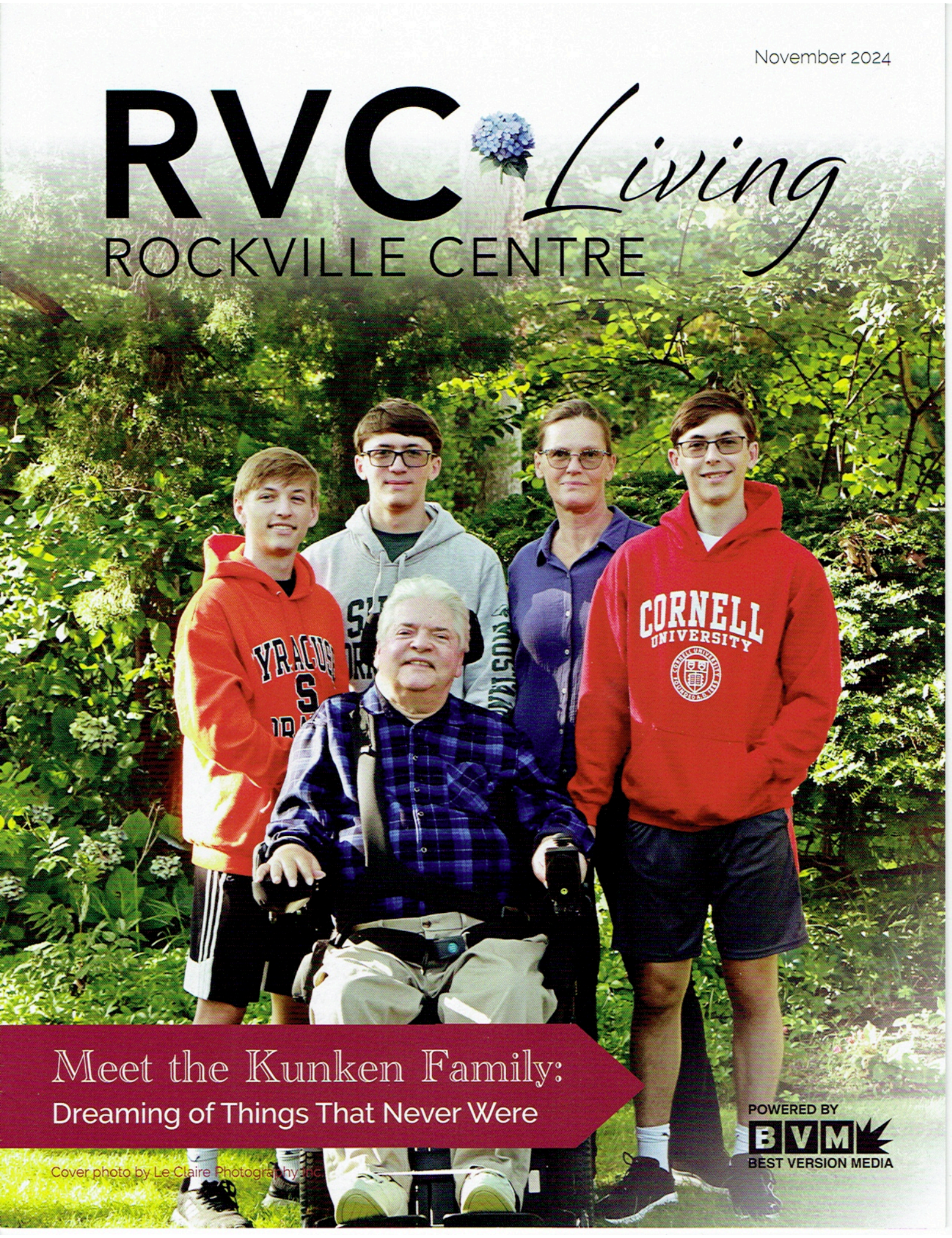


November 2024

RVC Living

ROCKVILLE CENTRE



Meet the Kunken Family:
Dreaming of Things That Never Were

Cover photo by Le Claire Photography LLC

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Meet the Kunken Family:

DREAMING OF THINGS THAT NEVER WERE

By Carol Hoenig | Feature Photo by Le Claire Photography Inc.

Some may wonder how it was possible for a young woman from Poland to end up not only marrying a quadriplegic, but having triplets with him. Chances are many people in town are familiar with this story since Kenneth Kunken wrote about it in his memoir *I Dream of Things That Never Were: The Ken Kunken Story*. However, for anyone else, I'm grateful that Anna and Ken Kunken took time to share their story with me.

Anna, who got her Master's degree from Academia of Economics in Wroclaw, Poland, said, "I worked as a marketing manager and promotional specialist back in Poland, but the lack of English language skills held me back. I decided to come here and immerse myself in English. The plan was to learn the language fast and go back to my country to continue my career in business."

But life took a different turn for Anna, who was hired to help Ken on weekends with his activities of daily living. She said, "I was very happy to have the opportunity to talk in English to Ken, a native speaker. Once we knew more and more about each other, our relationship changed."

Anna learned that Ken wasn't always a quadriplegic. When he was young and growing up in Oceanside, Ken participated in little league baseball and football. He was a member of the varsity wrestling and football teams at the high school, as well. Without a doubt he was extremely active and while studying engineering at Cornell University, he played on the lightweight football team. In 1970, though, in his junior year, he broke his neck while making a tackle during a college football game at Cornell University, severing his spinal cord.

As challenging as life was for Ken, he eventually returned to Cornell where he completed his Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering and a Master of Arts degree in Education. As if that wasn't enough, he also earned a Master of Education degree in Psychology from Columbia University. Then in 1982 he earned his Juris Doctor degree from Hofstra University School of Law and went to work as a Nassau County Assistant District Attorney where he eventually became a Deputy Bureau Chief of the County Court Trial Bureau.

When Anna said that their relationship changed, she meant that the couple fell in love, married and spent their honeymoon driving 9101 miles back and forth across the country. Apparently, the journey was just beginning because she and Ken



have been married for 21 years and have 19-year-old triplets, James, Joseph and Timothy. Yes, triplets! Yet, somehow, Anna not only found time to get an Associate Degree from Nassau Community College in graphic design but keeps active by running. She says, "I have been trying to keep in shape. Since March of 2020, to deal with the stress from the pandemic, I was usually running 10 miles around the neighborhood every day. For the past few months, I do only five miles a day indoors on a treadmill."

Ken adds, "She also helped develop my public speaking career and the writing and promoting of my memoir."

As for being part of Rockville Centre, Anna said, "We were very lucky to find a ranch house only four blocks away from the Park Lane condo that Ken had owned but was too small for raising triplets. After excessive renovations to make it accessible for Ken's electric wheelchair, we moved there in June 2006. At that time there were not too many young families on our block."

"Over the years, though, more families were moving in," Ken says. "It's great to talk to our neighbors while on our walks and see their kids grow. It's still close to the Rockville Centre and Oceanside villages, but we are a part of the Oceanside School district. We were very happy about the school district."

"The boys have been involved with Tae Kwon Do for eight years," Anna says. "They are now second-degree black belts. They still participate in classes at the High Performance Martial Arts located at Sunrise Highway in Rockville Centre. They were

instructors there as well. For the past two years, they have been studying Brazilian JiuJitsu at the same school, but now they are away in college."

Timmy is attending the Newhouse School of Communications at Syracuse University. He is interested in politics, especially the politics of South America. Anna says, "His goal is to be a journalist, so mastering Spanish (his minor) and studying for his second major at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs should help him."

Joseph followed his father to Cornell University and plans to major in engineering. He is also trying to perfect his French and recently developed a passion for bouldering.

James has been interested in renewable sources of energy for some time. He had quite an eclectic interest before that as well, studying American Sign Language and teaching himself Morse code just for fun. He has been studying renewable energy at SUNY Morrisville, with a plan to work on wind turbines.

"It's good that he loves heights," Anna says. "It started from trying to make it through the most difficult treetop trails at the Catamount Zipline in the Berkshires."

When asked what it is that they like about the neighborhood, Anna replied that they like the fact that they can walk to restaurants, the movie theatre, and bowling alley. "We used to walk to St. Agnes Cathedral every Sunday with a stop for a donut at Dunkin or ice cream at Ralph's on our way back," Anna says. "We were regulars at the International Delight Cafe. After it was sold, we made Press195 our favorite. Last year, though, we were delighted that the Café on The Park offered the same kid friendly atmosphere with our favorite dishes our boys grew up loving. It turned out the same family that used to own the International Café, runs this place!"



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Ken and Anna have fond memories of taking the boys trick or treating, with Ken saying, "There are still people around that remember our two-or three-year-old boys running from door to door dressed up as Winnie-the-Pooh characters asking for candy. It was also a tradition to host a picnic for some of our friends and family on the evening of the fireworks every July. We would visit a street fair every time there was one in town. For years, we would watch the St. Patrick Parade. Twice we were marching with the St.

Mark's Nursery School, which two of our boys attended for two years. One of the first places we took our boys to was the Rockville Centre Library. They participated in everything there from a reading circle to the Legos club, movie screenings and concerts. Anna and I went a few times to attend the writing workshop. After my book was published, the library held a book signing event for us."

It's safe to say that Rockville Centre has been a welcoming neighborhood for the Kunkun family. Both Anna and Ken say that they want to use this opportunity to thank their neighbors for helping over the years. It was especially appreciated when their boys were young. Anna concludes, "From starting our snow blower, cleaning the fence from green goo, fixing sliding doors, cleaning snow from the driveway, connecting us with service people – small things, but we remember and appreciate them all."

I want to thank the Kunkens for sharing a bit about who they are and why they like living here, but there's so much more to discover about this family and I recommend getting a copy of Ken's inspiring memoir *I Dream of Things That Never Were* to learn more.



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