and I drifted in and out of each other's orbits. His struggles mirrored my own, both of us navigating the wreckage of past wounds. There were moments of joy, like sunbursts through a cloudy sky, but also the inevitable shadows of unresolved pain. "Don't fall in love with me," he had warned, his fear disguised as detachment. Yet, in his presence, I found fragments of solace, even as his walls remained firmly in place.

Through it all, my connection to God deepened. Each challenge became an opportunity to practice surrender, each triumph a testament to the power of faith. The whispers of divine guidance grew louder, steering me toward a future unburdened by fear.

Standing at the precipice of a new chapter, I felt a profound gratitude for the journey that had brought me here. The pain, the joy, the isolation—it had all shaped me, tempered me, prepared me. I was no longer merely surviving; I was thriving, anchored in the unshakable truth that home is not a place but a state of being.

And so, I walked forward, the echoes of the past fading into the distance, the light of hope illuminating the path ahead.

As the weeks rolled on, the rhythm of life found its cadence once more. My mornings became sacred rituals—a symphony of meditation, prayer, and gratitude. Each day, I awoke with the intention to radiate joy, to be a beacon of light in a world often shrouded in shadows. And in this space of inner peace, opportunities began to unfurl like blossoms in spring.

Elara, though still navigating the complexities of her world, started to find her voice in unexpected ways. One evening, she shared a poem she had written—a raw, beautiful piece about resilience and hope. It was as if she had taken all the chaos and distilled it into art, her words a reflection of the strength that had been forged in the fire of her trials.

Cowboy's presence, though intermittent, remained a comforting thread in the tapestry of my days. There were nights when we would sit under a blanket of stars, the silence between us speaking volumes. He played his guitar, and I listened, the melodies weaving stories of their own. "You've got a way of finding the silver lining," he said one night, his voice low and warm. I smiled, knowing that the silver was often hidden beneath layers of hardship, waiting to be uncovered.

But not all moments were serene. The hearing loomed ever closer, its weight pressing down like a storm cloud on the horizon. I knew the stakes were high, the outcome uncertain. Yet, I refused to let fear dictate my path. Instead, I leaned into faith, trusting that the journey—no matter how arduous—was guided by a higher hand.

The day of the hearing arrived, and I stepped into the courtroom with a calm resolve. My attorney's words echoed in my mind: "Hold your ground. Speak your truth." And so, I did. The proceedings were intense, the accusations a tangled web of half-truths and exaggerations. But through it all, I held fast to the truth that lived within me, knowing that justice, like the morning sun, would eventually break through the darkness.



When the judge ruled in my favor, a wave of relief washed over me. It wasn't just a victory in court; it was a testament to the power of perseverance, of faith in the face of adversity. As I left the courthouse, the weight on my shoulders lifted, replaced by a quiet strength. I called Cowboy to share the news, his familiar chuckle on the other end of the line a reminder that life, despite its challenges, had its moments of sweetness.

The journey was far from over, but for the first time in a long while, I felt a sense of closure. The road ahead stretched wide and open, the possibilities endless. And as I looked to the horizon, I knew that whatever lay ahead, I was ready—heart full, spirit unyielding, and eyes fixed firmly on the light.

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## CHAPTER IX:

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### THE TURNING POINT

Todd Stone left just before we were about to renew our lease on our shop—a timing so precise it felt cruel, like a symphony cut short before its crescendo. Left alone, I was forced to dismantle the life we had built, piece by piece, item by item, until the final hour of July 31, 2021.

Every box packed and every item sold carried the weight of memories, of people who had journeyed across states to support us, of neighbors who had popped in just to offer a kind word. They had no idea how their gestures were not mere kindnesses but lifelines, threads keeping me tethered to hope.

August 17<sup>th</sup> was on the horizon—my 47<sup>th</sup> birthday. Or so I thought. When Thomas—who was a former TV and radio personality, and was also stuck in the past as the rest of us—asked my age, I confidently said, “Forty-eight.” It wasn’t until I called my parents, a moment of humor in my exhaustion, that I realized my mistake. That birthday became a patchwork quilt of joy and strain, stitched together with karaoke, laughter, food, and games under the barn’s weathered beams. But when Thomas and my father presented a cake marked with “Happy 48<sup>th</sup>” in bold, waxy numbers, the room filled with laughter that tasted bittersweet.

At the end of the night, barefoot on the farm, I walked into the embrace of solitude. The soil was cool beneath my feet, grounding me

as I whispered my gratitude, my grief, and my prayers into the night sky. Yet the universe, it seemed, had more heartache to deliver.

Joe, my friend and collaborator, had suffered a stroke. His body was failing him, organs shutting down like lights flickering out in an abandoned house. I was told not to return to Raleigh—blamed, inexplicably, for his struggles. From a distance, I did what I could: face-timing him through a mutual friend, whispering my love and forgiveness into a fragile connection. “I’ll help finish your book,” I promised. His response was faint but real, a final thread of connection before he passed the next day. Leaving the same way his mother had, drinking himself to death—gradual, and yet so so disruptive.

And as if grief were contagious, loss multiplied around me. Chad’s parents. Sherry’s mother. Death seemed to stalk us all, reminding me of the fragility of the bonds we cling to. Yet, amidst the chaos, I held onto one truth: the energy we pour into the world returns to us, shaped and amplified by forces we cannot see. God’s timing, I realized, often veers far from our own.

Thomas was a storm—unpredictable and powerful. He introduced us to a nano-technological based product with an advanced glutathione formula, and though I loved its promise, cracks in our relationship began to widen. His short fuse flared unpredictably, his anger a wildfire scorching everything in its path. Once, on a drive back from a night out, his temper erupted. He yelled, slammed the brakes, and drove erratically over mountain roads. My nervous system, already frayed, felt like a live wire. When we finally reached home, his drinking became the focus of my fury. I hurled his liquor bottles at his car, screaming at him to leave, to seek the help he so desperately needed. But the pattern repeated: anger, apology, promises, and my hopeful heart clinging to the potential of change.

Over time, I came to see the cycle for what it was—a dance of codependency, a choreography of hope and despair. I stayed, partly for

Elara, partly out of stubborn hope, and partly because leaving felt like failure. But even as Thomas' external tools for healing grew—brain treatments, new products, endless advice from well-meaning friends—his soul seemed untouched, locked away behind walls of pain and anger.

The farm became my sanctuary and my prison. Winters were brutal, a test of endurance against frozen pipes and dwindling bookings. But in those quiet, snow-blanketed months, I turned inward. Journals became my companions, meditation my refuge. Dr. Joe Dispenza, Neville Goddard, and Abraham Hicks were voices of reason in the storm of my mind, guiding me to focus on my inner world. “Change your energy, change your life,” they said. And I tried.

But Thomas' anger continued to flare, even in moments that should have brought joy. A night out at a rooftop restaurant ended with him berating a valet, his rage spilling over onto me. Back at the condo, his yelling left me in tears, locked out once again. Each blowup felt like a wave, eroding the foundation of our relationship. And yet, when he was kind, when his light shone through the cracks, it was blindingly beautiful. Those moments kept me tethered, even as the rope frayed.

When the flood hit Cruso on my birthday, August 17, 2021, it felt symbolic—a deluge washing away the old, carving a path for the new. Thomas and I tried to help, delivering supplies, organizing a community event with the support of our sponsors, and making so much difference with their product. But even this effort was mired in resistance and miscommunication. Thomas' fears and insecurities sabotaged progress, and I realized that his inner world was a reflection of the chaos he brought to ours.

The turning point came not in a dramatic moment but in the quiet realization that I was fighting a losing battle. Elara's pain became my compass. When she looked at me and said, “Mama, please sell the

farm,” her words pierced through every doubt. This land, this life I had fought so hard to preserve, was no longer our salvation. It was a cage.

Listing the farm was an act of surrender, a recognition that clinging to the past was preventing us from stepping into the future. Saying goodbye to the animals—the alpacas, the emus, even the blind emu and deaf pig who had brought so much joy—was like peeling away a layer of my soul. But it was necessary.

And then came Cowboy—Lucas, with his slow Southern drawl and steady presence. Meeting him felt like finding a river after years in the desert. He saw me—not as a project to fix or a partner to control, but as a person to cherish. He, too, traveled in the same boat as I did—both adopted and only children—and sought refuge under the same awning that life offered. Together, we worked on the farm, tackling challenges with laughter and camaraderie. When we both caught COVID, quarantining together felt less like a hardship and more like a gift—two souls finding solace in each other’s company.

For the first time in years, I felt protected, cherished. Lucas was my mirror, reflecting back the strength and worth I had forgotten I possessed. His steady hand on my back, his quiet laughter, his unwavering support—they were the antidote to years of turmoil. And yet, even as I leaned into this new love, I knew that my journey was far from over.

Selling the farm, rebuilding my life, reclaiming my relationship with Elara—these were the steps ahead. And as winter descended once more, I found myself not in despair but in quiet determination. The lessons of the past years had crystallized: our outer world is a mirror of our inner state, and true change begins within. The farm had been my sanctuary, my crucible, and now, it was time to let it go. To rise. To step into the unknown with faith, knowing that the impossible could become possible.

The day finally came when the animals were rehomed. It was a bittersweet symphony of farewells, with Lucas by my side as we loaded them onto trailers. The alpacas hummed nervously, the emus blinked their wide, curious eyes, and Nick the cow—always the stubborn one—refused to budge, a symbol of the deep roots I'd planted here. I stroked his coarse fur one last time, whispering promises of love and gratitude, before letting him stay behind with a neighbor.

With each animal that left, a piece of my heart went with them. Our donkeys; Sheena and Jolene, our pigs; Sergeant Peppa and Chuck Berry, Nick the cow, Oreos, Otto, John, and Darla, the goats, Romeo and Juliet, our beautiful peacocks. The alpacas; Surprise, Flash, Supernova, Smoky, JoyJoy, Sunshine, and Pumpkin, Kendall the cat, and of course, the menagerie of horses, chickens, other goats, bunnies, and so many other animals that I had cherished and loved and cared for, for so long. All moving on and finding their new homes and families.

Yet, as the barn emptied, I felt the first stirrings of freedom—a weight lifting, a door opening. The farm, once my sanctuary and my burden, was transitioning into a memory, a stepping stone to the life Elara and I were building.

Lucas became my anchor in this sea of change. We spent evenings on the porch, watching the sun dip below the horizon, its rays painting the sky in hues of orange and gold. He listened as I recounted stories of the farm, of Thomas, of the battles fought and lessons learned. His presence was a balm, his silence a comfort, his laughter a light.

One crisp autumn evening, as we sat bundled in blankets under a canopy of stars, Lucas turned to me and said, “You’re stronger than anyone I’ve ever met.” His words settled into my soul, a reminder of the resilience that had carried me through.

The farm sold in the late spring, its new owners eager to breathe fresh life into its fields. As I signed the final papers, a mix of relief and sorrow washed over me. This chapter was closing, but the story was far from over.

Elara and I moved into a cozy home closer to town, its walls soon filled with laughter and warmth. Lucas remained a steady presence, his love a quiet force that bolstered us both. Together, we began to dream of a future not weighed down by the past but buoyed by possibility.

And then, just last year, came the retreat—a luminous beacon in a sea of chaos, or maybe a reward for all that we had gone through. It was a week of profound transformation, where energy, science, and spirit coalesced into something almost magical. Each moment was alive with possibility. The ballroom thrummed with energy as thousands of us gathered to meditate, to release, to heal. I watched people shed decades of pain, witnessed the miraculous as if the universe had orchestrated a symphony just for us. A woman from the UK, burdened by a tumor in her ear, radiated light by the week's end. Her pallor replaced by color, her headaches dissolved—she stood as a testament to what is possible when the spirit awakens.

The morning meditations under the pale blush of dawn were transcendent. Walking amidst two thousand others, we became threads in a tapestry of collective healing, pausing only to surrender completely to the moment. Lying on dew-kissed grass, the sky seemed to open up, whispering promises of new beginnings. It was as if God himself had placed his hand on my shoulder, assuring me that I was exactly where I was meant to be.

The retreat culminated in an unexpected encounter. At a fundraising dinner, fate led me to sit beside the lead scientist of the program. It felt divinely orchestrated, as though the universe had conspired to remind me of my path. And then, as if plucked from a dream, Dr. Joe himself appeared. He looked into my eyes, saw the

journey etched into my face, and listened as I recounted how his teachings had lifted me from the abyss. When I showed him a photo from my darkest days, he studied it intently before turning to me with a smile that seemed to hold the weight of the universe. “Apply for our programs,” he said, and in that moment, the world shifted.

South Africa followed soon after, a balm for my weary soul. Martin and I embarked on a journey that felt like stepping into a storybook. The game reserves, with their sprawling landscapes and untamed beauty, breathed life into me. Elephants, majestic and wise, moved with a grace that mirrored the rhythm of the earth itself. One day, I even found myself swimming beside one, laughing as its tusk became my perch. Nights were filled with the sounds of the wild—a symphony of snoring elephants and distant howls. Each moment was a gift, wrapped in the splendor of a world untouched by chaos.

Yet, even amidst the joy, clarity surfaced. Martin, kind and steadfast, was not my match. His heart, walled off and guarded, could not intertwine with mine. It was a bittersweet realization, one that brought peace rather than pain. I chose to savor the time we shared, to thank God for the lessons and the laughter, and to release what wasn’t meant to be.

Back in North Carolina, life continued to weave its intricate patterns. A visit to Cowboy’s worksite rekindled a connection I thought had faded. His drawl, his steady presence, felt like home in a way I hadn’t expected. Trust began to rebuild, not just in him, but in myself—in my ability to discern, to navigate relationships with grace and authenticity. It was a quiet revolution within me, a soft unfolding of a new chapter.

Thanksgiving brought warmth and gratitude, a reminder of the community and love that surrounded me. Elara’s performance on stage was a revelation, her voice carrying strength and passion. I saw in her



the reflection of my own journey—a resilience that cannot be extinguished.

As the year wound down, I stood on the precipice of yet another transformation. The farmhouse awaited, a sanctuary where Elara and I would create new memories, unburdened by the shadows of the past. My work with Dr. Joe Dispenza’s teachings deepened, opening doors to serve others on their healing journeys. The universe seemed to whisper, “Keep going. You are exactly where you need to be.”

And so, as I stood on where I am now, and breathed in gratitude. I was no longer a slave to the external world. The darkness that once threatened to consume me had only revealed the brilliance of the light within. I had found freedom—not in the absence of struggle, but in the unwavering trust that God’s plan was unfolding perfectly. This was my testimony, my offering to the world: that we can rise, we can heal, and we can transform. One step, one breath, one moment at a time.

The lessons of the farm stayed with me, etched into my heart like the lines of an old, cherished map. I had learned to let go, to trust, to find strength in vulnerability. And as I stood on the threshold of this new chapter, I knew one thing for certain: the impossible had become possible, and the best was yet to come.

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## CHAPTER X:

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### AFTERTHOUGHTS... GOING OVER THE DETAILS OF THE EVENTS

The journey through the unknown was never a one-time event; it became a constant rhythm of life. Each step forward was met with resistance so fierce it felt as though the air itself pressed against me, daring me to retreat. Yet, surrender wasn't defeat—it was the opening act of transformation. Each leap into uncertainty carried whispers of courage, reminding me, "I didn't come this far to only come this far." I held onto mottos like lifelines: "I am either winning or learning," and "Teamwork makes the dream work." They were the steady drumbeats in a symphony of self-discovery.

Time and again, I found myself saying, "There but by the grace of God, go I," or softly uttering, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." These words became the lanterns guiding me through the darkest of nights. They illuminated moments when strangers crossed my path, as if by divine choreography, and shared stories so vulnerable, they echoed my own struggles. In these fleeting exchanges, humanity revealed its deepest truth: connection heals.

Comfort zones, I learned, were gilded cages. To step beyond them was to forge greatness in the crucible of the unfamiliar. And though my timing often clashed with God's, I grew to understand that delay wasn't denial. It was divine timing—a meticulous unfolding of a plan far greater than my own. In the seasons of isolation, when loneliness wrapped around me like an icy shroud, I realized this solitude was

preparation. It was in these quiet hours that God worked within me, shaping the crown I was yet to wear.

The darkness wasn't a punishment; it was a forge, tempering my spirit and sharpening my resolve. It compelled me to seek light in places I had never looked before. God, I came to see, measures worth not by the surface but by the depths—the unseen corners of the soul.

Some people, I discovered, were anchors to a past I needed to release. It wasn't personal; it was vibrational. Our frequencies no longer aligned, and God's pruning process, though painful, was necessary. Each closed door wasn't rejection but redirection, a compass pointing me toward what was meant to be. Every battle, every setback, was not a curse but a lesson—a refinement for the next evolution of myself. My resilience became a silent testament to others, a flicker of hope in their storms.

The process wasn't designed to break me; it was meant to mold me. Each trial was a chisel, carving away the excess to reveal the masterpiece within. To step through the next door required not just readiness but transformation. I had to become the person capable of carrying the weight of my calling.

Faith was not an accessory; it was the foundation. Doubt knocked often, but each time, I met it with trust. Trust the process. Let go and let God. These mantras became my daily bread, nourishing me in moments of uncertainty. I stopped seeking approval from others, realizing my purpose was far too sacred to hinge on worldly validation.

When the vision comes, it is not a mere suggestion; it is a divine assignment. Many hear the call, but only the brave chooses to answer. I learned to turn my gaze inward, away from the cacophony of opinions and judgments. The journey inward was transformative. By disconnecting from the external noise, I found the still, small voice within—the voice that changed everything.

Trying to change matter by sheer will felt like pushing a boulder up a mountain. But when I connected to the soul realm, it was as if the wind itself lifted me. Mountains moved, not by my strength but by the frequency I emanated. I learned to detach from the ego and observe life through the eyes of the soul. By reprogramming my mind and raising my energy, I began to see the world not as it was, but as it could be.

Each morning, I practiced heart-brain coherence, aligning myself with joy, love, and gratitude. These weren't fleeting emotions; they were anchors, grounding me in a higher frequency. Rising each day with this elevated baseline felt like donning an invisible armor, readying me for whatever lay ahead.

My old self had to die for my new self to be reborn. This was no metaphorical death but a shedding of the layers that no longer served me. By regulating my nervous system, rewiring my brain, and reconnecting to my soul, I unlocked a trinity of power: mind, body, and spirit in harmony. The alternative was to remain shackled in lower frequencies, a prisoner of my own making. Only I could bridge the chasm of change.

Miracles, I discovered, are not rare. They are the inevitable result of aligning our internal state with divine energy. Change your energy, and you change your life. The first steps were the hardest, each one feeling like a defiance of gravity. But once momentum took over, the path unfolded as if it had always been there, waiting.

God works behind the scenes, orchestrating a masterpiece we cannot yet see. Every delay, every detour, is a brushstroke on the canvas of our lives. This is not a solitary journey; we are all threads in a quantum tapestry. What we send out into this field returns to us, amplified. The work begins within, but its ripples are felt far beyond.

## Passion Purpose Peace

*The journey is not for the faint of heart, but for those who dare to trust, to surrender, and to rise. In the end, it all starts with us—the seeds we plant in the fertile soil of our souls. And when we tend to this inner garden, the harvest is nothing short of miraculous.*

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**Change Your Energy And You  
Change Your Life.**

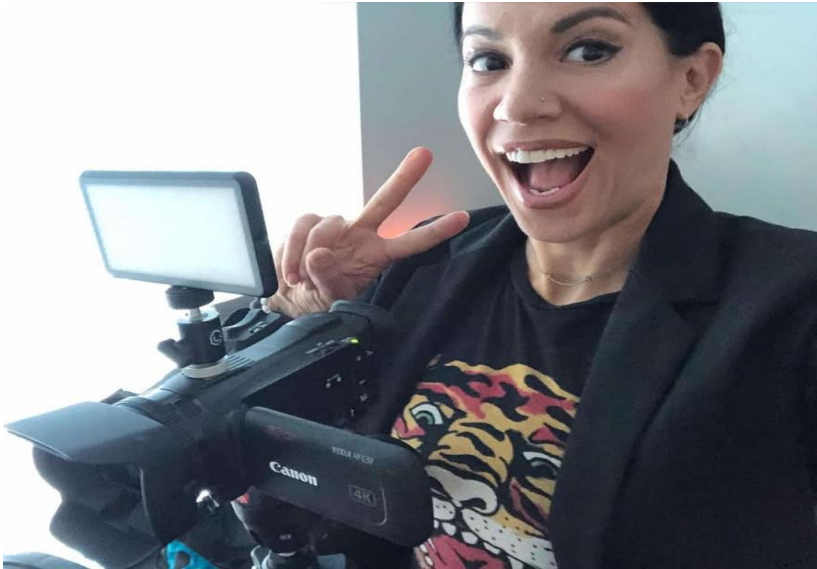
**Dr. Joe Dispenza**

IMAGE GALLERY





















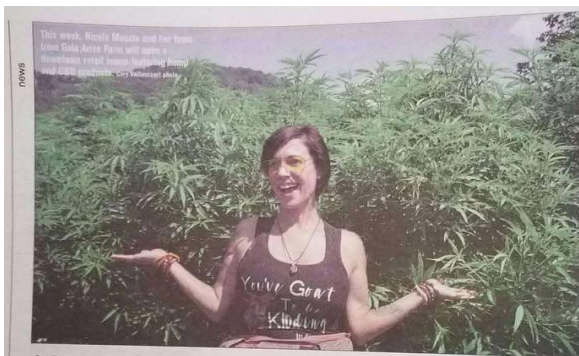












## 'Growing our gifts'

## Retail hemp shop comes to Waynesville

BY CORY VAILLANCOURT  
STAFF WRITER

**T**hat empty black and white building on the corner of Branner Avenue and Depot Street is about to be filled — with a touch of green.

"Knowing what this plant can do in all

applications, we're creating a place where we can gather the community and educate them, so it's not a scary thing," said Nicole Meschia, owner of Gaia Arise Farm and one of the few Haywood County cultivators of a very special crop that up until recently had been illegal to grow for decades.

In 2015, the North Carolina General Assembly created the regulatory structure for a pilot program that would allow hemp cultivation in accordance with newly-relaxed federal laws. After a series of modifications, hemp

cultivation in N.C. has finally become both agriculturally and economically attractive.

Mescia's been growing high-quality hemp on her farm for more than a year now, and is finally ready to bring an array of locally produced hemp products to a retail setting in downtown Waynesville.

"It's basically going to be an indoor year-round shabby-chic boutique farmers market," said Austin Bassett, who formerly created soaps, creams and oils at the now-defunct Verberna Soap Company in Canton.

Bassett will continue crafting his artisanal creations for Gaia Arise Farm Apothecary, which is currently scheduled to open this Saturday, Aug. 3.

"We'll have a full line of skin care products.

soaps, and a lotion bar where you can create your own lotions, body washes and shampoo infused with essential oils," he said.

Products sold at the Apothecary will utilize hemp grown locally, at Mescia's farm.

"A lot of people outsource that, but we have our arms around the whole process," she said. "It's a passion of all of ours—purity and high quality."

Some of those concoctions could include CBD, an oil made from hemp plants that purports to treat a variety of ailments both topically and by ingestion. Although formal medical studies haven't yet confirmed many of the specific benefits touted by CBD producers, anecdotal evidence abounds.

But so does confusion — since hemp is the same plant that produces marijuana, many people have trouble distinguishing between the two. Mescia, though, says there's no funny business going on at Gaia Arise Farm, and said she has had enough visits from law enforcement to prove it.

"They come out, they take a sample, and they test it," she said. Legal hemp must contain less than three-tenths of one percent THC, the intoxicating chemical that gives pot smokers that "high."

Gaia Arise Farm grower Greg Shelton said he enjoys a good relationship with inspectors, even if it is a long-distance one.

"They'll fly overhead and check your farm out," Shelton laughed. "We wave at them and they wave back. It makes us feel protected."

In addition to offering a variety of local organic produce including eggs and honey, the Apothecary will also feature donation-based consultations and educational seminars by Dr. Todd Stone, a proponent of plant-based medicines like that which can be made from hemp and thereby provide an alternative to pharmaceuticals that often cause his discomfort.

"We just want to gently expose to people to the fact that there are so many other tools out there than what we normally focused on," said Mescia. "If we can get a little bit of that into people's lives, it will benefit them."









