

# NORTH HAVEN

## NEIGHBORS

Photo by Keeley Abigail  
Photography



**MEET DEBBIE PAUSIG**  
*Perseverance and Passion and Devotion*

OCTOBER 2019

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of North Haven.



Best Version Media®



## RESIDENT FEATURE

# MEET DEBBIE PAUSIG

## *Perseverance and Passion and Devotion*

By Jackie St. Peter | Photos by Keeley Abigail Photography

This month I sat down to talk with Debbie Pausig and her family. Debbie is 59, her daughter Kate is 28 and her son Dan is 26.

Debbie told me that she and her husband Perry met in the spring of 1977 when she attended a University of New Haven sports banquet. She described Perry as a lively free spirit, and a jokester. She said he sat across from her at the banquet table and ever so subtly brushed his finger from the corner of his mouth- into his mouth. She explained that it was the nonverbal action that shouted "Hey! You've got lettuce hanging out of your mouth and before anybody else sees it, I suggest you put it "in" where it belongs." "You look really, really silly!"

She met him again on the UNH campus that following September. They talked by a big shady oak tree in the cozy courtyard for 8 hours. That conversation carried on through a mixer that same night when the lights went out because the band blew a fuse. She said he caught her attention then and the rest became an incredible journey. They married in 1978.

Debbie attended University of New Haven and received a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice-Law Enforcement Administration & Master of Public Administration from the University of New Haven. She and Perry both went to UNH for Criminal Justice. Of interest is that Perry was hired on North Haven Police Department in April 1980. A test came up again for the fall of 1980 and he encouraged her to take it, just for the experience of test taking. She took it and passed! She found out on her 21st birthday that she got the job and was sworn in as North Haven PD's first female patrol officer in December 1980. She was sworn in with Bill Joslyn, North Haven PD's youngest officer at the time. She started the job exactly one week after completing final exams for her BS-CJ degree. The timing was perfect, she and Perry were coined a "Husband and Wife Team on the PD" when she was hired, however they worked opposite shifts. Later, Debbie earned a

Master of Public Administration. She worked with an incredible team of Men and Women and she tells me she is so proud to have served in her own community. They were especially supportive during Perry's long progression with Huntington's Disease. She says she was blessed to be an officer with the North Haven Police Department from 1980-2005. She retired with a career ending shoulder injury requiring a shoulder joint replacement. She says as she was convalescing from surgeries, Perry was dying from Huntington's Disease. I had met Debbie around this time when she called my home care agency to enlist us to help her with care for Perry. I immediately liked Debbie and I remember thinking what a strong woman she was. Everything she did was with a smile and unwavering devotion to her family.

Debbie had to reinvent herself after the loss of her lifelong career in police work and Perry's death from Huntington's Disease in 2008. Sr. Jacinta of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus approached her at St. Frances Cabrini Church and suggested that she get trained to facilitate bereavement groups in church. Her joke is that Sister's don't ask, they suggest. She says they laugh at that because they are now dear friends. She took her suggestion and was trained two months after Perry's death by Sr. Maureen O'Brien O.P. in the "New Day Program". She was the Director of the Bereaved, Separated & Divorced program at the former Family Life Office, Archdiocese of Hartford, in Hamden. She began facilitating bereavement support groups at St. Frances Cabrini in September 2008. At the one year anniversary of Perry's Death, February 2009, she sat in one of those support groups and realized that people were able to manage their grief better with support. She told me "I think it was God guiding me to my new future." She then researched master degree programs in therapy to formalize her new future. She chose the Master of Marriage and Family Therapy degree because it focuses on the "Family System". And, Huntington's Disease rocked her family system, and not in a good way. Southern was fortunately local and had the reputation as an excellent program with an experiential component. Because of this experiential component, it was one of the

best educations she ever had received. She received from Southern Connecticut State University-Master of Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT).

Next up was an Association for Death Education and Counseling-Certified in Thanatology (CT). She says she is proud to have this CT. Certified in Thanatology: Death, Dying and Bereavement (CT) is the Association for Death Education and Counseling's (ADEC) official recognition of practitioners and educators in the field of death, dying, and bereavement who meet specified minimum knowledge requirements measured through a standardized testing process. She tells me by earning ADEC's CT, you identify yourself to members of the public as: uniquely qualified to practice in your chosen field and better prepared to help the dying and bereaved in practical and profound ways. ADEC's Certification in Thanatology is unique - no other certification program exists in thanatology that requires professionals to both complete educational requirements and to pass a rigorous, comprehensive exam. Once credentialed, the CT must be maintained through continued education; re-certification is required every three years.

#### **Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Certified Thanatologist (LMFT, CT)**

The culmination of this reinvention has given me the privilege to wear many hats in my new professional world:

#### **LMFT, CT in private practice [debbiepausigmft.com](http://debbiepausigmft.com)**

She graduated from Southern and began a private therapy practice in North Haven. It is located in a residential neighborhood. Her focus is on grief & loss; adjustment from aging; illness; injury; death; relationship and job loss or changes which can result in feelings of anxiety or depression; caregiver anxiety, depression and stress; life cycle adjustment issues; long term and chronic illnesses; terminal illness and end of life challenges; beloved pet loss. In this neighborhood setting, she has the privilege and opportunity to see clients in a cozy office, hold session in the garden in nature or walk and talk during a stroll in the neighborhood. This type of setting just enhances the compassionate and experiential nature of her work.

She helps people adjust to changes in their lives from "what was" to "what is", their NEW NORMAL. She states "this adjustment brings my client back to the living after a loss. Some of life's losses are inevitable in order to grow, yet sometimes we get stuck. I believe each client holds the answer to moving forward. The answer is their own pearl hidden within themselves. We work to find this pearl which is their own gift of moving into the future."

#### **Professional support group leader - Huntington's Disease Society of America-CT Chapter (North Haven and Norwich groups)**

She says it took a few years after Perry died for her to recover from the harshest caregiver effects of Huntington's Disease. Once she got her focus on being a therapist, she decided that she did not want other Huntington's Disease families to suffer the way she did. In 2012 she states she "got back in the saddle" and involved with the Huntington's Disease Society of America and the Connecticut Affiliate. She started her very first HD support group in Norwich which is now 7.5 years strong! She told me other support groups have waxed and waned throughout the state of Connecticut as death changes the need of a caregiver support group. She was in Middletown, Danbury, Stratford and Norwich at one time. Now she facilitates 2 groups, Norwich and North Haven. They have another therapist that facilitates one in Fairfield. This year they officially became a Chapter of this all volunteer organization lead by Susan McGann of Colchester.



#### **Hospice Bereavement Coordinator -VNA Community Healthcare & Hospice**

Debbie says extraordinary things occur in their own time. Three years ago, she was asked to apply for a position of Hospice Bereavement Coordinator with the VNA Community Healthcare. This VNA agency is now 109 years old! They were just forming a new hospice program. Debbie was hired to be on a team that created the foundation of this new program. "Talk about an honor and a privilege!", she stated. She said "there is no doubt that Perry lead me to this incredible team that keeps me in awe every week with the wonderful compassionate and caring work they do. Somehow, he was leading me to a program that would one day care for Huntington's Disease patients in hospice."

#### **Author - An Affair Worth Remembering With Huntington's Disease, Incredible Love & Intimacy During an Incredible Illness, (Paperback & ebook, LULU.com)**

Debbie says she started writing a book about her life as a caregiver for a loved one with Huntington's Disease just after Perry died in 2008. She put her notes aside in 2009 when she went back to school at Southern for the MFT. She says her thought was that she would be learning a great deal about herself in this new education process and she did. Thoughts of the book changed in June 2014 when she attended the 29th Huntington's Disease National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky as the CT-Affiliates Representative for Leadership Day. She says it was the first time that she was immersed in an environment of Huntington's Disease "inclusion", a HD Family reunion

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of sorts. She had the honor and privilege to meet and witness the interactions within and between HD families including caregivers for those persons, persons at-risk, children of these families and the friends and family who love and support them from across this great country. She says some connected by Facebook finally met face to face. "Tonight's Gonna Be A Good Night" was a theme played. What she witnessed became the springboard for her to finally write and complete the book. It was self-published as a paperback in September 2014 and launched as an ebook in January 2016. A teaser of the book is on her website [debbiepausigmft.com/an-affair-worth-remembering.php](http://debbiepausigmft.com/an-affair-worth-remembering.php)

**Professional workshop presenter, Bereavement facilitator trainer**

She presented workshops at the 2015 Huntington's Disease National Convention in Dallas. She conducted workshops in the past at the Mercy Center, Mercy by the Sea in Madison, CT. She also trains groups of bereavement facilitators in the New Day Program as requested. She presents workshops to groups on grief, loss and caregiving as requested. She also presents workshops to professionals on various subjects.

Debbie says her hobbies include doing short term crafts that take less than 4 hours. She likes having a finished product in a reasonable amount of time. Otherwise she says she would have a room full of supplies and partially finished projects that "someday" she would get to.

She says she likes cooking for friends & family and enjoys watching company eat the finished product. She says it reminds her of the matriarch grandma who would spend the day in the kitchen and relish the witnessing of her meal being appreciated. She likes to bead with a purpose, write, read, music of many genres, Bible readings, the outdoors and take drives to "nowhere" and "everywhere" because they all are adventures. She loves to watch the birds in her back yard. They are her therapy. She appreciates the perennial garden flowers that her late mom planted and blessed her with their continuous growth. She loves her planted garden flowers especially when she doesn't forget to water them. "Yikes! This has been a tough hot summer for continuous color in my yard" she says. She loves when the hawk visits her on occasion. She says she thinks that is Perry's Spirit Animal. She loves her cats, "I so love my cats" she says. They help her take note of being in the present. They give and receive such unconditional love and are quite entertaining for her.

Girl Friends, "I suppose we are a hobby for each other." says Debbie. "We keep ourselves entertained, we listen, we cry together, we celebrate together. It took me a good 50 years to realize just how important it is to have a true "sisterhood". I worked with 48 men for 25 years and never had the opportunity to bond with a group of girls. I'm older, wiser and more blessed than ever to have friends I can call my "sisters". I know that they will be there for me as I them. As we now are the 'Golden Girls.'" Debbie says of the most importance, she has learned to just "Be". She enjoys "alone and quiet time", she enjoys her private space. "It takes me away from the rat race and grounds me. It is great selfcare."



Debbie says she was raised Catholic and practices that faith. She belongs to a Small Christian Community prayer group associated with St. Frances Cabrini, now St. Elizabeth of the Trinity. She enjoys visiting different Catholic Churches and experiencing the opportunity to visit other places of worship to broaden her awareness of God's presence and his people.

**Debbie volunteers at:**

- Connecticut Chapter of the Huntington's Disease Society of America (CT-HDSA) is her biggest volunteer involvement. It is an ALL VOLUNTEER run organization. She is a support group leader only 3 hours a month. The rest of the time is helping the families when she can through email or phone, speaking at educational events, volunteering at fundraisers and whatever she can do within her limits to contribute to that organization. She is a Board Member, "Family Services Chair" is the position.

- Got Girlfriends? She is a co-host on the Citizens TV talk show where I was a founding member of. The host of Got Girlfriends is Peaches Quinn and other co-hosts are Jan Mazziotti and Kim Kasparian. Every other month they interview women who have reinvented themselves, have overcome challenging circumstances and do extraordinary things. It's all about empowering and celebrating women. Episodes can be found on vimeo.com
- Debbie lends a hand when & where I can and being mindful that she also needs to care for herself. She states that she burned out from caregiving once. "I am just finding myself and purpose. I am mindful not to go down that rabbit hole and lose myself again" she says.

Debbie states her children are adults and do their own thing. They are supportive with the Huntington's Disease efforts. She says they are three adults who live under the same roof and often ships that pass each other. They are discovering who they are and where they want to go to blaze their own paths. They are all a work in progress.

Debbie explains that through the challenges of experiencing long progressive illnesses and deaths at young ages of both their father and live in grandmother, they are different. They have experienced the world differently through the caregiving process and grieving process. They understand the fragile state & temporary nature of life. Because of these profound losses they value life, family and friends. They enjoy celebrating life and its accomplishments on a much different level. Nothing is taken for granted. We have a special love.

Debbie says their dear beloved Tubby died at 19 years old in July. She and Katherine "visited" a couple of rescue shelters to get some kitten love and kitten therapy. Never imagined that Sylvia & Edgar would capture their hearts so fast. Then they brought Dan to meet them. Edgar took to Dan like a magnet! Not to be hasty, they visited the shelter again 3 times in the following weeks only to realize their beloved Tubby did not want us to be cat-less for long.

"There are MANY stories to tell. If you are a cat lover, you know how special these furry friends are. They have been and continue to be the best therapy for us. Our hearts remain full because we found a special place within each other called love" says Debbie.

They live in what Debbie believes was called "Sandy Acres". She has lived there 38 years. They moved into North Haven shortly after she started her job at North Haven PD. They wanted to be close to work and part of the community they served. They did their research "on the job" and learned it was a safe neighborhood. She says today, it remains a quiet and safe neighborhood. They moved into an established neighborhood of houses built in the late 40's to the early 60's. The fact that it was an established neighborhood, quiet and had sidewalks for walking was a huge draw she said. They did not want to move to a neighborhood that could ultimately be bought up by commercial properties. They are just far enough away from those areas. They are both a quick drive and a reasonable walking distance if necessary.

When asked what she loved about her neighborhood she says Perry and she were 21 and 23 when they moved into their house. Their neighbors at the time were the age of her parents so it was very comfortable being the "New Kids on the Block". As some of the neighbors aged they helped watch over them as good neighbors do. These elders became adopted grandma, aunts and uncles to the kids when they came along. Those neighbors in the closest proximity have since passed away. Debbie says she is now one of the elders in her immediate group of houses and gets to witness new families with children move in. "It is a beautiful to see life continue."

Debbie enjoys the walkability of their neighborhood. She says her neighbors are wonderful. They continue to watch out for each other as needed. Everyone is willing to help when they can. Snowstorms are proof of that as well as the microburst that touched us all in May 2018. She says it remains the type of neighborhood that is easy to wave or say hi in passing. She says she knows the mail carrier and delivery people appreciate that. It is the type of neighborhood that gives out bottles of water to the walking mail carrier and sanitation workers on hot summer days. That is community appreciation! Debbie says "I love my community. I am blessed to be here and hope I get to grow further here."

She says everyone is pretty independent. Coffee dates with Galit and Sushil on our back decks is as good as it gets. Making hot chocolate for a special set of other neighbor twins, Emma and Miles, and releasing

butterflies with them was another thing they did. She states she loved watching them grow. They helped shovel snow and loved their cat Tubby. They have since moved and are now teenagers. These are her "bookend" neighbors directly on each side.

When asked about favorite family stories Debbie told me most of the stories are in her book that carried us through Huntington's Disease, their love story, the adoption, caregiving, death and beyond. She says they have been rebuilding and reinventing themselves since.

When asked about a Family Motto, Debbie told me:

- I supposed "Never Give Up" would be one.
- "Tomorrow is a New Day" would be another.
- I try to live as I would sit in my car. I face forward, focusing on what is in front of me through the windshield, that's the big area. There is a reason the rearview mirror is small. It's the past and I'm not going that way. When I remember, I look back to the past, not remain in it.

I can reflect on it and learn from it. Then I can focus on what is in front of me, the future.

Debbie talked about a recent overnight trip to Boston for the Huntington's Disease National Convention in June. The most interesting part was that Perry's spiritual presence was huge. She says he sent her several signs that confirmed she was where she was supposed to be. "Signs from above are things that you just can't make up. It is part of our Continued Bond. This fellow just happened to be at the

beginning of the Team Hope Walk officially starting the convention. He was wearing a plain black ball cap boldly printed PERRY in gold. He was not part of it. He was just there!" says Debbie

When asked about a special message for her community, Debbie said "Make your part of this world a better place." Just like a puzzle, once all the little pieces are connected, we make a beautiful picture, "together." Kindness, patience and love for one another are things that cost nothing yet have an immeasurable ripple effect.

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Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at [jstpeter@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:jstpeter@bestversionmedia.com).



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# LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

## HELLO NEIGHBORS,

The air is getting crisper. We've been enjoying doing some apple picking and signs of fall. I think fall may actually be my favorite time of year. I love getting out the sweaters and sitting out by the fire pit at night. I hope you are all enjoying some of those things as well. Before we know it Halloween will be here.

Speaking of favorites, this month's family is near and dear to my heart. When I met Debbie and her family I was so taken with the love and devotion she and her husband had for each other and their children. I watched their journey and then witnessed Debbie reinvent herself to the person she is today and it is absolutely amazing. It goes to show that what we are doing today may not be what we will be doing 10 years from now or what we are meant to do. Sometimes our road takes us to new and different places and sometimes we need to just let that happen. I hope you enjoy Debbie's story.

As always, we are always looking for families to feature and we appreciate your input.

We are also looking for charities to support and highlight. Please let us know if you know of cause that we can spotlight.

*Jackie*

# EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS



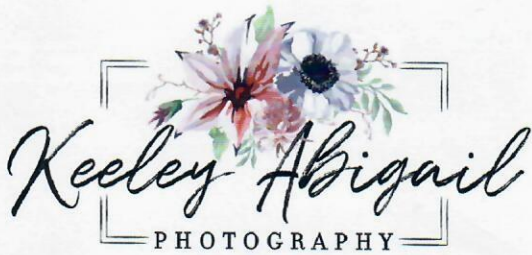
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