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# NorthEllisCoNOW

A Z I N E

JUNE 2025

## Art in All Forms

Dona Gassaway Mitchell  
writes, paints and performs

Also inside:  
Scavenger Hunt

In the Kitchen With  
Sree Pillai

Postal Customer

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Angel

Angel Morris  
North Ellis Co. NOW Editor  
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

*Father time ...*

The American Psychological Association reports that a "fathers' affection and increased family involvement help promote children's social and emotional development." There are many resources to assist men navigating this most important role. While children prepare to celebrate dad this Father's Day, June 15, here are a few key ways the APA suggests dads can be their best.

**Manage stress in healthy ways.** Kids emulate how dad (and mom) deal with day-to-day pressures. While the call of the TV at the end of a long work day is enticing, making time for a family walk, bike ride or quick game of catch is not only better for families physically, it sets an example for children and boosts everyone's mood emotionally.

**Recognize dietary habits.** Parents' attitudes around food play a huge role in children's diets. Not just eating healthy, but making time to communicate during family meals at least a few times a week is well researched for its positive impact on kids.

**Prioritize mental health.** If that means seeking professional help, do it for yourself and your kids. Being a role model is hard, but worth it when kids grow up to say, "Thanks, Dad."

*Happy Father's Day!*

June 2025  
Volume 20, Issue 6

## ON THE COVER



*Glenn Heights' Dona Gassaway Mitchell has built a career following her childhood introduction to the arts.*

**Photo by**  
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July 21 – ROISD School Board Meeting  
Aug. 2 – Back to School Bash, 8:30 a.m.  
Aug. 14 – First Day of School

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— By Angel Morris

*Dona Gassaway Mitchell recalls being introduced to the arts at age 4. “As a very active child, I participated in church, school and community plays. My mom’s hobby was sewing, and she made the costumes I wore. I remember going to department stores with her to purchase sewing patterns, then watching as she deftly stitched them together to create beautiful masterpieces that I proudly showcased on stage.*

“At the age of 10, I wrote my first unpublished book, titled *May I Adopt Your Twins?* which was a fictional story spanning five notebook pages, both front and back,” Dona, who is an identical twin herself, continued. “During that same year, I also wrote my first play called *Bad Girls*. Each experience was filled with the magic of storytelling and character creation.”

Growing as a writer, Dona continued to enjoy bringing characters to life. Her first of three published works, *Sculpture of a Miracle: God’s Glory*, shares the true story of 3-year-old Shamar and her family’s fight against a devastating diagnosis of Kawasaki disease. To raise awareness about Kawasaki disease — a rare illness causing inflammation of the blood vessels that typically impacts children under age 5 — Dona intertwined medical facts and emphasized the importance of early diagnosis with the family’s heartfelt narrative.

“The story begins with a fever and sore throat, immersing readers in a mother’s relentless determination to uncover the truth behind her daughter’s deteriorating condition. As Shamar’s health declined and the medical team struggled to find answers, the family’s journey became a powerful testament to the strength of prayer and the unwavering support of a community united by love and faith,” Dona described.

Dona’s other published works include *Celebrating Juneteenth with the Melon Tots: A Children’s Book* and *In My Power: A Female Journal*. *Sculpture of a Miracle* remains her favorite, however. “It allowed me to share my growth in faith and the power of prayer.

“God inspired me to write this book. It took me two



weeks to write the manuscript, but the publishing process lasted two years,” she calculated. “This included three rounds of editing, creating a book trailer, designing illustrations and making the front and back covers, as well as conducting research and writing my author bio and book summary.”

Dona also has a passion for writing stage plays, creating more than 50 productions over the past three decades. She has collaborated with professional actors and celebrities and is now determined to elevate her career in the film industry. “I plan to transition from short films to feature films and full-length movies,” Dona noted. “I’m also a performing artist, specializing in writing and performing monologues and poems.”

One of Dona’s biggest inspirations is poet Maya Angelou and her work, “Still I Rise,” which emphasizes perseverance in the face of adversity. The message spurs Dona to push herself to fulfill her own dreams. “Of course, I intend to continue writing books and expanding our family library. And, additionally, I’m learning music, so playing the guitar



and singing is next on my to-do list!”

As if this weren’t enough, Dona is also an award-winning visual artist. “I’ve won second and third place in the Creative Arts Professional Division at the State Fair of Texas and received Honorable Mention in the inaugural Juanita Craft Humanitarian Awards at the same fair,” she shared.

A 1984 graduate of David W. Carter

High School, Dona and her husband of 34 years, James, moved to Glenn Heights many years ago. “It’s a small, quiet town — a wonderful place for my three grandchildren to grow and engage, featuring state-of-the-art community facilities and entertainment options,” Dona praised. “I enjoy working with and supporting the mayor of Glenn Heights, Sonja Brown.”

As a mom of three grown children (James Jr., Johnique and Joslyn), Dona wants others to know it is possible to balance family life and career. As an artist, she hopes to encourage others to tap into their own creativity. “The best part of being an author is knowing that people around the globe are reading my words and connecting with my story. I wrote my first book at my kitchen table, often accompanied by soft instrumental music, with sunlight streaming through the blinds during spare moments in the day and sometimes under the moonlight at night,” she recalled. “My message to aspiring writers is this: Trust in your ability to write. It’s your unique voice to share with the world.” **NOW**

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## Zoomed In: Loren Smith

By Angel Morris

Red Oak Friends of the Library recently hosted local author Loren Smith, who discussed her book series. "I always wanted to publish a book but never had something inspire me as much as having my daughter, Aria. When we brought her home, one of my cats, Hazel, would spend every moment she could watching over her. *Nanny Cat* is told from the cat's perspective when her humans bring home their new baby," Loren described.

As a teacher, Loren sees the importance of a story people can relate to. The fourth installment of *Nanny Cat* (*Nanny Cat and Friends*), comes out this fall. "If anyone has ever experienced a new baby coming home from the hospital, they can relate to *Nanny Cat*," Loren noted. "It is great for first-time parents and new big brothers and sisters."



Red Oak ISD Education Foundation recognizes Joann Brewer with Prosperity Bank as a Top Partner.



City employees and City Council members participate in the annual Glenn Heights Cleanup Day.



Marilyn Nash wins the Ovilla Garden Club Patio Basket raffled at the Ellis County Master Gardeners Expo.





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Team Backrow Baptists, all graduates of Ovilla Christian School, play in the Midlothian Mens Basketball rec league.




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# CookingNOW

## IN THE KITCHEN WITH

### SREE PILLAI

— By Angel Morris



Sree Pillai discovered the benefits of baking when she picked it up as a hobby in 2019. “I found it was a stress reliever during my busy postgraduate schedule,” she shared.

Cooking memories are nostalgic for Sree. “My mom has an exquisite taste for cooking Indian dishes. She cooks incredibly fast, and I love helping her when I can,” she noted. “Watching her prepare ingredients is a true pleasure.”

A two-year resident of Ovilla, Sree enjoys spending time with her husband, Bijesh Bal, as well as pencil drawing, interior designing and food photography. Her favorite dish to make and eat is malabar biryani. “It’s a richly spiced, layered rice dish from South India,” she explained. “It’s a culinary masterpiece.” **NOW**

### Choco-Lava Cake

- 3/4 cup semi-sweet or dark chocolate chips
- 1 stick salted butter
- 4 eggs, room temperature
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour, sifted
- Cocoa powder, for dusting

1. Add the chocolate chips and butter to a heat-proof bowl. Melt in a double boiler method. Keep the bowl on top of a vessel with boiling water, with the bottom of the bowl not touching the water. Set aside to cool down.
2. Preheat the oven to 450 F. Crack the

- eggs in a separate bowl; beat on medium speed for 1 minute. Add the sugar, beating until the mixture is pale in color. Add the vanilla; mix until combined.
3. Pour the melted chocolate mixture into the egg mixture; mix well on low speed. Add the flour, folding gently with a spatula until no flour is visible in the batter.
4. Prep four ramekins or a cupcake pan by brushing with butter or oil. Dust the bottom of the pan with cocoa powder. Pour the batter into the pan/ramekins, filling 3/4 full. If using a cupcake pan, bake exactly 8 minutes (if overdone, the lava will harden).
5. Turn off the oven once the top of the cake is not wet looking. If using ramekins, bake 10-11 minutes. Check again for the doneness by monitoring the top of the cake.

6. Rest in the pan for 10 minutes; transfer to a plate. If using ramekins, you may eat it from the ramekin. Dust with cocoa powder; serve hot.

### Spicy Shrimp Fried Rice

*Marinade:*

- 2 cups shrimp
- 1/2 Tbsp. chili powder
- 1/2 tsp. pepper powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 1/2 Tbsp. ginger garlic paste

*Rice:*

- 1 cup basmati raw rice, cleaned, cooked, refrigerated until use
- 2 Tbsp. oil
- 1 Tbsp. ginger, chopped
- 1 Tbsp. garlic, chopped
- 2 green chilis, chopped
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 1/2 cup carrots, chopped
- 1/2 cup bell pepper, chopped
- 2 Tbsp. green peas
- 3/4 tsp. salt (divided use)
- 1 Tbsp. chilli sauce
- 1 1/2 tsp. soy sauce
- 1 tsp. tomato ketchup
- 2 eggs
- 1/4 tsp. pepper powder

1. *For marination:* Add the shrimp to a bowl along with all marinade ingredients; set aside for 30 minutes.
2. Add oil to a wok or skillet; heat well. Keep the heat in medium-high flame throughout the cooking. Sauté the ginger and garlic till slightly brown.
3. Add the shrimp. Fry each side for 2 minutes. Add the chilis; mix. Add the onions; sauté until slightly softened. Add the carrots, bell peppers and green peas; mix well. Sauté till the carrots are slightly softened. Add 1/2 tsp. salt to mixed vegetables.
4. Mix sauces into the vegetables; sauté 1 minute.
5. Add 1/4 tsp. salt and the pepper to the eggs; scramble them. Add the rice and eggs to the pan, mixing well with the sauces. Serve hot; enjoy with any hot sauce.

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