



# THE LINK

March 2026



## A Note from Next Chapter...

March is arriving gently this year-more like a chilly, damp lamb than a snowy lion and with it comes the welcome return of longer days as daylight savings time begins on March 8<sup>th</sup>. Spring always feels like a season of fresh energy and renewal, which is exactly the spirit we hope to capture with our Next Chapter gatherings.

You will note that our Urban Adventure NYC has been moved from March 1<sup>st</sup> to March 8<sup>th</sup>. We heard from several members who wanted to join but had conflicts, and one of the things we value most about this community is being flexible and responsive so as many people as possible can participate.

Speaking of listening to our members, we've also heard from quite a few of you asking about a **Next Chapter Book Club**.

We love the idea and are currently exploring how best to organize it-stay tuned as we work through the logistics.

As always, we welcome your ideas and suggestions for future programs. This community is built by all of us, and the more voices we hear, the better it becomes.

This month's **Worth it!** interview features one of our very first Next Chapter members-someone who truly embodies what it means to embrace a new chapter-**Lisa Raffaelli**. Along the way, Lisa channeled life's challenges into a passion for flowers, creating a beautiful floral design business alongside her work as a graphic artist. Lisa is proof that it's never too late to grow something beautiful in your next chapter.

Here's to a wonderful March and the promise of spring just around the corner!

*Anne & Mary Beth*

## Read On for...

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Worth It!

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February Game Night

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Membership Update

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Upcoming Events

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Refer a Friend!

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# WORTH IT!

**AN INTERVIEW WITH NEXT CHAPTER MEMBER, LISA RAFFAELLI**



## **THE PIVOT**

**What was happening in your life or career that made you realize it was time for a change - even if the path ahead wasn't yet clear?**

My most transformative pivot began more than fifteen years ago when my husband unexpectedly passed away, leaving me with two young children and a completely new reality as a single parent. In an instant, my life shifted. I was no longer just navigating a career—I was rebuilding a family, a home, and a future.

I had to overcome profound heartbreak, fear, and uncertainty. Grief does not come with a roadmap, and neither does suddenly becoming the sole provider and emotional anchor for your children. There were days when survival felt like the only goal. But even in that pain, something in me strengthened. I realized that waiting for life to feel certain again was not an option. I had to create stability, even while I was still healing.

Professionally, I was fortunate to hold a position that allowed me to work from home while staying connected to colleagues in an industry I loved—the hotel world and graphic design. That career became more than a job; it became a lifeline. It gave me purpose, flexibility, and a way to support my family while still being present for my children.

That time taught me resilience before I ever realized I was building it. It was the first time I understood that sometimes the pivot chooses you. The path ahead wasn't clear, but standing still was not an option. I learned to move forward—even when I couldn't see the entire future ahead of me.

Looking back, that chapter prepared me for every bold decision that followed. It showed me that I could endure, adapt, and rise—no matter how unexpected the change.

## **THE RESISTANCE**

**What fears, doubts, or practical concerns did you have to work through before taking that leap?**

When Marriott International acquired Starwood Hotels & Resorts in 2016, I knew my 20-year chapter was closing. What I didn't know was what the next chapter would look like. For the first time in my career, there was no clear roadmap—only the unknown.

I had to make a choice: stay comfortable or step forward in faith. I chose to bet on myself.

Starting my own design company, Turn Key Designing, meant walking away from security and into uncertainty. The fears were real and relentless. Would the clients I had built relationships with for decades still trust me? Would I generate enough business? Could I carry the financial responsibility of supporting my family? What if I failed?

The fear of starting over was overwhelming—but so was the thought of not trying.

Yes, it was scary. But fear became my catalyst. It sharpened my focus, strengthened my resilience, and forced me to trust the experience, relationships, and expertise I had spent two decades building. Instead of letting uncertainty paralyze me, I let it propel me.

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Taking that leap wasn't just about starting a business. It was about reclaiming ownership of my future—and choosing growth over comfort for myself and my family.

### **THE GROWTH**

**How has stepping into this new chapter changed how you see yourself--professionally, personally, and creatively?**

Stepping into this new chapter transformed me in ways I never anticipated. There is undeniable power in trusting your instincts and walking straight into uncertainty. I had no guarantees—only belief, determination, and a willingness to outwork my fear.

Professionally, I stopped seeing myself as someone who contributed to a vision and started seeing myself as the vision. Building my business from the ground up required courage, strategy, and relentless perseverance. I had to secure new clients, master the operational side of entrepreneurship, and say yes to opportunities that stretched me beyond what felt comfortable. Every challenge sharpened my leadership. Every risk expanded my capacity. I didn't just grow a company—I grew into a stronger, more decisive, and more confident woman.

Creatively, I experienced a new level of freedom. Without corporate boundaries, I was able to fully own my ideas, trust my design instincts, and elevate my work beyond what I thought possible. I realized that my creativity wasn't dependent on a title or an organization—it was mine all along.

Personally, my children were my anchor and my motivation. I was determined that this transition would not define them by instability, but by resilience. Supporting them financially was only part of the responsibility. I wanted to model courage, faith, and perseverance so they could see what it looks like to bet on yourself. The pressure was intense—but so was my commitment.

The obstacles I faced didn't break me; they revealed me. They showed me that I am far more capable, resourceful, and resilient than I ever gave myself credit for. When I look at my children and see who they have become, I see the legacy of those hard years reflected back at me.

This chapter didn't just change my career. It redefined my identity.

### **THE AHA**

**Was there a moment - big or small - when you knew you had made the right decision?**

During the COVID era, all of us were forced to confront uncertainty in ways we never expected. Jobs disappeared, income slowed, and daily life had to be reimagined. Although I was still able to take on some freelance work, it wasn't consistent. I knew I needed to find another source of income—but I also wanted it to bring me joy.

For years, I had loved working in my garden—growing flowers and creating arrangements for friends and small gatherings. It had always been a creative outlet, something that filled me up. One day, I asked myself, Why not explore this further? I reached out to a local florist to see if they might be interested in hiring me.

They said yes.

That simple yes became my “aha” moment.

I found myself designing in an entirely new medium—trading digital layouts for living, breathing creations. Flowers became another form of storytelling for me. What began as a practical decision to generate income quickly grew into a true passion. I started accepting side projects—weddings, corporate events, parties, and special occasions—and realized I wasn't just supplementing my work. I was expanding my creativity.

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The moment I saw my floral designs transform a space and bring people joy, I knew I had made the right decision. I wasn't starting over—I was evolving.

Today, I feel full. Full of gratitude. Full of purpose. Full of possibility.

### **THE WORTH IT**

**Looking back now, what makes this pivot “worth it” and what would you say to a woman standing at the edge of her own next chapter?**

Looking back, this pivot was worth it because I chose alignment over comfort. I chose growth over fear. I chose to believe that my experience, my talent, and my voice had value beyond the safety of what I had known for 35 years.

The journey was not easy. There were sleepless nights, hard decisions, and moments of doubt. But every obstacle I faced strengthened my confidence and clarified who I am. What once felt like loss became liberation. I gained ownership of my time, my creativity, and my future. That freedom alone made it worth it.

More than professional success, this chapter gave me something deeper—it proved to me that I am capable of rebuilding, reinventing, and rising when life demands it.

To any woman standing at the edge of her own next chapter: the fear you feel is not a stop sign; it is a signal that you are about to grow. Trust the wisdom you've earned. Trust the resilience you've built. You are far more prepared than you think.

Bet on yourself. Do the work. Walk through the fear.

On the other side is a stronger, more empowered version of you.

And she is absolutely worth it.

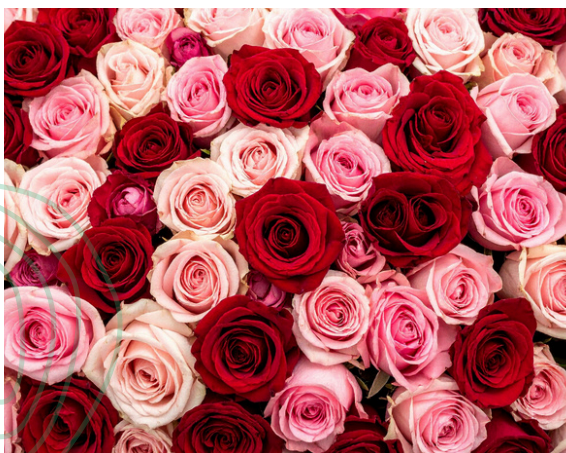


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# FEBRUARY GAME NIGHT

On Monday, February 9th, Next Chapter hosted a Valentine's themed Game Night for a cozy crowd. The game that was chosen for February was "***I Should Have Known That!***", a member recommendation! Thanks, Sharon!

Two teams battled each other, answering a series of common knowledge trivia questions. The delicious buffet was provided by the players and everyone enjoyed mingling and sipping spirits before the games began and even after!



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# Membership Update

**Next Chapter** is thrilled to welcome two new members to our growing community of like-minded women. Please extend a warm welcome to **Annemarie Graham** and **Jeannine Pascal**.

**Next Chapter** is better and more fun with friends! Please continue to spread the word.

All new members will electronically receive a New Member Welcome Packet shortly. You will be asked to complete a profile and include a headshot as well as provide contact information and fun facts to share with fellow members. The Membership Circle, our new member directory is being developed and will be live on our website in the coming months.



# Upcoming events

## MARCH

### Speaker Series: "Cultivated by Caryn"



Caryn Antonini, host of the podcast, "Cultivated by Caryn" shares global culinary and cultural experiences - **March 30<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm** - Location - CoCreate @GE Kitchens, Stamford

### About Caryn Antonini.....

Caryn Antonini is a seasoned entrepreneur having run Present Perfect, a high-end, customized gift service for the entertainment industry and subsequently, Early Lingo, a children's foreign language learning system. Most recently she launched Cultivated by Caryn, a global media brand with an emphasis on Culture · Cuisine + Comfort. Caryn is the host and producer of The Cultivated by Caryn Show, a podcast and radio show, exploring cultural and culinary experiences around the globe. She regularly features top industry guests on her weekly show.

Caryn is a graduate of the Georgetown University School of Languages and Linguistics, speaks 5 languages, is a 2x TEDx Speaker and has appeared on CNN/HLN, ABC, Fox News & Fox affiliates, CBS and NBC as a Food/Lifestyle Expert, Language and Culture Expert and Parenting Expert. Caryn hosted 12 episodes of a 60 minute cooking show for Community Forum/Danbury, CT in 2020. She is a member of IACP, World Forum Foundation and Advisory Board of Global Chamber. Caryn is an avid travel and resides in Connecticut with her two children.

**Admission is complimentary for Next Chapter members.**

## HOT FLASH

*Join Next Chapter's Urban Outing Adventure*

**New Date - March 8th**



**PRIX FIXE LUNCH AT THE GRAND BRASSERIE - GRAND CENTRAL**



**CITY VIEWS AT THE SUMMIT ONE VANDERBILT**



**COCKTAILS AT CAMPBELL BAR**

**\$135 PER PERSON**  
(DRINKS & TRANSPORTATION NOT INCLUDED)

## APRIL

### MENOPAUSE THE MUSICAL



#### COME JOIN OUR SISTERHOOD!

**April 9<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm** - The Palace Theatre,  
Stamford Center for the Arts

#### About the show....

Four women at a lingerie sale have nothing in common but a black lace bra AND memory loss, hot flashes, night sweats, not enough sex, too much sex and more! This hilarious musical parody set to classic tunes from the '60s, '70s and '80s will have you cheering and dancing in the aisles! See what millions of women worldwide have been laughing about for over 20 years!

#### Hot Facts

- Nearly 17 million people in 16 countries (more than 500 cities worldwide) have attended the performance.
- Longest running scripted musical in Las Vegas history
- Entertainers of the Year 2016 (Las Vegas)
- Internationally, the show has performed in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Philippines, United Kingdom, Slovenia, South Africa and South Korea.
- Stress reduction is advised for women who are going through The Change. Menopause The Musical® celebrates this time in a woman's life with laughter and sisterhood.

We have obtained a **limited number of tickets**. Visit our Next Chapter website for details.

### AND COMING LATER IN APRIL..... NEXT CHAPTER'S BLOOM BAR EVENT



Join us to celebrate Spring! Members will create their own floral arrangements, taking home a unique keepsake. It's a great way to bond with friends and nature. **Lisa Raffaelli**, a NC member and floral designer, will be our featured speaker and Bloom Bar facilitator. A fun night with friends is guaranteed!



**HELP US GROW OUR COMMUNITY OF  
INSPIRING MID-LIFE WOMEN.....**



*Anne & Mary Beth*



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