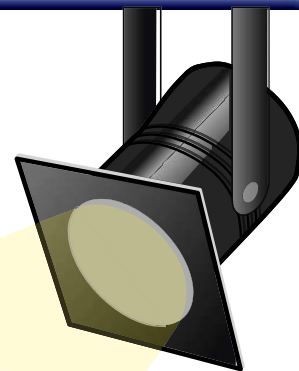




# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## JILL VAN DEN ENG Class of 2016



### **What is your favorite master gardener volunteer opportunity?**

I love the Garden Walk. It is so inspiring to see how people have beautified their spaces and hear them talk about it with such passion. It always gives me ideas, although my own plot of land is very boring and has a long way to go. Everyone seems happy and in a good mood because there is no better therapy than spending the day among the smells and sights of a well kept garden.

### **What is your favorite gardening activity? (working with herbs, starting a veggie garden, working in a perennial garden, etc)**

While my family has moved several times, one of the first things I do at each house is put a vegetable garden in the back yard. I love watching the progress over the growing season and of course, eating the produce. Vegetable gardening leaves a lot of room for experimentation since the plants only last a season. In recent years, I have become more interested in herb gardening, mostly because they don't seem as prone to disease and pests, smell wonderful, and I can still eat what I grow.

### **What do you like to do in your free time- besides gardening?**

I write novels! My newest release, "Gangbanger", a young adult novel about friendship and family, set in Wisconsin, was published by Solstice Publishing in November 2016. This is a companion novel to my debut novel, "Divided Moon," which is about arranged marriage and living two cultures. When I am not writing, I am reading, or talking to other writers, or taking a workshop or attending a conference.

### **Do you have a significant other? Kids? Pets?**

I have been married to Dean for 21 years and we have three sons who are 10, 14 and 17. We are definitely in the thick of this parenting thing and busy, busy, busy. We also have two lazy lap cats and a leopard gecko we inherited from a retiring middle school librarian. The gecko is my favorite. He doesn't make a sound, doesn't smell, is pretty interactive and you can forget to feed him for days and he is fine and doesn't complain. He's also really happy to see you everytime, probably because I do forget to feed him.

### **What is something you would like to learn more about?**

Everything gardening. I thought I would come out of the classes being an expert, but instead, I realized how much

there is that I don't know. One area I am particularly interested in learning more about is trees and their health. The first project I worked on as a student in the Master Gardening Volunteer classes in Dane County was to dig around the trunks of young trees that were planted too deep at the middle school and snipping girdling roots. I didn't realize planting a tree too deep was a problem before the MGV program, but now I want to tell everyone about it. Trees are an investment of time, and it is a shame when something so simple keeps them from flourishing.

### **What is the best vacation you've ever taken?**

Dean and I went to Paris, France for our 10th wedding anniversary in 2005. What a gift that was to each other. Our hotel was right across the street from the Tuileries Gardens and it was a treat to walk through there and see the French formal garden style. I also really enjoyed visiting the street artists along the banks of the Seine, strolling through Pere Lachaise cemetery, and visiting the corner patisserie for breakfast. There is so much history and beauty in that city, I cried when we had to leave. I miss the taste of pain au chocolat. I haven't found one quite the same since we got back.

### **What is/are your favorite author(s)?**

It is impossible to pick a favorite author, impossible! As a child, my biggest influences were "Alice in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll and "Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck. Both introduced a place and time I was not familiar with, and involved a lot of discovery. As an adult, one of my favorite books has been "The Time Traveler's Wife," by Audrey Niffenegger. I absolutely loved that story and was lucky enough to meet the author, who revealed she never was interested in novel writing, but prefers doing graphic novels. She did do a follow up novel in 2009, called "Her Fearful Symmetry", which didn't captivate me as much, but some of the images she created about ghosts and how they live in our world haunt me years after reading it. I haven't read her other stuff, which doesn't make me much of an author fan. Maybe I should put some of them on my reading list.

### **Why do you like living in this area?**

Although I was born in Kaukauna, I spent most of my adult life living elsewhere. Most recently, Dean and I were located in a tiny village south of Madison called Brooklyn. We were there for 14 or 15 years. I went through the Master Gardeners Volunteer classes in Dane County, under the tutelage of Lisa Johnson. I still get a girl crush when I hear her on the Larry Meiller show. She has a fun personality and kept class interesting.

We moved to Appleton in 2013 after a job upset, and for Dean and I, it was a coming home of sorts. Our families are still here, along with friends from a lifetime ago. It is so nice to see more of our parents, siblings, nieces and nephews.

continued on PAGE 10

## JILL SPOTLIGHT continued from PAGE 9

Traveling for the holidays is no longer an event. I also love the access to nature here and the abundance of trails for hiking and sightseeing.

### **What is your favorite style of gardening and why?**

I am a vegetable gardener, and I like to experiment with styles and try new things. I did a square foot vegetable garden a few years ago, and it was the most beautiful garden I ever had. Unfortunately, we relocated before the bulk of the harvest, so I never got to see how much it yielded. This year I tried straw bale gardening for the first time. That seems to have more of a learning curve to it, but I definitely want to try it again next year. I have a book on lasagna gardening on my bookshelf and I wonder if I will ever get to that, since I have fallen for the convenience of straw bale gardening (once I get the details down). I am lucky in that my father in law is a retired farmer and has access to bales.

Whatever style of gardening I do, they must include tomatoes. Nothing is better than a fresh tomato picked off a plant.

### **Who taught you how to garden?**

My mom was my inspiration. She had a green thumb and

an interest in gardening. I grew up in a house full of thriving houseplants and wonderful landscaping. I struggle to keep houseplants alive, and am constantly asking her for advice. At some point, I realized she wouldn't be around forever, and I felt a responsibility to pass on this knowledge. This is the reason I started taking the Master Gardener Volunteer courses in the first place. Over the last few years since I took the course and volunteered many hours, the student has become the teacher and I now offer my dear mom advice and prune her trees and bushes for her.

### **Stay Connected:**

If you'd like to see my progress on my garden experiments and usual family life, friend me on Facebook at Jill E Bean.

If you'd like to see more about writing and novel news, like my author page at <https://www.facebook.com/JillVanDenEng/>

On Twitter @MoonOverMadison

On Instagram @jill.vandeneng

On my blog at [www.jillysbookblog.blogspot.com](http://www.jillysbookblog.blogspot.com)

