



## The People Behind the Puzzles

### Patrick Blindauer (he/him) – St. Louis, MO

Patrick has always loved puzzles and remembers rifling through his dad's GAMES magazines as a kid. He started solving crosswords daily as an adult to quit smoking, which led to constructing and having his first published puzzle in 2005. He has worked for Sterling Publishing and has self-published several projects through Kickstarter and his website ([patrickspuzzles.com](http://patrickspuzzles.com)). He's really fond of his dollar-bill-shaped New York Times puzzle from 10/6/2008. His 7-year-old daughter has enamored him with her language development, from speaking to reading, and they enjoy playing board games together.



### Laura Braunstein (she/her)

Laura has been solving crossword puzzles most of her life and began constructing in 2015. She worked alongside Tracy Bennett to co-found The Inkubator ([inkubatorcrosswords.com](http://inkubatorcrosswords.com)). By raising two know-it-alls, she has learned how much she doesn't know, and she says the thing they like to do most together is argue – it's a family tradition.

### Sam Buchbinder (he/him) – New York, NY

Sam has been constructing for almost 13 years now. In 2014 he had his first crossword published in the New York times, and this past year they published his 10th. He recently got up the gumption to submit his first ever Sunday puzzle and is eager to see how that goes. He loves seeing his kids, ages 3 and 6, figure out how to do new things, and he is especially proud when they finally get one of his jokes or tell their own funny jokes. He and his family enjoy visiting playgrounds around NYC, riding scooters, and visiting museums.



### Laura Dershewitz (she/her)

Laura began constructing in fall 2021 and has since spent many happy hours tumbling down theme- and clue-related rabbit holes. Her puzzles have appeared in Universal, LA Times, and The Inkubator. Laura's favorite part of parenting is watching her 14-year-old son become his own person. She finds it fascinating to see what makes him laugh, how he likes to spend time, and what he cares about. Laura enjoys traveling with her son because he's very open-minded and loves visiting new places and having new experiences. His delight in the world helps her delight in it as well.



### Trent H. Evans (he/him) – Catonsville, MD

Trent started constructing in 2017 after only solving crosswords regularly for a few months. He found constructing to be an even better puzzle than solving. His first published puzzle ran in the New York Times in 2018, and has since had dozens of puzzles published in various outlets. That first "yes" from Will Shortz still rings as the biggest thrill he's had in puzzling. His five kids, ages 17, 18(3), and 28, keep him young. Watching their journeys from infancy to adulthood has been a privilege like no other, and their fresh eyes help him stay less jaded. Together, they love laughing and making fun of the absurdity all around them.





## Dan Feyer (he/him) – San Francisco, CA

Dan edits cryptic crosswords for The Browser and American crosswords for Jonesin', People Magazine, and others. He holds the Guinness record for winning the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament eight times, including six years in a row. A pianist and music director, Dan has worked for the last few years as a substitute keyboardist and conductor for the national tours of *Hamilton*. He lives with his wife Gretchen and two-year-old son Levi.

## Matt Forest (he/him) – Rochester, MN

Matt has been solving crosswords since childhood and decided to dabble with construction in late 2021. He has since started his own puzzle blog ([mattsword.com](http://mattsword.com)) and landed his first mainstream publications in the LA Times and Universal in December 2022. He enjoys watching his kids, ages 6-months, 3, and 5, grow through every phase of childhood, and says there's no better feeling than seeing things click when they learn something new. He loves going on bike rides and enjoying the outdoors with his family.



## Katie Hale (she/her) – London, UK

Katie grew up solving crosswords with her dad and began constructing during the pandemic when she needed a little mind space away from home-schooling and watching the news. She gives credit to the amazing Christina Iverson for mentoring her along the way. She loves watching her 6- and 10-year-old develop their personalities over time, although she can still recognize essential characteristics from when they were babies. She loves to make watercolour paintings with her kids, and is always surprised with their creativity and how they express different feelings about their art.



## Sally Hoelscher (she/her) – Iowa City, IA

Sally was solving a crossword puzzle in 2018 when she thought, "I wonder who constructs these things?" which led her down a line of questioning that landed on her realization that she, too, can make puzzles. She has since been published in a number of outlets. She also writes a daily blog about the USA Today puzzle and edits for Lil AVC X. From parenting their now 27- and 29-year-old children, Sally and her husband have learned that everything is a phase, whether good or bad. They enjoy any opportunity to spend time together as a family. In April 2022 they made many great memories hiking to the bottom of the Grand Canyon – and back up!



## Christina Iverson (she/her) – Ames, IA

Christina started constructing in 2018 and got her first "yes" from the New York Times about 6 months later thanks to the help of her mentors, Ross Trudeau, Amanda Chung, and Jeff Chen. Her hobby quickly snowballed into near full-time constructing, and she became Patti Varol's assistant editor at the LA Times in early 2022, and then joined the New York Times editing team in September 2022. She loves watching her 2- and 5-year-old kids morph from little screaming blobs into fully-fledged humans. She enjoys seeing the traits they've inherited, but also their individual quirks. Her kids are getting to the age where they can play board games, which is very fun!





## Taylor Johnson (he/him) – Minneapolis, MN

Taylor began constructing in the spring of 2021 and has been published in Universal, LA Times, Crosswords Club, and the New York Times. He also contributes crosswords to his local arts and culture publication, called DISPATCH, and hosts "lemonade disco," an indie puzzle venture open to all constructors, on his blog ([taylormadecrosswords.com](http://taylormadecrosswords.com)). Being a parent has humbled him more than anything and taught him to always ask questions instead of making assumptions in any situation he encounters. With his 2- and 4-1/2-year-old kids, he enjoys bouldering, bike riding, reading lots of books, and "macaroni Mondays."



## Jesse Lansner (he/him) – Rochester, NY

Jesse has been solving crossword puzzles since he was a teenager and started constructing puzzles in 2018. His puzzles have appeared in AVCX, Grids for Good, and on his own site, [jklcrosswords.com](http://jklcrosswords.com). Originally from Brooklyn, he now lives in Rochester, NY, with his wife, kids, cats, and dog. Outside of crosswords, he and his kids enjoy solving jigsaw puzzles, playing board games and going for bike rides.



## Liari (she/her) – Ohio

Liari discovered the world of cryptic crosswords in mid-2020 and began setting in early 2021. She is among the U.S.'s foremost setters of UK-style cryptic crosswords. Her work has appeared on her blog ([liaricryptics.blogspot.com](http://liaricryptics.blogspot.com)), The Browser Sevens, and on [mycrossword.co.uk](http://mycrossword.co.uk), where she organized and edited the Halloween cryptic by Platypus, which was made by a group of 34 different setters from all experience levels. In addition to her constructing work, she's a top solver, regularly bringing new enthusiasts into the hobby on her Twitch stream. She enjoys hiking and playing board games with her 10- and 13-year-old kids.



## Barbara Lin (she/her) – West Chester, PA

Barbara was a committed daily solver for years, until one day she had a conversation with her younger son about constructing and decided to pursue it seriously in 2019, having since been published in several venues. She gives him credit for helping with the theme that led to her first New York Times puzzle, and both her sons still solve all her puzzles. She has most enjoyed watching her sons, ages 26 and 29, grow into thoughtful, capable, independent adults. She and her family vacation to many national parks and outdoor areas, and they recently rented a house in New Hampshire where she summited a 4000-ft peak with her oldest son.



## Steve Mossberg (he/him) – Boston, MA

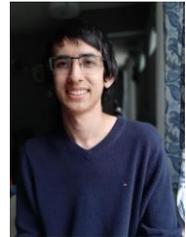
Steve is the puzzle maker behind Square Chase and Square Pursuit, and a regular contributor to The Browser and AVCX Cryptics. His non-cryptic work appears monthly in the Newsday Saturday Stumper and elsewhere. When not teaching music and doing crossword stuff, he loves cooking, birding, and being silly with his wife and daughter.





## Will Nediger (he/him) – London, Ontario

Will started writing puzzles as a teenager when he was an avid solver and turned his hobby into full-time work in 2017. He is now a regular contributor to Vox, Crossword Club, and The New Yorker. He enjoys watching his 1- and 3-year-old kids grow and learn and enjoys learning to cook with them.



## Shannon Rapp (she/her) – St. Louis, MO

Shannon started making crosswords in 2020 and began writing puzzles for her blog in early 2021. She has since written puzzles for AVCX+, Lil AVCX, Crucinova, LA Times, The Inkubator, and Universal. She also writes for Daily Crossword Links and Diary of a Crossword Fiend. You can probably find her at the next tournament, talking up indie puzzles and trying desperately to not finish in last place. Watching her 13-year-old daughter grow into her own person has been very rewarding. She is proud to say they share a love of crosswords, and in fact have been published together (Lil AVCX, Nov. 2022).



## Aaron Riccio (he/him) – New York, NY

Aaron came into cryptics by solving them regularly, then writing analyses of them, then streaming them, and finally putting pen to paper and writing them. After about a year of practice and considerable help from the community, he is proud to release this puzzle, his biggest construction feat to date, and hopes you all enjoy it. He enjoys watching his 1-year-old son figure out how to solve every puzzle he encounters in life and taking him on roller coaster stroller rides that involve zooming down the basement ramp and making chug-a-chug noises.



## Kate Schutzengel (she/her) – Brooklyn, NY

Kate first started constructing crosswords in January 2020 and after lots of help from the amazing crossword community, had one puzzle published in the NYT (she hopes it wasn't a total fluke). She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and 3 kids, ages 2, 4, and 6. She loves seeing their personalities develop and especially enjoys spending one-on-one time with each kiddo. Their newest game to play together is a riddle scavenger hunt - the adults write clues, and the big kids follow them to find a little treat at the end. Kate hopes they keep their interest in word games and can try crosswords soon!



## Nancy Serrano-Wu (she/ella) – Belmont, MA

Nancy began constructing crosswords as birthday gifts 1.5 years ago and has since been published in Spyscape, LA Times, and Inkubator, with more on the horizon at Universal and New York Times. She met Will Shortz when she participated in the NYT Diversity Fellowship, and was included in the documentary, "Across and Down," which was an unimaginable experience. At 18, 20, and 22, her kids keep her plenty busy, and she loves sharing their passions, having spent an estimated 10,000+ hours at gymnastics, track, soccer, squash, basketball, and crew events. She loves to make empanada care packages for her hungry college kids to share with their friends.





## Jess Shulman (she/her) – Toronto, Ontario

Jess has always enjoyed crossword puzzles, but only started solving regularly during the pandemic (and has gotten into cryptics even more recently). One day in 2020 she casually mentioned to a constructor friend that she might someday consider making a puzzle herself; her friend sent a dozen resources... and Jess was hooked. She has since been published in The Inkubator, Crossword Club, Universal, and New York Times. She's thrilled to publish two collabs in this pack (with amazing constructors Amie Walker and Erica Hsiung Wojcik), including her first-ever cryptic, and she thanks Steve Mossberg and Liari for their very generous, patient mentorship. She loves watching her kids – 14 and 17 – grow increasingly independent. Her family enjoys watching movies and Jays games together, and sometimes having multiple-minutes-long conversations over dinner.



## Robin Stears (she/her) – Girard, OH

Robin started constructing after her first child was born and has been at it for 30 years since. She's been published in the LA Times, Games Magazine, Penny/Dell Puzzles, and has lately been writing for puzzle apps like Daily POP and Redstone Games. Her favorite part of parenting is reliving her own childhood as her kids, ages 21 and 31, enjoy theirs. She has been their scout troop leader, room parent, band booster, and, when one of them was in college, classmate. She loves to hang out with her smart and funny kids.



## Brian Thomas (he/him)

Brian has been constructing for about 5 years and has been finding less time for it lately (in a good way). He spends most of his time writing for his personal puzzle blog, which, more than anything, provides a healthy hit of immediate gratification compared to waiting in the submission queue at mainstream outlets. He enjoys seeing his kids, ages 4 and 6, discover new things with fresh eyes and a sense of wonder to all of life's experiences. He really loves riding bikes with them.



## Juliana Tringali Golden (she/her)

Juliana was solving a lot of crosswords when her kids were young, but when her youngest turned 3 she finally found enough mental space to take on constructing. She bought some software and started submitting puzzles to the New York Times. She learned a lot from the rejection letters, and eventually found the indie publishing world, which opened her eyes to a community of resources and mentorship she had overlooked. Thanks to support from that community, she has now been published in several mainstream outlets and indie venues and writes a weekly puzzle every Tuesday for Vox. Her kids, 7 and 11, make her laugh all the time. They did funny random things when they were little, but now they make legitimately great jokes! She loves going on hikes with her family (dog included), and sometimes the kids don't even complain.





## Leinana Two Moons (she/her) – Long Island City, NY

Leinana has been an enthusiastic solver for many years, and never considered making her own puzzle until hearing that a colleague's husband was a published constructor. Through that connection, she was brought onto this project which marks her first constructor byline. She enjoys learning together with her 9- and 11-year-old kids and loves how they remind her to be silly and not take everything too seriously. Outside of NYC museum tours, stage performances, and Friday movie nights with pizza, she loves to adventure with her family and has a fond memory of their recent trip to Sedona, AZ where they hiked through the mountains and went on a stargazing tour guided by local astronomers.



## Hoang-Kim Vu (he/him)

Kim has been making crosswords since 2018, when he decided he needed a new "nerd goal." Since then, he's had over 50+ puzzles published, with the 5/24/21 USA Today and the 9/8/21 AVCX puzzles being his most treasured. His favorite moments as a parent are hearing his daughter speak a sentence that he is fairly certain he did not teach her, and early morning trips to the coffee and donut shops with his wife and daughter.



## Amie Walker (she/her) – Chandler, AZ

Amie has always loved solving crosswords and began constructing in 2021. She learned a lot from her first year of submissions, getting better after each rejection, and is now thrilled to have puzzles published in both the LA Times and Universal. She loves having a front-row seat as her kids write their own stories (ages 2, 5, and 8). As a family, they love listening to music and snuggling up with a big stack of books.



## Erica Hsiung Wojcik (she/her)

Erica has been constructing puzzles since the winter of 2019. She gets excited every time she gets published and is most proud to have conquered some scary themeless grids and to have figured out mirror symmetry (kind of). She also likes to introduce crosswords to her college students, and she is very proud to debut her first ever cryptic crossword in this pack (co-constructed with Jess Shulman). With her kids, ages 2 and 4, she has learned to be incredibly efficient with her time because at any moment you might have to stop everything to deal with an illness or an early wake-up. She loves cuddling with her kids and hopes they will always want to cuddle with her.



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