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THE
FISCHER FAMILY

OFFERING HEALING JOURNEYS THROUGH MUSIC



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I FIRST LEARNED ABOUT KRISTEN AND DOUGLAS FISCHER'S FAMILY – which includes their children Boden (15), Dylan (13) and Elise (10) – when a mutual friend shared about Kristen's community-building work with Music Together North Shore. I'm so happy to share their inspiring story.

The beginning – 2002

Douglas and Kristen met at The Lodge in Milwaukee – both out with friends.

"The moment we met, something sparked – both of us were genuinely curious about this person we'd randomly bumped into at a bar," says Kristen. "On our first date, we talked nonstop about family, our shared love of fishing and camping, and our mutual dreams of someday being parents."

"In fact, we talked for so long, I had to admit that I had a softball game to play at 9pm," explains Douglas. "So, I asked Kristen if she'd like to come."

So, there she was, on the bleachers, watching this guy she'd just met on their first date. "He hit homerun after homerun that night, on all counts!" Kristen kids.

Four years later, Douglas proposed at Kristen's northern Wisconsin cabin in Townsend. "A trail of gerbera daisies (my favorite) led me to the dock where he'd been waiting for hours," shares Kristen. "It was also the time when we found our first house in Whitefish Bay and put down roots in what we'd heard was a wonderful place to raise a family – a decision we're forever grateful we made!"

From Nebraska to Milwaukee

After graduating from the University of Nebraska, Douglas and his oldest brother moved to Milwaukee.

Douglas' parents both work in the medical field, he says. "My mother's a longtime nurse who began her career in the Army serving in the Vietnam War. My father has a prestigious career as a psychiatrist in both Nebraska and Wisconsin."

With a degree in psychology from the University of Nebraska and a passion for the medical field, Douglas was drawn to a career in pharmaceutical sales. First focusing on pharmaceuticals to treat various diseases, Douglas learned to build relationships quickly and discovered his niche in neurology.

"My career moves have always been driven by my intense desire to help people who face devastating diagnoses," he says.

According to Kristen, the top neurologists in the region respect him for his honesty, great communication, and incredible attention to the needs of their patients. Recently, he accepted a new role at his long-time employer, Amgen, where he now serves as the regional account manager for a drug that treats two extremely rare neurological diseases.

North from Chicago

Kristen grew up on the south side of Chicago. "Neither of my parents at-

tended college, and it was their dream for my older brother and me to have the best education possible," shares Kristen.

She fell in love with Marquette University after a campus tour guide let her into the Helfaer Theatre. "I asked, 'Can I walk onto the stage?'" she explains. "It felt so right. I never really knew if I'd make theatre a career, but I knew it would be a constant part of my life."

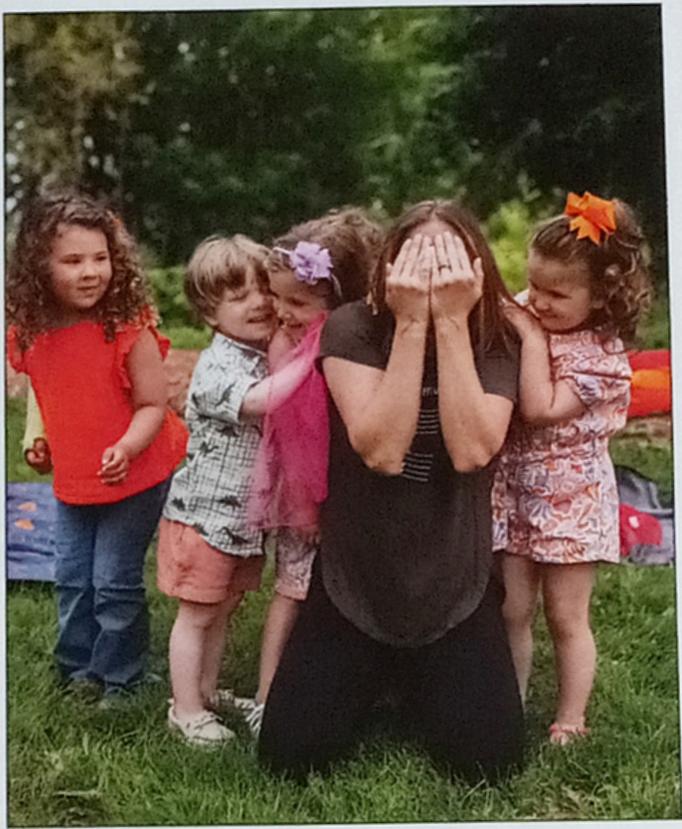
Kristen minored in theatre and Spanish and majored in communications. She combined her love of theatre with community engagement and became the development director at The Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, which ultimately led to a 15-year career in nonprofit administration.

While her day job was in the office, by night, Kristen was an active professional actress at local theatres, including The Boulevard Ensemble, The Skylight, and In Tandem Theatre. She was working 13-hour days, but loving every minute of it!

Navigating being a stay-at-home mom

Fast forward to January 2010, Kristen left her day job and her performing career to become a full-time, stay-at-home mom – a dream she always had.

"However, after the birth of my first son, my experience as a stay-at-home mom was not what I'd expected," Kristen shares. "I felt so isolated, even though I was surrounded by people. I really struggled in those post-partum months with anxiety and a deep sense of loneliness." While things did get easier after those first few months, Kristen found herself struggling with that same post-partum anxiety after the birth of her daughter and again after the birth of her second son. "It was mind-blowing



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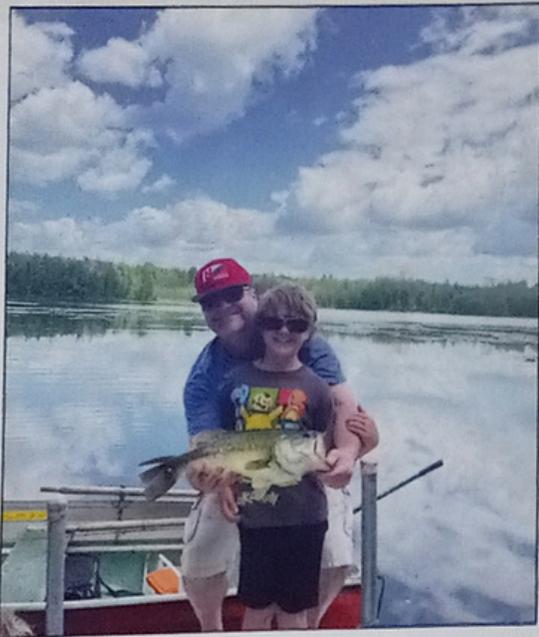
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The Creator Collaborative Team (from top left) Kristen Fischer, music director | Karen Gersch, co-choreographer | Joan Fieireisen, administrative manager | (front) Chris, founder and artistic director

to me that no one talked about any of this!" She craved a deeper connection to someone - ANYONE - who could relate to her experiences and admit that they too, struggled sometimes.

Launching Music Together North Shore

Given her musical background and her love of children, a friend suggested Kristen teach baby music classes. "I'd taken a few Music Together® classes with my children, but I never felt FULLY comfortable in my circle of music-making parents," she explains. "I wondered ... could I, as a teacher, have reached an anxious, shy mom like me?"

So, in 2016, Kristen became a certified Music Together teacher. "The curriculum uses research-based techniques proven to make an impact on newborns, toddlers, and preschoolers. It emphasizes the SO, or the silly quotient."

In 2017, Kristen started her business with just 17 families. During the 45-minute classes, Kristen felt transported to a joyful zone, cued into the kids, their nuanced responses, their hesitations, and also watching the grown-ups and realizing what resonated with them.

By the time Covid hit, she was working with 85 families and continued teaching online via Zoom. "I will never forget Mother's Day of 2020," says Kristen. "I played 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' and shared messages to the moms with little notecards about what a good job they were doing during these crazy times. Every little square on my Zoom screen held a weeping mother - I felt this tremendous connection to every one of them."

Post Covid, Kristen began a relationship with The Creator Collaborative Studio, run by Chris Feiereisen and his parents, Joan and Jim. She utilized their space to run her classes and was invited to help with their after-school theatre classes. "I soon found myself named music director at the studio, running a Children's Choir, and becoming an extension of their loving family." When The Creator Collaborative Studio outgrew its home on Marlborough and Silver Spring, it moved just five blocks west and invited Kristen and Music Together North Shore to join them. With more room, she was able to hire the studio's choreographer and Whitefish Bay mom, Karen Gersch, as a second teacher. In her new space, they currently serve more than 200 families a week. "Parents tell me, 'My child sings nonstop' or 'My daughter pretends to be you and runs music classes for all her stuffed animals' - that's wonderful to hear - but the feedback that REALLY matters are the notes from mothers who share, 'This class got me through the darkest days' or 'I made all my friends in that circle,'" she shares. "It's my goal to build community through music, and I think we're doing just that."

Three children, three schools

Douglas and Kristen's oldest son, Boden, will be a sophomore at Whitefish Bay High School in the fall. He's on the wrestling team and loves working with Coach K, whom Douglas says is an indispensable resource to the students.

Their daughter Elise is looking forward to her eighth-grade year, who, like her mother, loves to be on stage. "She's been in every production she could possibly fit in at The Creator Collaborative Studio and has performed at First Stage for the past years," says Kristen. "She adores Ms. Hammond, our beloved Middle School choir teacher."



Dylan, the youngest child, will land in the fifth grade this fall at Cumberland, and he's all about sports. He's earned a spot on the U11 Premier team at Bavarian and also plays at Craig Counsel Park every weekend with the Iron Birds. He's an avid reader and absolutely LOVES math and video games, according to his parents.

"We also have two of the most barky dogs on the planet, whom we love even though they're terrible," says Douglas. "And we're in the process of getting our saltwater tank – my hobby – prepared for new inhabitants after our 13-year-old porcupine pufferfish sadly passed away."

The Milwaukee life

The family loves living so close to Lake Michigan, exploring downtown, camping, traveling around our state, and of course, this amazing community. In 2006, the family bought a home on the 5100 block of Berkeley. As newlyweds, they spruced up the house, taking the 1960s out of it and giving it a wall-to-wall facelift.

"After three kids, we were toiling with the decision to leave the best block in the Bay (so many kids roaming the yards, playing while the grown-ups hung out!) for a larger home," says Kristen. "We ultimately bought our forever home – a beautiful 1930s Tudor in the Cumberland Forest area in October of 2019. Uninhabited for more than a year, it had squirrels living in the attic. But we've poured our hearts into repairing this home and putting the love back in."

Today, they LOVE hosting their kids' friends in their refurbished home. "We finished our basement with them in mind, with a popcorn machine, foosball table, and hopefully someday a full-sized shuffleboard table. Our house has become known for our Friday scratch-pizza nights, and we love that our home serves as a hub for their friends to gather."

