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6 The Joule's subterranean spa is a welcome refuge from the sizzling summer heat.

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Stealing the Show

Still sequined and spinning after nearly 30 years, Lucy Wrubel, Dallas' most covetable DJ, isn't done dancing.

BY ALLISON HATFIELD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATHY TRAN

The blue morpho ranks among the most beautiful butterflies in the world. Huge (by butterfly standards) and hugely famous (again, by butterfly standards), it's an iridescent showboat with azure scalloped wings. It lives in the tropical forests of Latin America, from Mexico to Colombia. You're lucky if you've ever seen one.

Lucy Wrubel, too, is an iridescent showboat of some fame, and the similarities don't end there. They reveal themselves in her story of transformation, the way she flits from topic to topic during an interview or town to town for the parties where she performs, and the eye-popping costumes she often dons for the job. You're lucky if you've ever seen her.

A fifth-generation Texan, Wrubel, 56, grew up a "painfully shy, nerdy girl." Raised on a steady diet of encouragement and positivity by creative, hardworking parents — who, in their mid-80s, released a novel (her mom), can still offer a critique of a band (her dad) or have the name of a cool new restaurant at the ready (both) — Wrubel is as authentically joyful as they come. Even when she's home recharging from a string of late nights performing at parties, her megawatt smile and infectious energy are present.

After graduating from Highland Park High School, Wrubel shed her cocoon and moved to Los Angeles to study film at the University of Southern California. After USC, she stayed in LA, waiting tables at The Ivy by day and sharpening her comedy chops at The Groundlings by night. It was there, alongside Cheryl Hines, Rachael Harris, Maya Rudolph and a whole bunch of other funny folks, that she learned to lean into the rule of "Yes, and ..." — an improv principle in which you accept a premise or idea that has been introduced and then build upon it. Wrubel's time at The Groundlings is also where she mastered the art of paying attention.

“I walked back to my little hotel at daylight, carrying my music and my shoes, and I thought, ‘God, I’ve gotta figure out how to do that again.’”

“An improv actor has to watch the other actors on a stage, like keenly pay attention to everyone,” Wrubel says. “You also have to feel the audience. Are they laughing? Are they invested in what you’re doing? You can feel that if you’re really paying a lot of attention.”

These two skills — running with yes and reading a room — came in handy when she was fired from The Groundlings and moved to Italy with her boyfriend. Intent on reinvention, she agreed to co-deejay a wedding in Tuscany. With a vast knowledge of music cultivated from a young age but no idea how to work the equipment, Wrubel said yes.

“I put on a little Pucci dress and gussied up and went. It changed my whole life. It was the wildest night ever. I learned so much. I played all night. Cops came. There were party crashers. There was great success. There were great failures. ... I walked back to my little hotel at daylight, carrying my music and my shoes, and I thought, ‘God, I’ve gotta figure out how to do that again.’”

She did figure out how to do it again. And again. And again. In fact, Wrubel’s been doing it all over the world for the last three decades, performing everywhere from a secret prom and posh birthday parties to philanthropic fundraisers and

corporate events. She’s packed dance floors at celebrity weddings and engaged shoppers at hundreds of events for Neiman Marcus, Forty Five Ten and The Conservatory. She adores a fancy party dress and wore a replica of the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge on her head when Dallas celebrated the structure’s grand opening. When we talked, she was about to head out for 10 days: six jobs in six cities.

A couple of years ago, Wrubel told a podcaster there could be a point when she’d age out of being in a DJ tower, wearing a bubble dress and jumping up and down. At the time, she said, “This is not an aging job.” Now in her mid-50s, still buckling bedazzled overalls over a crop top, applying flirty lashes and lugging her gear from Fort Worth to Jackson Hole to Santa Fe, she’s changed her tune. “I don’t know if I agree with my own statement anymore,” she reflects. “My whole family has age dissociation. It’s not like we are trying to be younger than we are; we just don’t think about it much.”

Wrubel does, however, think about what might come next, now that her daughter is off at college. “I think I’m just gonna keep on doing what I’m doing until something else ...” She trails off and pauses to consider what that might be, then continues, “I’m just gonna keep going.”

A glittering piece by pop artist Ashley Longshore covers nearly an entire wall in Wrubel’s vibrant Highland Park home. The word “yes” appears dozens of times in colored resin rhinestones. “My house looks like it was designed around it,” Wrubel says, “but the truth is, I think it was just destined for our living room.” When you see the work — an expanse of turquoise blue blooming with affirmation — you know that’s true.

A reminder of the power of “yes” can be found in sparkling artwork in Wrubel’s home.

Hey, DJ!

“I’m a glorified mixtape maker,” DJ Lucy Wrubel says, without a hint of self-deprecation. She misses the days when mixtapes were an art form at which she excelled, but she’s still down to put together a playlist for love or money. You can hire her to create a custom set, but she’s made it easy for her Spotify followers to find out what she’s into.



Some of Wrubel’s Spotify party playlists are public, and she keeps several running lists of songs that pique her interest. She’s “constantly curating, constantly looking, constantly listening.” If you’re curious, queue up her three-part soundtrack: “This,” “That,” “and the Other.”



LOOKING FOR SUMMER FUN? NO SWEAT.

7 cool (literally) things to do in North Texas this summer.

BY MARY GRACE GRANADOS

We won't fault you for sheltering from the North Texas heat under the breeze of your ceiling fan, but staying cooped up at home is no way to spend the summer. We drummed up seven cool reasons to get out of the house, even when temps reach triple digits. Who knows, you might even need a sweatshirt — the air conditioning can be brutal this time of year.

Settle in for a spa day at the newly renovated Joule Spa

➔ **The Joule** hotel's subterranean spa will take you far away from downtown's steamy sidewalks. Recent updates include an elegantly refreshed interior and a new, separate entrance off Main Street that makes it easy to pop in for treatments. Whether you select body therapy, a customized massage or your choice of facials (there's even one tailored to bearded men), plan to arrive early to — or stay after — your appointment to enjoy the spa facilities, which include a soothing indoor pool. thejouledallas.com



COURTESY THE JOULE



See a 332-carat gem or presidential artwork at Dallas museums

While you can certainly peruse your favorite permanent collections this summer, there are two particular exhibits you should be sure to check out. At the ➔ **Perot Museum of Nature and Science**, enjoy the glittering wonders of “Topaz: A Spectrum in Stone,” open through Oct. 14. It features more than 100 topaz stones on display, including a 15-pound blue topaz from Brazil and a 332-carat imperial topaz (the largest in the world). And through Oct. 19, “Scenes from SMU and the Bush Center by President George W. Bush” at the George W. Bush Presidential Center offers 35 never-before-seen paintings by the former leader. perotmuseum.org, bushcenter.org

Unlock Dallas’ past at an architectural heritage lecture series

Take a deep dive into the city’s “built heritage” at one of Preservation Dallas’ Summer Sizzlers lectures. This year, participants will enjoy field trips to Dallas City Hall, Southern Methodist University’s Hamon Arts Library and the Dallas Public Library — where archivists will share the stories behind special collections and preservation projects. The final lecture is a panel discussion with all the archivists. Tickets are \$25 per lecture or \$75 for all four, with one lecture per month scheduled from June through September. preservationdallas.org



Catch a classic film on the big screen

If you find yourself thinking that you’d just like to sit in a cold, dark room, you’re in luck: You just described a movie theater. If no new releases pique your interest, many local theaters put on special showings of classic films. In July and August, the Angelika Film Center has *Dark Passage*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Dazed and Confused*, *Doctor Zhivago* and *Roman Holiday* on its roster. Alamo Drafthouse will show *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* in July and *The Sound of Music* in September. Other theaters, like Violet Crown in Uptown and ➔ **The Texas Theatre** in Oak Cliff, show a variety of nostalgic films, too, but release their schedules closer to the showing date. Visit theater websites to see what’s playing. angelikafilmcenter.com/dallas, drafthouse.com/dfw, dallas.violetcrown.com, thetexastheatre.com



Slip into a jazz club for a live show

Jazz clubs aren't a relic of decades past — Dallas is still home to venues where the brass is bold and the drinks are cold. Tucked next to Dallas' Lakewood Theater, The Balcony Club has an assortment of jazz, blues, R&B and classic rock shows. Or venture to Fort Worth to try 📍 **Scat Jazz Lounge**, a cool spot with a full bar and a menu of light bites and desserts. Most venues charge a cover fee, and it may be best to book your tickets online in advance. balconyclub.com, scatjazzlounge.com

“Let your curiosity and creativity be your guide.”



Put yourself in summer school

Go back to school (sort of) and learn something new this summer. Take a chocolate-making class at Chocolate Secrets in the Oak Lawn area. Try your hand at needlepoint with a class at newly opened Saville Needleworks in Snider Plaza. Learn the basics of clay sculpting or take a painting class at the 📍 **Creative Arts Center of Dallas**. Let your curiosity and creativity be your guide. mychocolatesecrets.com, savilleneedleworks.com, creativeartscenter.org



Sip and stroll local wineries and distilleries

For a wine or whiskey enthusiast, few activities could beat a visit to cool cellars or copper stills. If you're game for a country drive, head to Eden Hill Vineyard and Winery in Celina. Go behind the scenes at the 10-acre estate, tour the vineyard (OK, that part will take you outdoors) and then retreat indoors to the air-conditioned tasting room. For a spirited afternoon or evening, take an immersive walk through 📍 **New Artisan Distillery** in West Dallas. Go online to book your tour and tasting of the distillery's botanical bourbon, gin and vodka. edenhill.com/celina, newartisanshipirits.com

More ways to stay cool

For other fun indoor summer activities, visit dallasnews.com/timeless-in-texas.

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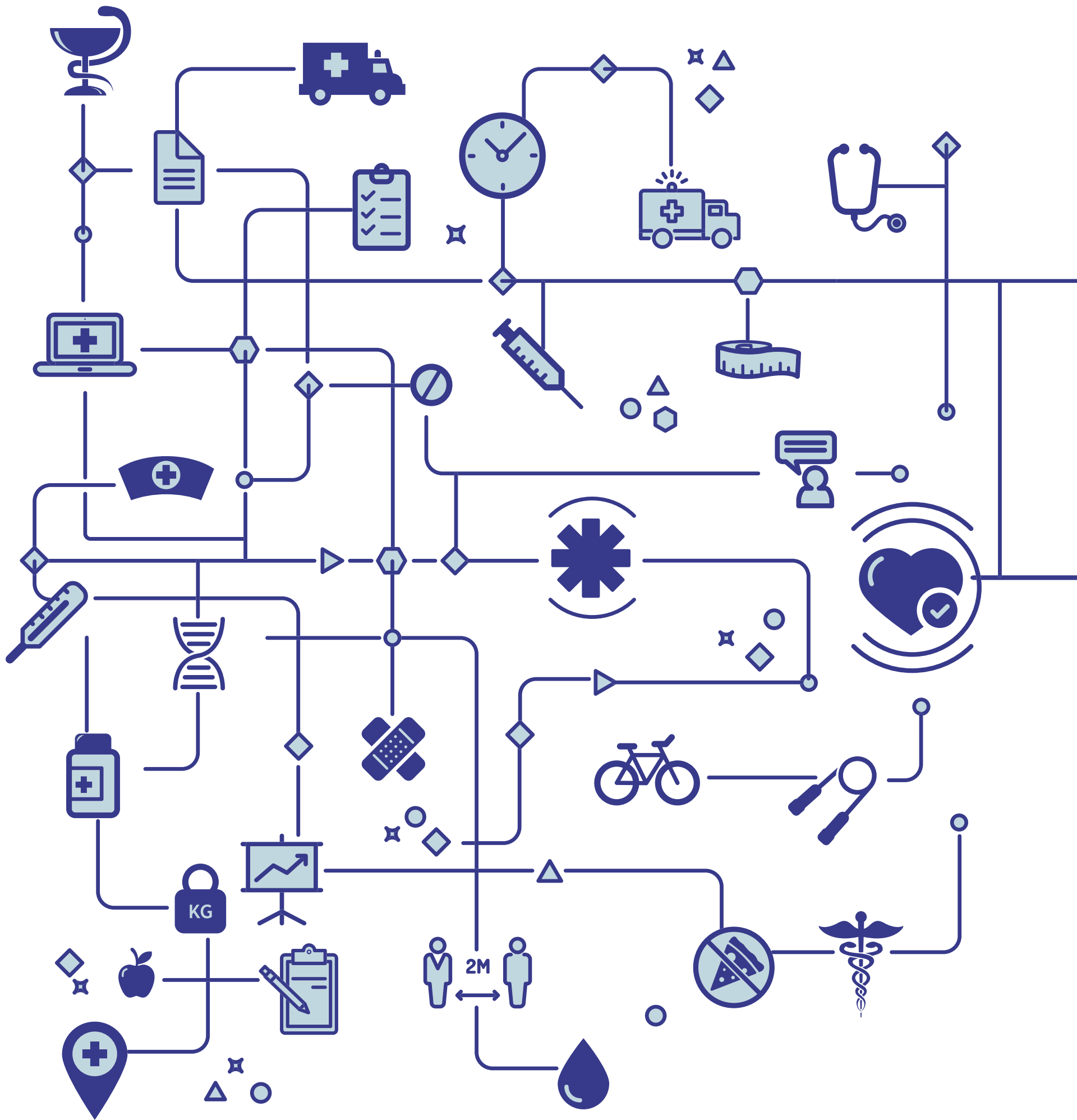
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HOW MUCH WOULD YOU PAY TO HAVE **YOUR DOCTOR ON SPEED DIAL?**

(And actually have them answer.)

BY MARY GRACE GRANADOS

Paul and Patricia Bonavia's last primary care physician was a good doctor — they respected him — but getting him on the phone was nearly impossible. "I could crawl on my hands and knees to his office faster," says Paul Bonavia, 74. "We were really frustrated with that." Then a friend told them about concierge medicine, a retainer-based health care model where patients pay a monthly fee for personalized primary care. "I thought it was kind of a marketing gimmick when he first told us about it, but it's not," says Paul. When the couple moved to Dallas in 2014 and needed a local physician, they decided to give concierge medicine a try and found Dr. Emily Hebert, then part of the Cooper Clinic's concierge program. "That was, as the saying goes, 'the beginning of a beautiful relationship,'" he says.

Concierge medicine emerged in the 1990s as a more exclusive alternative to the standard primary care physician experience. In a typical practice, a doctor may have a patient load of 2,500 individuals; however, in a concierge practice, the monthly retainer fee allows a physician to limit that count to a couple hundred — or even fewer. "We really are able to spend a lot of time with our patients and get to know them well, which is hard to do when you're taking care of 2,500 to 3,000 people," explains Hebert.

While these practices vary greatly in price, offerings and how they handle insurance, the foundational idea of a deepened doctor-patient relationship and more customized care is highly appealing to those who join. "At our age, it's really nice to know that [the doctor's



Dr. Emily Hebert

“When you have one doctor who is like the umbrella over your whole health, it’s great.”

response will be] immediate, and that you’re going to talk to somebody that knows your history and knows about you,” says Patricia, 73.

While “concierge medicine” is a common term for these kinds of practices, Texas law distinguishes between two models: true concierge practices, where patients pay a monthly fee for enhanced access and services, and insurance is billed for actual office visits and treatment; and direct primary care practices, where all basic services are provided under the monthly patient fee and insurance isn’t billed. It’s important to note, though, that with direct primary care, patients often still pay for insurance to cover other needs such as prescriptions, specialist visits and emergency care. (This story and even some practices use the general term “concierge medicine” without differentiating between the models.)

When Hebert moved from the Cooper Clinic, where seeing concierge patients was only part of her role, to MD², a national network of concierge practices, the Bonavias followed. Hebert is one of two physicians at the company’s second office, MD² Park Cities, which opened in January 2025. Individual members pay approximately \$2,000 per month for primary care, with spouses and significant others billed at half that rate, and children ages 16-26 billed

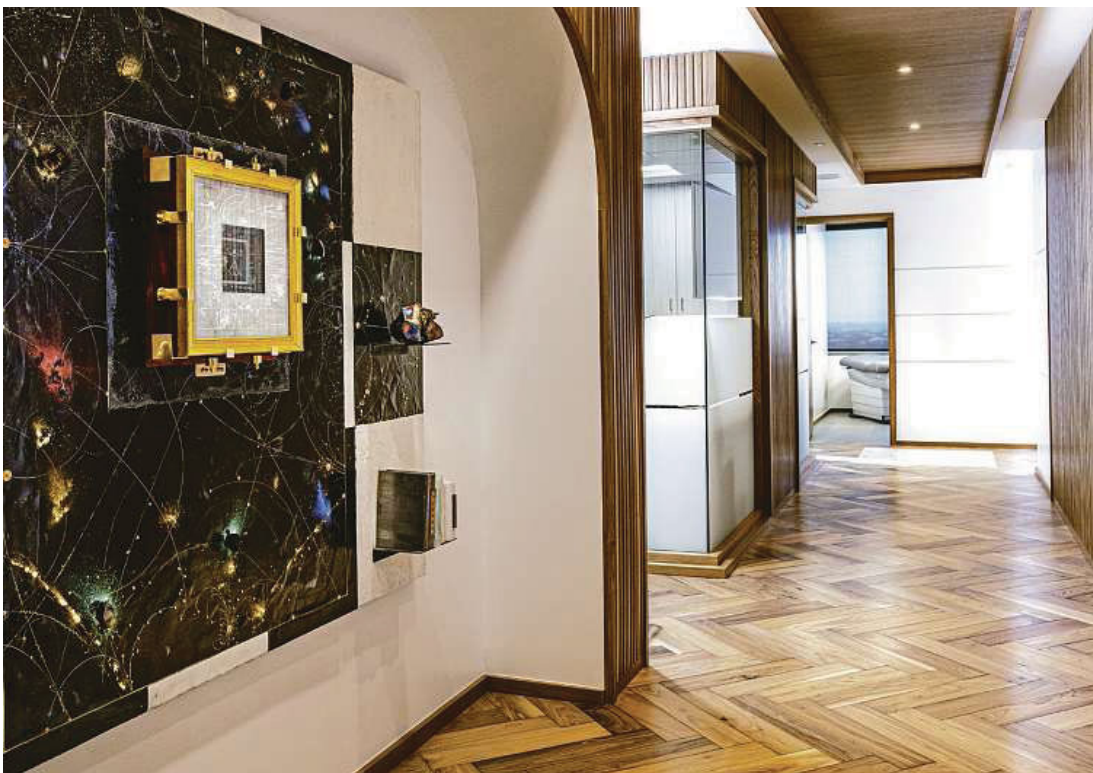
at about \$667 per month. Each physician is limited to 50 families, and the monthly fee includes direct access to the doctor via phone or text, unlimited doctor visits, annual physicals, house and work calls, routine lab work, cardiovascular evaluations, X-rays, EKGs and ultrasounds as needed. The practice markets itself as luxury care and offers additional benefits, such as attending specialist appointments alongside the patient. MD² patients are also enrolled in a medical evacuation service membership, for use if a medical emergency occurs while they’re traveling. Services provided within the practice are never billed outside of that monthly membership fee, and the practice does not bill insurance for primary care (though specialty services or tests done outside of the practice might be).

Many have criticized the concierge model because it’s cost prohibitive. Those who can afford the extra monthly cost reap the benefits of more personalized care; those who can’t are stuck in a system riddled with physician shortages, long waits and communication challenges.

Dr. Anastasia “Staci” Benson, founder of Paradigm Family Health, opened her East Dallas practice in 2016. She set out to create a personalized health care model that was more affordable than the typical concierge setup and cut insurance out of the physician-patient relationship. Membership fees range from \$75 to \$150 per month for adults, depending on age (the practice sees children, too), and each physician in the group is limited to 600 patients. The approach gives Benson more time with those she treats. As a result, she says, she can focus on prevention and assess patients from a holistic perspective. She doesn’t take insurance, but the flat-rate membership fee includes office and virtual visits, some tests and in-office labs, and procedures such as stitches, EKGs and breathing treatments, among others.

Aimee Elkman, 53, one of Benson’s patients, found that having a genuine advocate in her physician has made it easier to manage thyroid issues and all the preventive care associated with a high risk for breast cancer. “It’s intimidating when you’re going to all these different doctors for different things and they’re not really talking to each other. You can get really confused,” says Elkman. “But when you have one doctor who is like the umbrella over your whole health, it’s great.”

And having an advocate with a clear view of your entire health — including your habits and lifestyles — is a big draw of these retainer models. “One of the things that’s also very appealing to us about



MD² is a national network of concierge practices. Its Park Cities location (shown here) opened in 2025.

ILLUSTRATIONS MUSTAFAHACALAKI/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY MD²

this concierge concept is she's got a lot of freedom to focus on preventative medicine," says Paul Bonavia of Hebert's limited patient count. Despite his active lifestyle, a routine scan 10 years ago indicated that Bonavia had the beginnings of coronary artery disease. "I could easily imagine if I just got a physical, they [might say], 'Well, you've got a little bit of this; let's follow it next year,' because my condition wasn't in any danger zone," Paul supposes. But Hebert advised him to take early action and not wait until the risk turned into an actual problem. "It was one of my interactions with her early on, and I was so impressed with that," he says.

Whatever the ultimate costs, for some, the investment in their health care experience is a price they're willing to pay. "It's not for everybody — not everybody can have that extra outlay of money every year," acknowledges Nancy Wilson, 56, another patient of Paradigm Family Health. "But when it comes to my health and how I feel on a daily basis, it is so worth it for me. I know I can call them ... and they're going to answer. And I know they're going to know what they're talking about."



Footing the Bill

How do insurance, Medicare and Medicaid factor in?

The monthly membership fee for a concierge or direct primary care practice won't be covered by insurance, Medicare or Medicaid — it's an out-of-pocket charge. And you can't use an HSA (health savings account) for that fee, either, because the cost is considered a retainer or access fee as opposed to a billable service.

Concierge medicine and direct primary care aren't insurance policies. Depending on the practice, though, you might be able to use insurance. Practices legally defined as concierge medicine can bill insurance for qualified services such as an office visit or lab work (the monthly concierge fee covers enhanced offerings such as 24/7 access to your physician and longer appointments). Direct primary care practices do not bill insurance, and the monthly fee from the practice covers your services there. Still, many direct primary care practice members carry insurance for specialist visits, medical emergencies and prescriptions. Your billable services at a concierge practice, and incidentals such as lab work or imaging if your doctor provides direct primary care, could be eligible for reimbursement through an HSA.



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The Senior Shift

Driven by loss, health issues and a desire for connection, three North Texas families navigated one of life's biggest transitions and found unexpected joy on the other side.

BY ALLISON HATFIELD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATHY TRAN



Dolores Palmer felt devastated when her husband died. He'd suffered for months with Guillain-Barre syndrome, an autoimmune disease that affects the nerves, before he passed away in December 2024. She was still in the early stages of grief when something went wrong with her pacemaker. Her Dallas doctors needed the Amarillo resident to be close for several weeks.

Already contemplating a move from the home she'd shared with her husband, the 69-year-old thought maybe it was time for a fresh start. "I just couldn't stand to come outside and look at everything," Palmer says. "I'd look at this, or I'd be in the house and I'd see something, and I'd

say, 'Well, John liked that,' or 'This was John's favorite,' and I just couldn't handle it. Everything reminded me of John, and I thought, 'Man, this is not healthy. I'm never going to be able to get over what's happened in my life if I don't do something different.'"

With the help of her daughter, who lives in Grapevine, she narrowed the choices within her budget to Brookdale Club Hill. At the independent and assisted living community in Garland, she has a small apartment, a big group of friends and a long list of activities that keep her busy — so much so that Palmer's children have a hard time reaching their mother during the day. "I say, 'Y'all told me not to sit at

home and mope — and I have not been sitting at home and moping!'"

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

A triggering event, such as the death of a spouse or sudden decline in health, is often the reason an individual or family begins to consider a senior living community. Not every person has the same level of need, however, and there are different types of residences.

Independent living: Best for active people who are largely self-sufficient but want a maintenance-free lifestyle, convenient amenities and social opportunities.

Assisted living: Designed for those who need help with everyday tasks like bathing, dressing, taking medications or managing meals but don't require 24/7 medical supervision.

Memory care: A secure environment for individuals with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia, with structured routines, specially trained staff and higher staff-to-resident ratios.

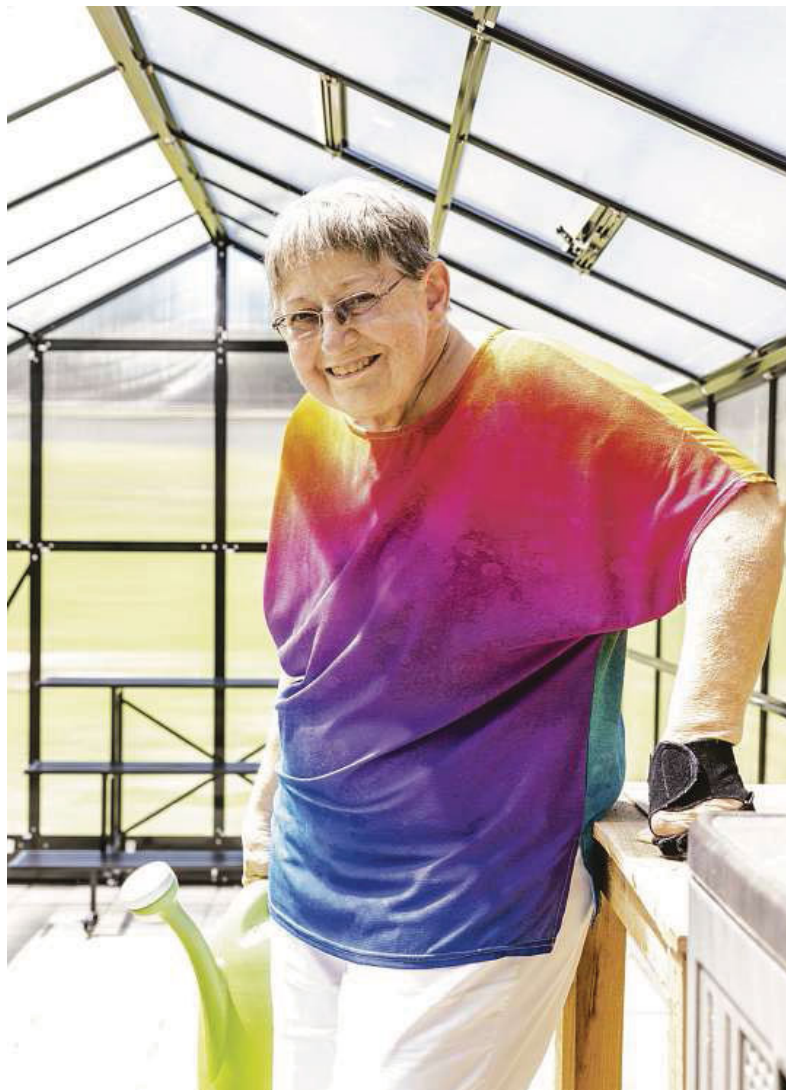
Some communities offer all three scenarios, allowing someone to start with independent living and transition to a higher level of care as needs advance. Such communities may also afford couples with disparate needs the opportunity to live together but apart (e.g., one may live in assisted living while the other lives in memory care, but they are in the same building or in buildings very near to each other).

PERKS AND PROXIMITY

At The Preston of the Park Cities, Larry Butler is also thriving. He moved in January 2024 from Minnesota to Dallas. Butler has dementia, and his daughter, Kathleen Fern, knew her dad needed to be close after her mother died. A longtime volunteer at The Preston, Fern relocated Butler, 89, without hesitation. Fern, who leads a weekly Bible study at the community, has spent time in various senior living facilities in North Texas, "and The Preston is just so lovely," she says.

*"I say,
'Y'all told
me not
to sit
at home
and mope
— and
I have
not been
sitting at
home and
moping!'"*

Right: Dolores Palmer has an active life at Brookdale Club Hill. Opposite: John and Susan Hepola stroll the grounds at "beautiful" Presbyterian Village North.



5 Questions to Ask When Touring a Community

Choosing a senior living community — whether for yourself or someone you love — is one of life's more impactful decisions. The right place offers more than just a home: It's connection, care, safety and support. Chad Hubbard, executive director of The Preston of the Park Cities, a Watermark retirement community in Dallas, shares a list of questions to guide your search.

1 How long has the executive director been in his/her role? Leadership stability is a good indicator of a well-run community. An executive director who has been in place for several years has likely fostered a strong, supportive culture for both staff and residents.

2 Who oversees resident care, and how accessible is that person? Solid care leadership translates to well-trained staff, proactive problem-solving and efficient responses to health concerns, ensuring residents get appropriate and timely medical attention.

3 Can I (or my loved one) remain in this community through the end of life? Not all communities provide a continuum of care; many require residents to move to a skilled nursing home or hospice house once they reach a certain level of need. Other communities offer dementia care and palliative care on-site, allowing residents to stay in familiar surroundings even as their needs evolve.

4 Can families bring in outside agencies? If your loved one requires specialized services beyond what a community provides, you need to know whether you have the flexibility to arrange for that support.

5 What's the dining program like? A well-run kitchen and lively dining room can make a big difference in quality of life. Some communities hire chefs with restaurant or hospitality backgrounds; others rely on mass-produced meals. Some communities include meals in pricing; others have a la carte programs.



Kathleen Fern moved her father, Larry Butler, to The Preston of the Park Cities. Butler is thriving there.

“Having it be really accessible and easy for you is going to be better for everyone — they’re going to see more of you, and you’re going to be able to fit [visits] into your lifestyle.”

Aesthetics matter, but so do the food, caregivers, the availability of transportation to appointments and other off-site locations, and options for religious and social activities. Geography matters, too. The ability to visit often — to be involved and provide oversight — also makes a big difference in a loved one's care. “As the adult child, you’re going to be the one trying to visit daily, every couple of days or at least as often as you can,” Fern says. “Having it be really accessible and easy for you is going to be better for everyone — they’re going to see more of you, and you’re going to be able to fit [visits] into your lifestyle.”

Fern advises individuals and families to start evaluating choices earlier than they think they need to, and to consider a move into a community sooner rather than later. You really don’t want to make these decisions under duress, she says.

NAVIGATING THE COST

Planning is key in more ways than one. The cost of senior living can vary dramatically depending on the community and the level of care provided. Independent living is usually more affordable; assisted living and memory care can be significantly more expensive. Communities often require a big payment up front — some of which may be returned if a resident relocates to a different community or passes away — and monthly payments to cover living expenses, meals and most amenities.

Dementia is considered a terminal illness, and Butler wisely invested in long-term care insurance when he was young and healthy. It covers his expenses at The Preston of the Park Cities. Combined with benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and hospice benefits through Medicare, he’s getting the best care possible at no cost to his family.

Most people, however, pay for independent living, assisted living and memory care as they would for anything else in retirement — Social Security, pensions, 401(k) and IRA withdrawals, and investment income. Individuals or couples with a lot of equity in their homes can sell and use the proceeds to fund their new living arrangements, and there may be other options, such as family support or life insurance conversion.

WHEN YOU KNOW, YOU KNOW

Susan and John Hepola moved from their house near White Rock Lake to Presbyterian Village North in May 2024. John, 84, was showing signs of Parkinson's (an MRI later revealed he did not have the disease), and Susan, 80, was worried about needing help caring for her husband.

The couple (who are the parents of *The Dallas Morning News* columnist Sarah Hepola) looked at a few communities before Susan made an executive decision. "I came out and spoke to the marketing person, and I said, 'I want you to convince me that I can't move into Presbyterian Village North, because it's beautiful.'" Before the visit was over, Susan had signed on the dotted line. A few weeks later, the two had relocated — first to an apartment and then to a patio home, once that became available. Later, they sold their house.

Susan is taken with the heated swimming pool (that's her pictured below) and lush walking trails. John attends balance classes and has made many new friends. "He looks so much better," Susan says. "He's smiling; there's no tremor. He's a shy, quiet Finnish man, and now he's inviting different people to dinner. And I'm like, 'Where's my husband? This guy is fun! This is incredible!' He's really come alive."



"I want you to convince me that I can't move into Presbyterian Village North, because it's beautiful."



Presbyterian Village North offers independent living, rehabilitation, assisted living and higher levels of care.

Need Help?

Families who want assistance finding the right senior living solution have plenty of options in North Texas. If you're unfamiliar with the process of choosing a community, one of these free services can provide education and resources.

A PLACE FOR MOM

Local advisers help families sort through services, amenities, costs and availability to find the ideal communities for their situations.

aplaceformom.com

CAREPATROL

Advisers in Collin, Dallas and Denton counties visit and assess senior communities in order to match seniors with choices that fit.

carepatrol.com/states/texas

KRISTI'S SENIOR SOLUTIONS

Founder Kristi Vance takes great care to help individuals and families narrow down their many choices. (903) 821-3780,

kristisseniorsolutions.com

OASIS SENIOR ADVISORS

Representatives in Plano, Frisco and Fort Worth help seniors and their families find the right care and services for their needs.

oasisseiniadoradvisors.com

RELIABLE SENIOR TRANSITION SERVICES

Dr. Christopher Lucchese, medical director for a Frisco practice called Well Within, built a company that helps families navigate the complexities of elder care after seeing a lack of

compassion in many facilities. (469) 829-7222, **reliableseiniortransitionservices.com**

SENIOR LIVING PLACEMENT SERVICES

The boutique agency with a deep understanding of area communities offers expert guidance and personalized housing referrals. (979) 233-7749, **seniorlivingplacementservices.com**

SENIOR LIVING SPECIALISTS

Founded by North Texas resident Paul Markowitz after his experience placing his mother in care, this service provides personalized referrals for seniors and their families across D-FW. (214) 929-5055, **seniorlivingspecialists.com**

THE SENIOR SOURCE

The trusted nonprofit offers comprehensive support to help families with the many decisions that come with aging, including choosing senior living communities. (469) 517-7523, **theseniorsource.org**

THE WAY TO AGING

Led by a gerontologist and former executive director of assisted living communities, the company offers senior placement and geriatric care management. (949) 278-6181, **thewaytoaging.com**



NICHOLAS SANDERS

Writer Glenn Hunter didn't look down during his 332-foot descent.

Over the Edge

I've never liked heights. So what am I doing on the roof of a Dallas high-rise?

BY GLENN HUNTER

I'm no fan of great heights. The last place you'll find me is on a Six Flags roller coaster, and one of the scariest movies I've ever seen, called *Fall*, had two young women trapped in the desert on a tiny platform atop an abandoned, sky-high broadcast-tower. So what was I doing here, at age 75, perched on the side of a downtown Dallas office building's roof, about to rappel to the ground 25 stories below?

I wasn't sure, exactly, but it was too late to back out now.

I'd agreed to this folly in connection with a fundraising event, dubbed Over the Edge, for Care-Dallas, a 41-year-old nonprofit that promotes education and awareness about alcohol and substance

abuse. In a break from the group's usual staid fundraisers, its recently organized Junior Board had devised this unique event around rappelling — a method of descending a vertical surface on a rope attached to an anchor at the top.

Each participating rappeller (there were about 35 of them) had raised at least \$500 for Care, earning the right to rope down a 332-foot-tall office tower at the Plaza of the Americas complex. Overseeing every detail of the experience was a professional organization, also called Over the Edge, that routinely conducts urban rappelling events for nonprofits looking to raise money.

Mike Cowan, the Canadian company's 55-year-old crew chief,

told me that a “significant chunk” of the rappellers he deals with for nonprofits are older people. He put his 74-year-old mother “over the edge” of a building in Tennessee, and he did the same for a 103-year-old man in Pennsylvania.

Hearing that was reassuring.

“The older crowd is much more resolute,” Cowan said. “They’re like, ‘No, I’m going to do this, even though I’m uncomfortable with the height and stuff.’”

And after they’ve done it? “They just absolutely are like, ‘Oh, can I please go again? That was life-changing for me. It really taught me that I can do the things I want to do, because I set my mind to it.’”

‘YOU WANT ME TO SOFTEN IT BY SAYING ‘LEAP’?’

In the weeks before I was scheduled to take the plunge, I tried hard not to think about it much. I overheard my wife tell a friend, “He’s in the bedroom, practicing jumping off the bed.” (I wasn’t.) When the big day arrived, her last words to me were, “All I can say is, ‘It’s been nice knowing you.’”

Downtown, walking through the Plaza of the Americas lobby en route to its elevator, chugging bottled water to stay hydrated, I spotted two uniformed officers from Dallas Fire-Rescue.

“Here to pick up the remains?” I asked. They laughed.

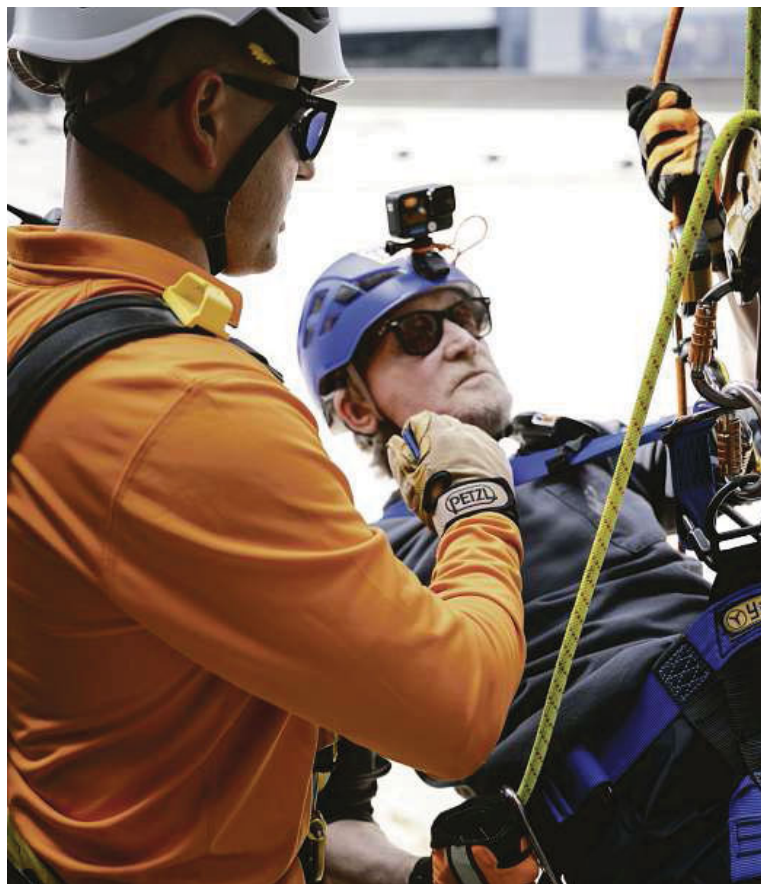
“Hopefully not,” one said, adding, “It’s that hard stop at the end that gets you!”

Twenty-five floors up was Care-Dallas’ staging area, filled with folks waiting to rappel. They included Peggy Bessellieu, the event chair, and Jan Osborn, Care’s interim executive director. “I thought it would be fun to be able to say that in my 65th year of life, I rappelled down a 25-story building,” Osborn said. “I’m not saying I’m not scared, but I’ve kept my mind really busy this morning.”

Others sat around a table, joshing with each other to ease the tension. “You keep saying ‘jump,’” one noted nervously. Then the reply: “You want me to soften it by saying ‘leap’?”

Someone else mentioned the movie *Die Hard*, where Bruce Willis

Before descending, Hunter was outfitted with a full-body industrial harness, gloves, a helmet and a two-way radio.



shimmies down a skyscraper using a fire hose. “Now I’m scared to death!” a woman said. I just kept chugging water.

Soon enough, it was time to don our gear and head to the roof for a quick training session. Outfitted with a full-body industrial harness, gloves, a helmet and a two-way radio, we each listened as Cowan and Dalton Ray, another Over the Edge employee, demonstrated how the system works.

You rappel with two roof-anchored ropes that are hooked to your harness, Ray explained. One of them is a safety line that has a fist-size, “fall-arrester” backup device — called an ASAP — attached to it. In the event you start descending too fast, the ASAP automatically locks on the safety rope and stops your drop.

The other rope is the main line, used to do the actual rappelling by means of an attached, “self-braking descender” gadget with a lever. It controls the speed of your descent. Your left hand works the lever (the more pressure you put on it, the faster you go) while your

right hand feeds the rope up through a metal loop, called a carabiner, at your hip.

Truth be told, these details were pretty much a blur to me when it finally came time to back up to the edge of the building roof and — gulp — go over the side. Working the main-line gadget ever so tentatively, my mouth suddenly as dry as Big Bend, I descended the 25 stories slowly, warily, never once looking down.

Will this ever be over? I thought, as the minutes, and the black-glass windows, inched by.

A profanity or two may have been uttered as well.

Then, at last, I was on the ground — ecstatic to have made it, relieved to have the experience behind me. Later, I suggested to Cowan I must have taken longer than anyone in history to go down a building that tall.

“Well, I will say I wasn’t worried about you locking up your ASAP backup device,” he said.

He was making a rappeller’s joke, and I was only too happy to laugh.

“All I can say is, ‘It’s been nice knowing you.’”