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FALL/WINTER 2023 • VOL. 26, NO. 2

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editor's note

In preparation for a talk I gave on *Lake Living* this past September, I thumbed through back issues for articles I thought best captured my intention when I started the magazine twenty-six years ago. When I opened to an article on Hiram Works in the fall 2013 issue, I knew I had found one of them. Dan Dolgin had recently purchased the Thomas Hammond & Son lumber mill in Hiram, Maine, and he and Henry Banks, a local contractor, agreed to an interview about their vision for the property. Dan agreed to be interviewed only if the article was about the concept they were cultivating, and not about him, which if you knew Dan is testament to the man. He envisioned a business collective; a multi-business campus for tenants to pool their talents and resources to deliver quality "Made in Maine" products and services. Sadly, Dan left us all too soon, but the energy he expressed in that interview lives on.

Ten years later, Marguerite Wiser has written the next chapter of the former mill that is now called Tear Cap. Henry Banks and his daughter Sarah are keeping the flame that Dan lit all those years ago alive. In addition to local craftspeople making use of the campus to operate their businesses, Tear Cap Workshops is striving to spread knowledge about traditional crafts through hands-on classes in the Community Workshop.

Community, connection, collaboration, creativity—these are the concepts that thread through this issue of *Lake Living*. And going through all those back issues made me realize they are the hallmarks of where we live and why I continue to find examples of them all around us.

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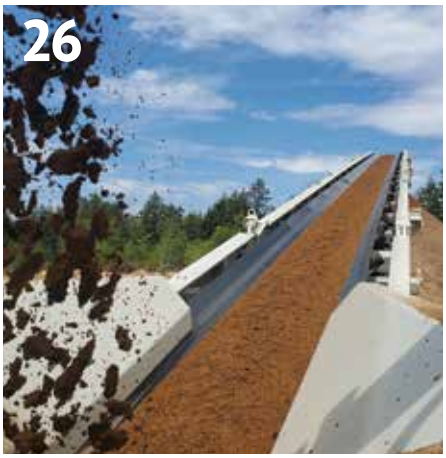

COVER HENRY AND SARAH BANKS PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARGUERITE WISER


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MAINE NEW HAMPSHIRE MASSACHUSETTS

Tradition at Tear Cap

BY **MARGUERITE WISER**

Nestled at the foot of Tear Cap in Hiram, the former Thomas Hammond & Son sawmill is once again bustling with activity. Tear Cap Workshops, incorporated as a nonprofit in 2016 and named for the mountain rising behind it, is creating a community hub for teaching and practicing woodworking and other traditional craft, while providing workspace for local artisans.

Tear Cap was founded by and is run by Henry and Sarah Banks. Henry worked for years as a carpenter in the Denmark area, but has shifted his attention to the workshop as its executive director. Sarah Banks, Henry's daughter, has served as Tear Cap's Administrative Director, using her English degree from Warren Wilson College to craft grant applications, as well as pitching in on the building conversions and facilitating workshops.

Tear Cap's development is funded by grants and gifts, and the organization has been the recipient of several grants from a wide range of foundations since its inception, including the Maine Community Foundation, Virginia Hodgkins Somers Foundation, and Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust. Sarah notes, "We are so grateful to the granting organizations who help fund Tear Cap's mission. Not only do these grants allow us to take big steps forward, but they show our donors and community members that support exists for organizations like ours."

Over the last several years the father-daughter-duo has been hard at work, converting the 19-acre property from a former sawmill into a craft school and work space for skilled local woodworkers and artisans.

The pine sawmill was operated in East Hiram by four generations of Hammonds beginning in 1947. When the mill was operating it did everything from sawing, sorting, planing, drying, retailing, to invoicing and delivering. The property, with its many outbuildings and storage sheds, hummed with activity, with forklifts zipping back and forth, the whine of saws and thunk of boards being cut and sorted, and the smell of pine sawdust heavy on the air.

Henry Banks recalls being a frequent customer until the mill closed in 2009. The combination of a 2007 fire that destroyed the sawmill portion of the operation and an economic downturn contributed to the closure. Char marks from the fire can still be seen on what remains of the green chain building, once used for sorting lumber by width.

After securing a loan from Coastal Enterprises, Inc (CEI) to help finance the purchase, Tear Cap Workshops acquired the 19-acre property in 2017 and began crafting their vision. Henry and Sarah feel the importance of this space and take the responsibility of carrying on its legacy seriously. A 1994 story from the Maine Times, titled "A great place to work" described the practices and ethos of the sawmill as

Thomas Hammond & Son sawmill c. 1960

believing in building for future generations, aligning well with the aims of the property's new use as Tear Cap Workshops.

Since 2017, Henry and Sarah have been working to transition the sawmill site, with its many outbuildings, into useful spaces for creating and learning, with an emphasis on handmade and traditional crafts. The journey hasn't been an easy one. Sarah describes the mill property when they acquired it as like Pompeii.

"There were coffee cups and the day's tallies left where they were midday the day the mill closed. They got up and left; it was a bit eerie, and still can be in secluded areas." Henry adds that, "There is still a strong presence of all who worked here."

Since they've acquired the property, the Bankses have been picking away at converting spaces, going building by building, fixing what really needs fixing, and attending to what needs attention. From there, they've been working to see what's possible with existing spaces, making use of Henry's extensive background and experience in construction. While some buildings have been entirely renovated and transformed, others function for the organization in more or less their original state, and still others are waiting to be repurposed.

The Community Woodworking Shop is housed in the former planer mill, where boards were planed down to produce dimensional lumber. The former green chain building where boards were sorted is mainly used as lumber storage now, but is also a great spot for demonstrations and craft setups for special events. A former gas station building has been transformed into a flexible-use space. The giant kiln building with its high ceilings is still waiting to be repurposed.

After lots of hard work, Tear Cap has created a small craft school alongside an artisan collective. A space where hands-on work is celebrated and taught, and where community is built. Henry Banks reflects, "So many things are virtual these days, with so much technology, but what's happening here at Tear Cap is hands-on. Working with our own hands, making something, is so gratifying, and the key to what happens here."

Artisan Tenants

Tear Cap is currently leasing 6 spaces to 9 artisan tenants operating their businesses out of the campus. They span a wide range of traditional skills, from timber framing, gardening, and cabinet making to a luthier building and repairing guitars.

Artisans, who often work independently, have a community here. They can eat alongside one another in the lunch room, seek advice from one another on projects and challenges, and collaborate. Tenant spaces range in size and use, but are heated by a combination of a large wood boiler fueled by scraps from the shops and heat pumps powered by community solar, with plans to install solar panels on the campus soon.

Henry and Sarah see enormous benefit in having the tenants on site and are gratified to see it bustling with use. Henry notes, "It's a visible representation of a vast amount of skill, technique, and traditional crafts as a career." They see it as a mutual use and mutually beneficial.

And tenants seem to agree. Alex Edney, who operates Edney Guitars out of the former shavings bagger building, now called Baggins, has been at Tear Cap since 2021. "I cannot overstate how much I enjoy being a tenant at Tear Cap. The first time I visited, I could tell it was a special place. Its history and the stories attached to it are an inspiration for me to pursue my work—almost like a form of spiritual momentum from the past."

Andy Buck operates his Custom Timberframer business out of a large building near the community workshop, shared with the workshop of Dietrich Woodworks, a local cabinetmaker. Other tenants have included gardeners, poets, woodworkers, and more.

"The idea is to re-purpose the former sawmill spaces into new workshops and

studios, or in one case, a former gravel lumber lot was built up with screened loam and turned into a vegetable garden. Our goal is to bring skilled craftspeople and entrepreneurs back to an industrial space, bringing jobs and opportunities back to the community," notes Sarah.

Hiram Town Historian Sally Williams notes, "Tear Cap Workshops under the guidance of Henry and Sarah Banks is a great boon to the town. We are very grateful for the risk they took in undertaking such a huge endeavor, their vision, energy, and determination."

The Bankses are excited to expand, with the addition of a newly renovated shop space dubbed Bag End. Also on the site of the former shavings bagger, the airy space with windowed garage doors and fresh shingles will soon be ready for a tenant. They would love to bring on a wooden boat builder to join the community.

Community Woodworking Shop: Hands-on Classes and Rent-a-Bench

In addition to the local craftspeople making use of the former mill to operate their businesses, Tear Cap Workshops is striving to spread knowledge about traditional crafts through hands-on classes covering a wide variety of skills and projects in the Community Workshop. The former planer building of the mill provides a fully outfitted space for such classes as well as one-on-one project mentoring.

The workshop is outfitted with a variety of donated, built, and purchased tools and materials, including shaving horses (a combination vice, workbench, and seat), a homemade panel saw, a 'new' 1947 planer from the Limington Airport, a SawStop table saw, a lathe and turning tools, drill press, scroll saw, joiner, bandsaw, routers, sanders, drills, grinders, and a wide range of hand tools including spokeshaves, drawknives, chisels, and hand planes.

Pine bench tops were made using lumber from pines on Tear Cap property that fell in a 2017 storm. The trees were hauled out of the woods by Henry and milled by local sawyer Brian Grady. The locally-sourced lumber has also been utilized in many on-site projects and in classes.

The Community Workshop is also home to the Bob Dunning Library, filled with instructive books from the collection from the late craftsman's workshop, donated by his wife and Tear Cap's founding board president, Sally Dunning. Hand tools and the lathe from Dunning's workshop are also used by workshop participants. A skilled craftsman with an eye for historic restoration, a passion for teaching traditional skills, and love of community, Bob Dunning would no doubt be pleased with the work Tear Cap is doing.

Past classes have spanned a variety of fields and skills, instructing participants in building dry stone walls, creating their own shave horses, weaving baskets, book binding, eco-printing, spoon carving, wood shaving ornaments, and canoe paddle carving.

In addition to these workshops, Tear Cap has offered facilities tours, demonstrations from artisans on bowl carving and blacksmithing, as well as seminars on forest biodiversity and The Barns of Maine. Sarah reports that the workshops have been well attended, with most selling out this year and last. Future workshops will include pottery, basketmaking, stonewall building, bookbinding, encaustics, eco-printing, and more.

Tear Cap also offers a Rent-a-Bench program that makes their workshop space and tools available for folks who have a project in mind but might not have the shop space or expertise to make it a reality. Participants call for an appointment and then are able to have access to the shop space, and benefit from Henry's experience. Rates range from hourly to daily, and depend on the amount of guidance the participant requires. Reduced rates are available for those on fixed incomes.

Alex Edney enjoys the interplay between tenancy and Tear Cap Workshops, "The classes and demonstrations at Tear Cap keep me engaged in different types of craft disciplines and the artists who teach them, and the Rent-a-Bench system brings everyday people into the world of creating things by hand. It's truly a wellspring of information, inspiration and community. I hope to be here creating instruments for a very long time."

Henry Banks can think of dozens of reasons why what Tear Cap is hoping to accomplish is not only important but necessary, from learning how to sustainably use a resource that grows so well in our state, to passing craft skills that have been honed over generations to future generations, to the satisfaction of building something with your hands. "It's not about the newest thing, or the fastest way," Henry notes, "this work is almost a lost tradition, and it's enjoyable work." Henry muses that working without power tools is quiet and pleasant, with less dust, and that it allows people to chat with their neighbors during classes, getting to know one another.

As the building improvements continue, and events continue to fill up, Sarah and Henry still have big ideas for the future. They'd like to eventually offer youth woodworking classes and possibly to install a commercial kitchen to teach the traditional skills that come along with gardening and food preservation. They are also always open to discussing future class topics or independent projects.

Though the whine of the sawmill has faded into Hiram's history, the new uses of the property still see people working with their hands, learning woodworking skills, and creating community through Tear Cap Workshops. ☼

Author Marguerite Wiser recently joined Tear Cap's Board of Directors. More information and registration for workshops can be found at tearcapworkshops.org.

Collaboration in Creativity

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

"One of the things I've learned over twenty years of teaching is that you can't expect students are going to be interested and excited in something you're not."

-IAN FACTOR

Fryeburg Academy's arts program is unique in that classes in drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, theater and music are all parts of a curriculum that inspires collaboration between students in the different disciplines. Another unique aspect of the program is that students who have excelled in the arts throughout their high school experience are awarded a Certificate of Arts upon graduation. The certificate program, which was instituted four years ago, has a fair amount of additional course work attached to it and culminates in the completion of a capstone project in the senior year. Not only does it recognize art participation through four years of high school, it brings students in the different arts disciplines together through collaborative capstone projects. One capstone project this past year was from a student who created an original film and composed and performed the score for it at a live audience screening.

For other capstone projects, composers have collaborated with performers, and visual artists have collaborated with writers in creating illustrated books, and in one case, the lead for a jazz combo collaborated with a film student in the creation of a promotional package to accompany the release of their album. The culmination of this capstone was a live performance from the album. Each spring an all-school Fine Arts Festival gives students a chance to share their projects with the entire community.

"Those kind of projects are exciting," says Mike Sakash, who is both chair of the arts program and music director, "but I think they're really unique at the high school level. I think you'd be hard pressed to find another art program, even in New England, that has the level of interaction between the arts that our students are going after. We started the Arts Certificate program with a handful of students and now the program is at our goal of about twenty-one students participating. There are students who are not only interested in the individual arts but they're interested in working together. It's been really exciting for the past several years to see that."

A few years ago, Mike Dana, FA's film workshop founder and instructor, oversaw a complete upgrade and remodel of the film lab and media center. This year, the visual arts program has undergone a transformation on both an academic and physical level. Over the summer there was a significant investment in upgrading infrastructure and equipment. Students returned to a completely gut-renovated studio that was designed to make better use of space and is therefore more flexible. The entire space has been rewired, replumbed, and reconfigured along with new floors, windows, HDTV, sound system and lighting. In addition, new easels, drafting tables, storage systems, and a three-bay sink have been installed.

Students also welcomed a new visual arts instructor this year. Ian Factor, owner of Factor Fine Art Gallery in Bridgton, replaces

Stephen Pullan, who was with FA for nearly two decades. It's worth noting that since Factor opened his gallery in June of 2022, he had been intentionally collaborating with Pullan and other faculty members in FA's audio/visual program to provide opportunities for students to take part in apprenticeship, certificate and continuing ed programs.

"My goal is to continue what Steve had done to build a very welcoming and open environment for anyone to be comfortable expressing themselves through the visual arts—and that's not going to change—but at the same time going to the next level means much more focus on training for those students who are dedicated and serious about pursuing visual arts beyond high school, whether it be graphic design, character design for an animation studio, fine art, painting, sculpture, drawing, story telling, book illustration—whatever their goals might be.

As much as I appreciate my undergraduate training, when I was in high school there were maybe a handful of small, non-accredited art academies or ateliers in the world, and those have just blown up like wildfire in the last ten or twelve years."

Factor explains that since the post-modernists came into being in the '50s, painting in any kind of realm of fine art, and most specifically representational and figurative art, was dead and buried. It was not supported or celebrated in higher education, but there's a swinging back of the pendulum toward actual academic training.

"I've always been more interested in the narrative aspect of image making. It's not just a sense of self-expression—and I teach this to my students—there's a responsibility as an artist, especially a visual artist, to think about and understand on some level what you're communicating. Because it is communication. It's visual communication, but it's communication. That's always been part of my passion for making images; the 'what am I saying?'"

So in place of Pullan's Experimental Materials class he has created a Narrative Image Making/Illustration class that focuses on telling stories through imagery. It will keep the experimental nature of Pullan's class by allowing students to use what ever materials and techniques they want, but the focus will be on the narrative. The goal is for students to use materials that best tell their story, which creates the idea of the technical narrative. He will also offer a portfolio class for seniors who are considering a career in art or at least pursuing art education at the college level.

Teaching has always been an essential aspect of Factor's art. After completing his own education with a BFA from the School of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University and MFA from the New York Academy of Art, he taught fine art, illustration and design in universities and academies from New York City to Guangxi, China, for more than 20 years. In 2014, he founded the Bend Academy of Art in Bend, Oregon, which gave him the autonomy to develop a curriculum based in the classical approach to figurative and illustrative art that encompassed technical narrative.

When the pandemic hit and he was faced with the prospect of remote courses, he made the decision to move back to his native New England. Factor grew up in Boston but spent childhood summers on Highland Lake and winter vacations on the slopes of Pleasant Mountain in Bridgton. When the former church that housed Craftworks for many years went on the market in 2020, he saw the opportunity for a cultural art center in which he could live, paint, teach and exhibit his art.

In his new role as visual arts instructor at FA, his goal is to bring the visual arts program to the level of what Mike Sakash has done with the music department by creating opportunities for students that go above and beyond and outside of the walls of Fryeburg Academy—to the regional, national and even international level.

Just as Sakash continues to perform as a regular with the Portland Jazz Orchestra, Factor will continue to operate Factor Fine Art Gallery.

Sakash points out that Factor's experience as a working artist and gallery owner brings an invaluable layer of art education to students.

"Ian is really active in his field, he has a following, he started the gallery in Bridgton, he has a huge body of work, so for the visual arts students that gives them a really close connection to their lives as artists after they graduate from Fryeburg . . . I think Ian's presence is going to affect all of our disciplines in a positive way because of his past experience and his amazing energy." ☼

Portions of this article were excerpted from an article on Factor Fine Art that appeared in the 2021 fall/winter issue of Lake Living. For a listing of current art events and exhibits visit FryeburgAcademy.org and click on the Performing Arts Center tab.

What's Going On

AT THE MAGIC LANTERN?

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

This October marks one year since the Magic Lantern Movie Theater in Bridgton was purchased by the Maine 4-H Foundation. In the two years prior to the purchase, the Foundation launched a $4 million fund development campaign to acquire the theater and restaurant, which was rebuilt and opened in 2008 with state-of-the-art technology, and expand it with the development and creation of a 4-H innovation lab and learning center. Support came from foundations, local businesses, community members and dedicated 4-H donors. The donation of the building itself was a tremendous $2.97 million gift from the Howell Family Trust as part of the major fund development to create the new learning center.

Executive Director Laurie Bragg credits the Howells and Susan Jennings, who was the Innovation Center's first executive director, with recognizing the need for STEM and literacy programs in Bridgton and envisioning the Magic Lantern as a means to address that need. Statistically, 70% of students graduating from Lake Region High School last year were not proficient in math and reading.

The blueprint for the new Magic Lantern 4-H Innovation Lab and Learning Center is to preserve the three-auditorium theater, while utilizing revenue from operations to the greatest extent possible to bring affordable educational programs in literacy and the arts, math, design and engineering, as well as local food systems to youth in a part of Maine that has historically been underserved by the University. The Center operates as a 501(c)(3) and as such is able to acquire additional funding through grants, workshop fees and donations. The hope is that the movie theater and restaurant will generate enough income to support the youth programming.

Bragg points out that eight out of ten dollars from a ticket for a blockbuster hit like *Barbie* goes back to Hollywood, so revenue from concessions is critical to their operation. She also notes that despite the success of two blockbuster movies this summer, the overall trend in movie attendance has been downward. In response to this trend, the past year has been about transitioning from relying solely on movie ticket sales to offering more live performances, including comedy shows, lectures, and improv. They've been partnering with local organizations like the Town of Bridgton and Bridgton Recreation, as well as Children's Theater of Maine and The Opportunity Alliance to offer live performances, puppet shows, events and workshops.

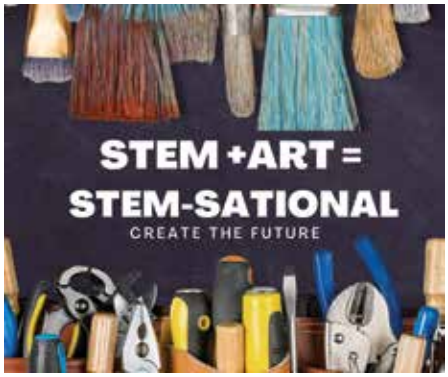
Bragg and Cooperative Extension employee Becky Mosley currently lead all of the classes and workshops. Bragg focuses more on the "techie stuff" for older kids and Mosley offers more hands-on art projects with the younger ones. The schedule this fall includes classes and workshops in Stop Motion Animation, Toy Photography, STEM Art Class, Story Book Art, Felting, and Clay Animation for K-12 youth. Science Saturdays! are designed for elementary students and cost just $8 per person.

Unlike a typical 4-H program that is run through the Foundation for free, the Innovation Center is a cost recovery program that has to offset the cost of materials

through workshop fees. Because they strive to keep participant fees low, they often fall short of that goal, which is another reason they depend on revenue from the theater and concessions to both fund programming and maintain the building.

With regard to local food systems, Bragg tells me they have received funding for AmeriCorps members to offer a gardening program for kids next year. This year they have been hosting Cumberland County Cooperative Extension staff and recently had a make-your-own-pickles class. They are "on the list" to host more classes in education around food through the partnership they enjoy with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service.

Conversation eventually circles back to my original question and what plans there are to get word out to the community. Bragg admits that the youth programming is something of a hidden gem at the Magic Lantern because classes take place on days when the theater is not open to the public. Developing partnerships with other educational resources in town is a mutually beneficial way to build awareness. The Bridgton News and a once-a-week e-newsletter are



other ways to get the word out. Facebook is another. They also gather email addresses at other town events and post flyers locally.

"We need community awareness. I know that in Bridgton alone there are 95 homeschool families and they should be coming to the Magic Lantern for daytime educational programming. We're trying to find that balance of offering stuff for home school and for public school kids."

Bragg has worked in non-profits for twenty-five years, including with Youth Alternatives in Portland, and more recently, managing and developing science programs for National Science Foundation grants in the EPSCoR (Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research) program at the University of Maine. Through the latter she has worked closely with Cooperative Extension.

Her two-year vision for the Innovation Center is that it will be bustling with activity and that there will be programming for youth every day of the week. She hopes that the movie theater will be a live performance venue with music and other art performances that will generate enough revenue to support at least the operations of the building.

"It's become a labor of love for me because I feel like I've been able to teach some things I'm passionate about, like photography and videography, and I'm constantly learning with the kids. I try to plan every class so that I am going to have some fun while we're doing it," says Bragg.

Beyond youth programs, there has been an increase in the number of documentaries being shown. Attendees to recent weekend screenings of MANHATTAN SHORT 2023 were able to cast their votes for Best Film and Best Actor awards. Budding filmmakers

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will be given the opportunity to screen their film on the screen in the pub on Saturday nights. Bragg would eventually like to host a student film festival like the Strand does in Ellsworth.

"We want people to know, we're still your community theater. We're just now branching out and doing live performances and youth programming. I feel like *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* helped audiences remember what it's like to go to the theater. Film is fun on the big screen and it's fun to watch it in community."

And then of course there's the popcorn.

Visit magiclanternmovies.com for class schedule and to register.

Raising the Rufus

BY LEIGH MACMILLEN HAYES

"We are preserving the past," said Beth Cossey, Vice President of the Rufus Porter Museum of Art and Ingenuity Board of Trustees. "The museum is one of the cornerstones of town, the others being the Methodist Church now owned by Bridgton Historical Society, Bridgton Public Library, the Civil War monument, and First Congregational Church."

In 2005, a vision long held by folk art collectors Carl and Julie Lindberg became a reality when an antique shop they'd purchased from the Johnson family was transformed to the Rufus Porter Museum.

The red building that housed the original museum had a curious past. It was built on South High Street circa 1790 for Reverend Nathan Church, the first minister of Bridgton. In 1840, the building was moved to the foot of Highland Lake to house workers for Gibbs Mills, and moved again in 1986 by the Johnson family to become their antique shop on the corner of North High Street and Taylortown Road. The Johnsons saved the house from being razed by the fire department to make way for Shorey Park and in that move Rufus Porter murals were re-exposed as they'd been hiding under wall paper for many years. The Church House, as it's become known in reference to Mr. Church, was finally moved in 2016 to Church Street to become part of the greater Rufus Porter Museum campus.

But even then, the vision was for more indoor space because the museum had acquired nearly two dozen murals painted by Rufus Porter's nephew, Jonathan D. Poor, circa 1840, and they wanted to expand the campus to share the artwork with the public. The murals were donated to the museum by the Haines family and professionally cut from the James Norton House in East Baldwin, Maine, by David Ottinger, a housewright with years of experience moving plaster walls.

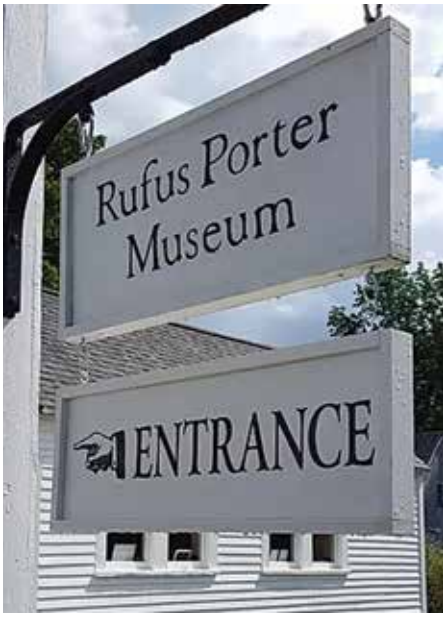
I asked why the museum trustees decided to build a barn and not a house. Beth replied, "Because there was a barn there. The exterior of the structure will be a barn, but the post and beam interior will be fully museum quality, with radiant heat in the floor and atmospheric conditions perfect for the murals."

The building constructed by Houses and Barns by John Libby of Freeport is 1.5 stories. And since the Federal and Greek Revival style John and Maria Webb House at the front of the Main Street property is on the National Register of Historic Places due to its significance as an early remnant of Bridgton's past, other buildings on the property cannot overwhelm it. Thus the barn has been set back under a canopy of trees. Its placement will create a green space where people can sit in the yard and enjoy a picnic lunch beside the brook.

Rufus Porter was born in Boxford, Massachusetts, but lived in Pleasant Mountain Gore, a section of Bridgton that has since become part of Denmark, during his youth. At age 12, he attended the one-room Fryeburg Academy. At that time, school tuition was $1.50 and he could only afford two semesters or six months of formal schooling.

As a teen, his parents encouraged him to become a shoemaker, but he only lasted a couple of years at that trade and instead went on to pursue a variety of careers. Madeleine Lane-Duigan, Community Engagement Coordinator said, "They call Rufus the Yankee da Vinci." Like Leonardo da Vinci, he was a Renaissance polymath despite his lack of education. She listed some of his many talents: "Fiddler, artist, portraitist, muralist, founder of *Scientific American* magazine, dance instructor, inventor."

It is known that he learned the techniques of house painting in 1810 from Marcus Quincy and by 1822 he'd turned to mural painting. Murals, portraits, and inventions are key parts of the Webb House and Church House displays. Porter had patents on a significant number of inventions, thus an ever-changing variety of items he had created, e.g. corn sheller, cane chair, and rotary pump will be displayed along with the Poor murals in the barn. The first



floor will feature an atrium plus a community room. The original staircase from the Norton House will be on display, but not functional because of its age. The second floor will be accessible via either a cascading staircase on the side of the interior or an elevator. Perch Design Studio of Portland is helping to create interactive and interesting exhibits for the barn and throughout the entire campus, thus updating the visitor experience in a way that will appeal to all.

Madeleine informed me that they are building out a Curious Arts program based on Porter's published work, *A Select Collection of Valuable and Curious Arts, and Interesting Experiments, Which Are Well Explained and Warranted Genuine, and May Be Performed Easily, Safely, and At Little Expense*. It's a book of his secret, or not so secret, DIY recipes and formulas on how to make such things as disappearing ink, waterproof gilding, enamel picture glass, and so much more. To date, they've offered a 19th Century Floor Cloth class, a Rug Hooking class, and a Quilt Lecture and Luncheon. In the future, plans are to offer other old craft classes such as journal making and fly tying, to name a couple. Some will be virtual offerings, but with the new building, they are excited about the potential for in-person programs.

Offering tours and engaging the community are key components of the museum. Already, the trustees work with students at Stevens Brook Elementary School in Bridgton, offering a Local Stories Project during the school year in which older people tell the children what the town was like when they grew up here. The students turn those stories into their own pictorial murals on display at the school. The museum and school also team up to offer Camp Invention during the summer. This is part of the national Inventors Hall of Fame program and they work with the patent office in Washington, D.C. What began as a small camp with 25 participants has grown to 150 and the museum raises scholarship money for those who want to attend but cannot afford it. "The goal was 25 scholarships, and we raised 34 this year," said Madeleine.

Executive Director Blainor McGough's vision for the new building and overall campus is to form a vibrant self-sustaining center of creativity that is inviting to the people of all walks of life in Bridgton and beyond. "Going forward, I see a special focus on Bridgton's history and all the history that comes along with Rufus Porter, but with a modern twist that acknowledges contemporary mural artists and ingenuity that's relevant to all ages and walks of life. Folk arts are a central theme, but we'll rejuvenate them in an accessible way."

All of this could not happen without the continued support of a number of volunteers, plus donations and grants. "For a museum," said Blainor, "we have a very small budget. Part of our challenge is building up the internal structure and capacity to have a vibrant museum, but also to share art and invention with our neighbors."

The plan is for the barn to open to the public in late 2024. You can help Raise the Rufus by contributing to the on-going Rufus Porter Museum of Art and Ingenuity capital campaign.

FMI: www.rufusportermuseum.org
207.647.2828
Open Wednesday - Saturday from mid-June to mid-October, or by appointment.

Every Picture Tells a Story

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

Dwight Mills has been telling stories in oil paint ever since he first picked up a brush in 1979. He pretty much sticks to three colors—Prussian Blue, Cadmium Red, and Cadmium Yellow—to mix almost any color or shade, though he's planning to use some "chancier" colors for his next paintings. He has never attended a formal art class and his style is by his own description "primitive," but he does like to tell a story and prefers to tell it in paint. I ask him if he's ever been tempted to take an art class and he doesn't hesitate before telling me no.

"After forty-four years [of painting], I'm pretty much set in my ways," says Dwight. "I've got a few books that I've bought so I guess technically I don't know if you could say I'm self-taught. I've learned a little bit from the books probably."

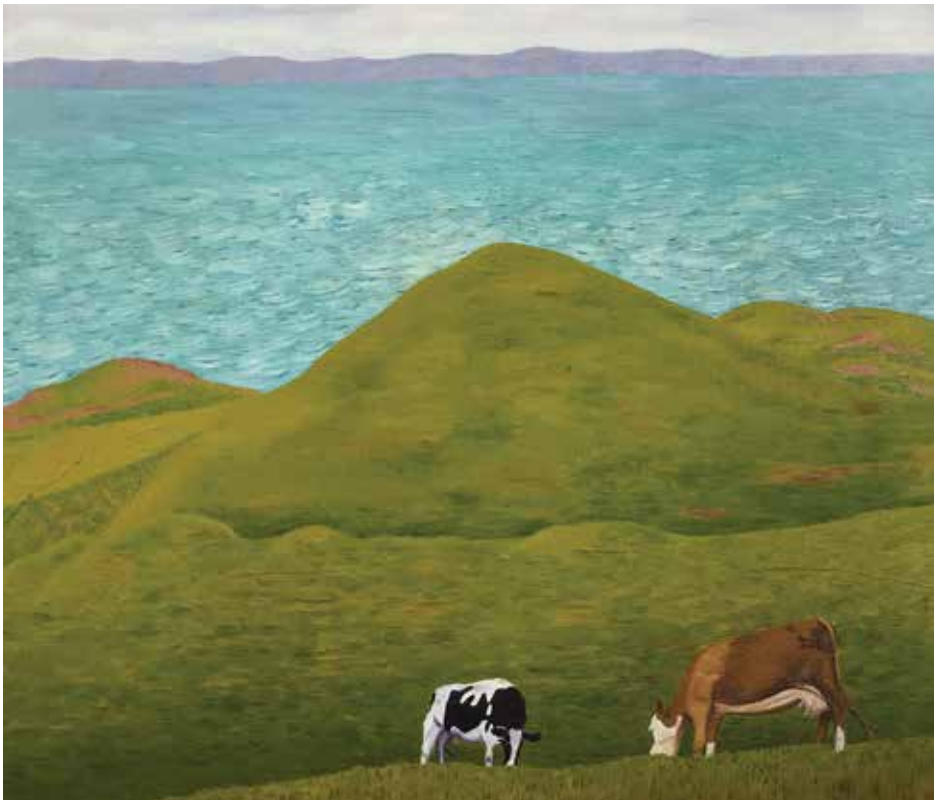
And who can say what effect formal training would have on his paintings? Would they lose some of their charm if the perspective was always in scale? Would the singular way he sees things and records them on canvas be sacrificed to technique?

Dwight's paintings are probably best described as a folk art. There is a narrative aspect to most folk art that is driven by an interest in making art that tells stories about daily life or the culture of a community. His first painting, *Roy and the Moose*, tells the story of his uncle Leroy Martin and a domestic encounter he had with a moose twenty years earlier in 1959. According to Dwight, "Roy" and a friend were processing deer hides in his Twitchell Pond cabin and it attracted the invading moose, who was able to get his head in the door but couldn't back out on account of his rack. The story further involves a wooden mallet and a broken sawhorse but no one, including the moose, was injured. The incident was written up in *The Bethel Citizen*, a copy of which is taped to the back of the painting.

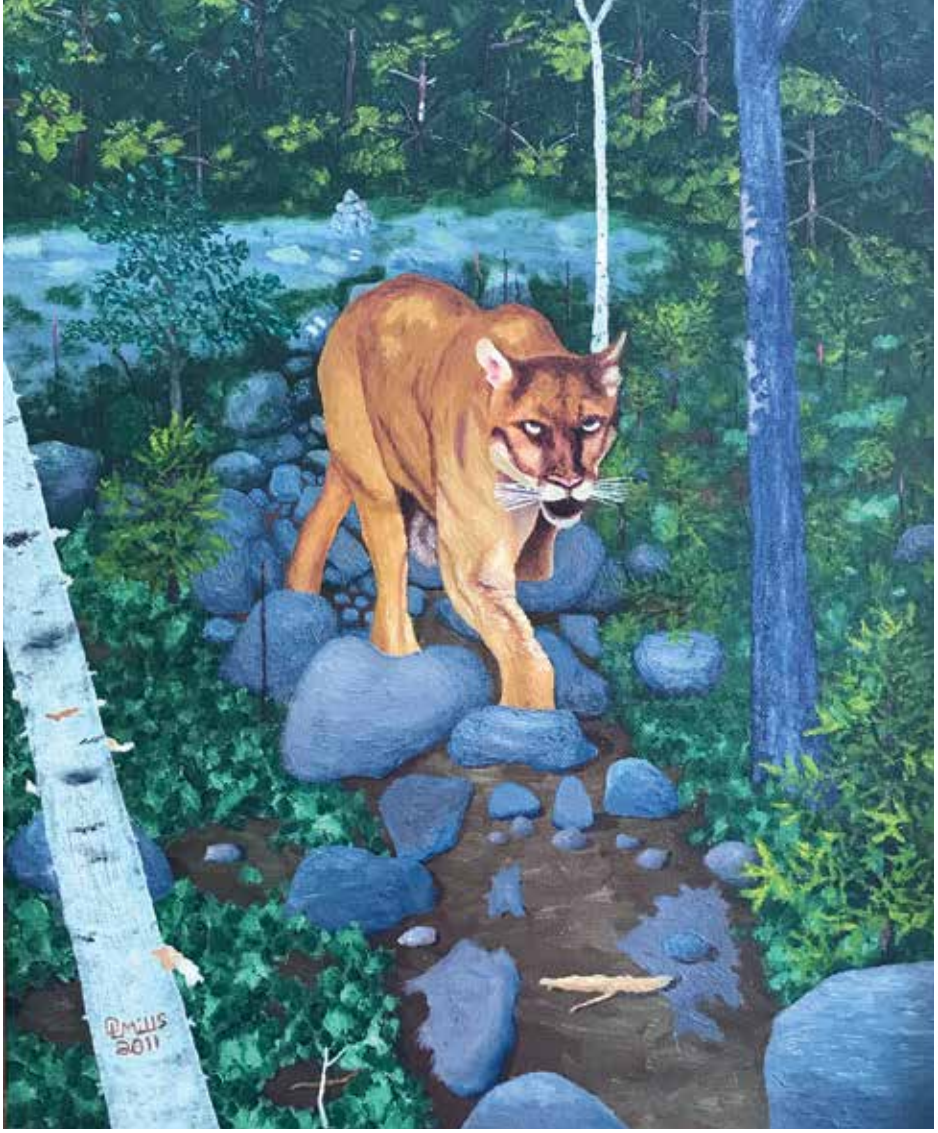
One of his more recent paintings, *The Potato Eaters: The Next Generation*, in which Dwight's wife, son, stepson and their girlfriends are pictured eating French fries at a McDonald's is a take-off on Van Gogh's Potato Eaters. The subject of Dwight's painting are well dressed and obviously

Franconia Ridge Seen from Mt. Lincoln

The Potato Eaters: The Next Generation



Iles-de-la-Madeleine Seascape



Through Hiker in Maine

enjoying themselves, in other words, in stark contrast to the harsh reality of 19th-century life depicted in Van Gogh's painting, but it's up to the viewer to interpret the message. Interestingly, the Van Gogh Museum has this to say about the artist's early work:

"The message of the painting was more important to Van Gogh than correct anatomy or technical perfection. He was very pleased with the result: yet his painting drew considerable criticism because its colours were so dark and the figures full of mistakes. Nowadays, the *Potato Eaters* is one of Van Gogh's most famous works."

The "message" of his paintings is important to Dwight as well. *Through Hiker in Maine* is an answer to Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife claims that there is no breeding population of mountain lions in Maine and that the occasional sightings are of cats passing between the Maritime provinces and Vermont. The cat in his painting boldly approaches the viewer on a section of the Appalachian Trail marked with white blazes. *Three of a Kind* uses a black, white, and spotted sheep to make a statement in support of diversity. *Trouble* captures an impending predicament between a curious black bear and a nest full of angry wasps.

Sea(E)scape reflects Dwight's aversion to traditional seascapes. The perspective is from the water with a view to the beach. One hundred and twenty bathers are shown in the water and along the shore. Sixty vintage and antique cars are parked on the beach. Some of them, like the '58 Corvette and the '56 Oldsmobile, are cars that Dwight once owned.

"I'm not an ocean person. I'm really a pond and lake guy. I just don't like looking at pictures of a boat by itself on the ocean so I said that if I ever paint a seascape it's got to be looking in at the beach. So that's what I did."

Monochromatic paintings, *Lady Sings the Blues*, *Going Green*, and *Red Tide*, are those in which Dwight has intentionally restricted himself to one color in addition to white. When I ask him if he's a fan of Billie Holiday, he tells me he likes some of her songs and some of them he doesn't. He supposes he was mostly compelled to paint her because it was a chance to use only Prussian Blue and white.

Going Green is a complete departure from the looser style in most of his paintings. It depicts a green gabled house at night, completely illuminated but devoid of humans, with three white windmills behind the house and solar panels on the house and garage roofs. A bicycle sits in an open garage bay and the EV in the driveway is plugged into a home charging station. It reminds me of Ray Bradbury stories I've read.

"I'm kind of trying to tell a story about how we have to straighten out the climate mess and go with less carbon. I'm afraid we've waited too long. I think we're in big trouble. You know what's aggravating to me is now we're having space tours. I can't believe it!"

If you haven't figured it out by now, Dwight is a Mainer through and through. He grew up on Bird Hill out of Locke Mills and has lived in Maine all his life. He doesn't have a smart phone because he claims he's "not smart enough to own one." Yet he worked for the Rumford Police Department for over twenty-five years and then went into contract security on his own. His most recent job was at the Locke Mills transfer station but back problems forced him to give that up.

"I put my back out down there. Another guy and I were wrestling with a big screen TV. Everybody these days has a contest with owning the biggest television."

What strikes me most about Dwight and makes me think twice about how we determine who is and is not an artist is the obvious joy with which he sees and documents the world. His hiking days are recorded in paintings of his favorite mountains and hiking companions. These days it's birds, most notably an immature bald eagle across the pond, and wildlife that catch his eye and even inspired him to plant a pollinator garden on his property. *Common Redpoll*, with its feet hidden in the snow, has a Miroesque quality. *Monarch Butterfly on a Mexican Sunflower* is practically a cross-species mating scene. *Bison in the Snow* tells of a bygone America. But my favorite peaceful story is of a Guernsey and Holstein cow grazing below a bluff that gives way to the sea off Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine in eastern Quebec. Apparently Dwight Mills does seascapes after all. ☼

Dwight Mills is an exhibiting artist at Elements Gallery in Bethel, Maine

the bookshelf

BOOK REVIEWS FROM
BRIDGTON BOOKS

JUSTIN'S LIST

Rainy days are wonderful for bookstore sales but they made it difficult to find time to read this past summer, and some of the books I had high hopes for were disappointing. I do, however, have a few good books to recommend for fall and winter.

William Kent Krueger's new novel ***The River We Remember*** is a complex mystery drama reminiscent of his Edgar award winning book *Amazing Grace*, an all-time favorite of the bookstore. Krueger's rich descriptions of rural, 1950s Minnesota and its residents make the tale so much more than a standard mystery. Jimmy Quinn is found floating in the Alabaster River face down with a gunshot wound. Although he was not well liked in the town, people want answers, and soon some start pointing fingers at Noah Bluestone, a Native American, who has a Japanese wife and worked for Quinn. It is up to Sheriff Brody Dern to get to the bottom of the secrets and lies underneath the veneer of this sleepy Midwestern town.

For lovers of historical fiction, check out these two. ***Crow Mary*** by Kathleen Grissom is based on an actual Crow woman in the 1870s Montana Territories. "Goes First" is the daughter of a Crow chief and is pledged to marry the man of her dreams, when tragedy strikes, and she loses him. Her father, in the hopes of giving her a better life, marries her off to Abe Farwell, an older, white trader. Abe calls her Mary and takes her with him to start a trading post in remote Canada. Without giving too much of the plot away, let me just say that Crow Mary is an empowering, inspirational woman, and is steady in the face of violence, alcoholism and betrayal. A most memorable character that will stay with you long after you finish reading the book.

The East Indian, by Brinda Charry, takes place in Colonial Jamestown, Virginia. Tony is an East Indian whose late mother's benefactor arranges passage to London for him. No sooner is he there, when he is swept up and kidnapped along with other boys to provide labor in the New World. This glimpse into Colonial tobacco farming and indentured servitude through Tony's eyes felt real and genuine and I was always racing toward the next page to see

what was going to happen. Although set in a different time period, this novel reminded me of *Washington Black* by Esi Edugyan.

Sometimes you just want to read something funny and light, and the next two novels fit the bill. ***Mrs. Plansky's Revenge*** by Spencer Quinn is a cozy adventure story starring the title character. An intelligent, 72-year-old widow, Mrs. Plansky nonetheless falls victim to Romanian teleswindlers and loses her substantial life savings. After being told there is nothing much they can do by the FBI and her banker, she decides to take matters into her own hands and books herself a ticket to the telefraud center of Eastern Europe, where the call originated.

In ***Miss Benson's Beetle*** by Rachel Joyce, Margery Benson, a single, middle-aged school teacher in 1950s London has a meltdown in class and abandons her job. Always fascinated by a childhood book titled *Incredible Creatures*, and the legendary golden beetle of New Caledonia portrayed in the book, she decides it is her destiny to find the fabled insect and bring it back to the Smithsonian Museum in triumph. She takes great pains to plan her expedition, and ends up saddled with a most "unsuitable" assistant, Enid Pretty, who is running away from England quickly for her own reasons. Follow their misadventures around the globe. You will be cheering for them by the end in this heartwarming novel.

From 1979-1992 El Salvador was caught up in a civil war between leftist insurgents and the U.S. backed authoritarian government. ***Solito*** by Javier Zamora, is the true memoir of Javier, who as a 9-year-old-boy, emigrated from El Salvador to the United States on his own. His parents had already fled to the U.S., and Javier waited with his grandparents for the day when everything would be paid for and arranged for his journey. One other man from his village was supposed to watch over and help him. This is a remarkable story that renewed my faith in human nature.

The Hope family murders on the Coast of Maine shocked the nation in 1929. Seventeen-year-old Lenora Hope was suspected of murdering her family, however, it was never proven by the police. In the mystery/thriller ***The Only One Left***, by Riley Sager, we fast forward to 1983. Kit McDeere, a home health assistant, is hired to care for Lenora, who is now elderly and has had a series of strokes. Kit has heard wild stories about what happened years ago and has reservations about working with Lenora, even though she needs the job. Lenora is a bed- and wheelchair-bound invalid with only the use of one hand, so how could she be dangerous? After only a few days, Lenora, who communicates by slowly typing with one finger because she can't speak, leaves a message for Kit: "I want to tell you everything." Although there may have been one coincidence too many toward the end of this book, I found it a highly entertaining mystery with plenty of unexpected plot twists.

The big five publishers appear to be hell bent on putting out large numbers of rom-com and horror books this fall, and both genres are growing explosively so this is understandable. But what about a good spy novel? There seems to be far fewer of

them being released these days, and that is why I was pleased to discover Mick Herron's eight-book ***Slough House*** series. These clever English novels revolve around the aforementioned Slough House, a place where disgraced MI5 agents, who have bungled an Op or have a substance abuse problem, go out to pasture. Still on payroll, but relegated to menial tasks for the rest of their days, most retire or quit . . . or so it seems! ***Slow Horses*** is the first in the series and they are all loads of fun!

PERRI'S PREFERENCES

Congratulations to Bridgton Books for being a mainstay business on Main Street for 30 years! I think I speak for many when I say thank you Justin, Pam, and the bookstore crew for hanging in there and promoting reading one book at a time.

In a recent interview ("207," Sept. 18, WCSH TV, Channel 6, Portland), bestselling author David Baldacci discussed the importance of literacy as "the last bastion of democracy" and essential for creating an informed electorate. He said people often tell him that they don't have time to read. He used to respond by shrugging his shoulders and saying that's okay, people are busy, but now he says, "I am so sorry for you." When they ask why, he declares because "you have no idea what you are missing" and says that he hopes they make a different decision and open up a book in the future. I wholeheartedly agree. I hope you will take the time to read a good book soon and encourage others to do the same.

I was thrilled to come across ***Horse***, by Pulitzer Prize winning Geraldine Brooks, one of my favorite writers. Centered around Lexington, the greatest racehorse in American history, the story begins in 2019 when a painting is retrieved from a trash pile. The narrative then moves back and forth through the 1850s, the Civil War, midcentury New York City, and the Smithsonian research labs. History, science, art, culture, and, of course, horse racing all come together to offer something for just about everyone in this intricately researched and compelling novel.

The bright yellow cover of ***Wing and a Prayer: The Race to Save Our Vanishing Birds*** by journalists Anders and Beverly Gyllenhaal caught my eye just like the flocks of goldfinches that inundate my bird feeders. While goldfinches may be plentiful, billions of other birds have disappeared and many species are on the verge of extinction. Longtime bird lovers, the Gyllenhaals set out to see what is being done to help reverse this trend. Visiting various sites across the continent they learn how scientists, citizens, and even NASA are working together using new technology to track, study, and hopefully save diminishing bird populations. The effort is truly global, even extending into space. This important and accessible book also offers suggestions for ways everyone can help save our feathered friends.

If you ever wondered how folks in the days before the internet, television, or the automobile survived the long Maine winters, ***Wit and Wisdom: The Forgotten Literary Life of New England Villages***, by local historian and storyteller Joan (Jo) Newlon Radner, will enlighten you. Based on extensive research that began in her family's dusty attic, Ms. Radner explores the unique phenomenon of local "lyceums" that flourished during the winter months in rural New England from 1840 to the 1890s. These lively community gatherings offered opportunities for people to express their views and creativity while providing a way to socialize during the long, cold season. Entertaining and often funny, this delightful work of local history is a great fireside read for a long winter's night.

I worked at Bridgton Books for 13 years and have written book reviews for *Lake Living* for 26 years. I now want to remind readers about some of my all-time favorites that people continue to enjoy. My very first reviews included ***The Samurai's Garden*** by Gail Tsukiyama, which has become a top recommended read at Bridgton Books. ***Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*** and other novels by Lisa See are also very popular, as is ***The Housekeeper and the Professor*** by Yoko Ogawa. ***When the Emperor was Divine***, or anything by Julie Otsuka, is beautiful. ***The Secret River*** by Kate Grenville is my personal best seller and I literally could not put down ***A Fine Balance*** by Rohinton Mistry (which I read years before it was on Oprah's Book Club). I consider Robert Olen Butler to be one of the best living American fiction writers—***A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain: Stories*** is exquisite and his other works are well worth reading, too. I found ***Atonement*** by Ian McEwan so good that I couldn't read new fiction for months afterwards so I turned to my go-to author, John Steinbeck, especially ***Cannery Row*** and ***Log from the Sea of Cortez***.

For nonfiction, I choose Timothy Egan's chronicle of the dustbowl, ***The Worst Hard Time*** (how did those people survive?!). Before the tragedy of the dustbowl is the delightful ***Letters of a Woman Homesteader*** by Elinore Pruitt Stewart. ***The Prince of Los Cocuyos***, by esteemed local author Richard Blanco, is a favorite memoir that perfectly complements his poetry in ***Looking for the Gulf Motel***. ***Waiting for Snow in Havana***, by Carlos Eire is another interesting take on a Cuban immigrant story.

The Paper Garden: An Artist Begins Her Life's Work at 72 by Molly Peacock is a fascinating biography of an extraordinary woman, as is ***Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China.*** and ***The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*** by Xinran explores just what that Modern China is like.

My very favorite book is ***Invisible Cities*** by Italo Calvino, but I don't think I have ever managed to convince anyone to read it… ☼

Keeping the Die-a-logue Alive

BY MOLLIE ELIZABETH WOOD

At some point in her life, Mrs. B had been told that she could not sing.

Now, in her eighties, she was close to the end of life. Her family had built a ramp up to her bedroom window so the neighbor's goats could walk up it and visit, she had held a baby goat in her hospice bed, and her death doula, Laura Carey, was singing constantly.

The singing was one of those unconscious actions that Carey didn't even think about, but it prompted Mrs. B to confide to Carey something she had held secret.

Mrs. B wanted to sing too.

"She had held in her voice for all those years," Carey said. "It would have been easy for her to take that to the grave."

Instead, Mrs. B let her voice fly. With only three months left in life, she began to sing, and she didn't stop. Every word she normally would have spoken came out as a song. For ten days straight, phrases such as, "Hello, how are you today?" emerged in tunes that Mrs. B improvised. And later, when the end-of-life process got messy, Mrs. B sang about it.

As a death doula, Carey tells Mrs. B's story to others who are facing the end of their lives. She provides services similar to the non-medical duties of a nursing assistant as well as those of a chaplain, working with families while their loved ones are passing. And since July 2023, she has been hosting a bimonthly Death Café at Charlotte Hobbs Memorial Library in Lovell, Maine, where folks thinking about death and dying can meet and chat about their concerns. The next Death Café will be held Monday, November 13, 2023 at 6 p.m.

The Death Café was inspired after Hobbs Library Director Jen Dupree invited Carey to present an information night in May. The initial event was titled, "How talking about death helps you live your best life," and it attracted an eclectic group of folks, from older to younger, from retired nurses to people who had recently experienced a loss. The info night was such a hit that Carey and Dupree started planning regular gatherings.

Carey "could get along with anybody," Dupree said. "She was open to what anybody said. The whole vibe was open and respectful."

I met Carey at Beth's Café in Bridgton, Maine, and as we sat at a wooden table in the quiet upstairs room, Carey's electric blue-tipped fingernails wrapped around a mammoth beverage container with a Pre-Dead Social Club sticker on it. "Keeping the Die-a-logue alive" her sticker proclaimed.

We discussed why people are so afraid to talk about death.

"It's hard for people to witness change," she said. "Our culture's fear of other is very similar to the fear of death and dying and grief. We're afraid of what we don't know."

She related fears of other races, genders, or sexual orientations to the fear of death because all those fears are ways that our brains push away what we don't understand. But the more we talk about aspects of death and dying that scare us, the better prepared we will be to help our loved ones when it comes time for them to transition out of this life.

Carey has been working with death and dying for over twenty-five years. She started out caregiving for a friend whose grandmother needed help later in life, and after that job ended, she was recommended for one caregiving position after another, until caregiving became a career.

After working in end-of-life services for ten years, she went to chaplaincy school, giving her the opportunity to expand the spiritual services she offered to clients. From there, she started her business as a death doula.

The main difference Carey sees between hospice and death doula services is insurance.

"I love hospice," she said, and in general her clients receive hospice services through organizations that provide doctors, nurses,

social workers, grief counselors, chaplains, and certified nursing assistants to the dying and their loved ones.

But how much time each hospice provider can spend with a patient is limited by insurance guidelines. As a death doula hired directly by clients, Carey has more freedom, so she can spend a night or a weekend—or however long anybody feels is necessary—to get to know a family and understand how to support them through their loved one's dying process.

"As people feel comfortable with you, then they're going to be more vulnerable and more honest," she said, but it takes time for people to reach the special level of closeness Carey and Mrs. B shared. "None of those things happen quickly."

Toward the end of our visit at Beth's, Carey invited me to a Death Over Drinks event later that month near Portsmouth, New Hampshire, which promised to be similar to her upcoming Death Café.

"Are you interested? You can ride with me," she said.

"I'd love to, but I have three dogs," I replied.

"You can leave them at my house with my husband."

So two weeks later I dropped off my crew of tiny terriers at her house in Bridgton, and they hung out with her pack of toy poodles while she and I drove two hours south to White Gate Farm, the home of another death doula, Laura Cleminson.

"Welcome to the Pre-Dead Social Club," Cleminson opened the evening. "Which is me and all of you, by default, because you're not dead."

We broke into groups and Cleminson presented us with a question: are you more concerned about your own death or the death of a loved one?

Easy peasy, I thought. Death of a loved one. Who cares about my own death? I'll be gone. It's the death of another that's painful.

But as the group went around, I realized many people were there precisely because they were concerned about their own passing and how it would affect those they love. From logistical steps, such as making sure a surviving spouse has secure housing and getting an advance healthcare directive in order, to other, more emotional aspects of dying, the process of preparing for death was on many people's minds.

One hospice nurse suggested holding a living wake, where guests share what they love about a person before they die. Such an event gives people a chance to clear the air if needed, or, as Cleminson put it, take care of "unfinished business." Even if it's tough to confront loved ones with painful truths, that act can sometimes free a sick person to pass peacefully. And we all agreed it's very important to us that our loved ones have a good death.

Co-hosted by the Hospice Help Foundation, Death Over Drinks is designed to get younger people talking about death and dying. By the time an emergency arises and a loved one is sick or in the hospital, people are generally not in the state of mind where they can calmly think about their options and plan, but events such as Death Over Drinks or Death Café give attendees the chance to make calm decisions about what they value before they or their loved ones face end-of-life realities.

Carey's Death Café at the Charlotte Hobbs Memorial Library in Lovell is likely to resemble Cleminson's Death Over Drinks event, but Carey structures her Death Café slightly differently. While both events feature food and conversation in a relaxed atmosphere, Carey lets the interests and needs of the participants direct the course of discussion.

"The joy of Death Café is the conversation is supposed to be really organic," Dupree said.

At the information night, attendees talked excitedly about what they could do with their ashes. "People got really specific, like you could make them into glass," Dupree noted. Some wanted their ashes to be scattered, and one younger person suggested sending them into space. Dupree was impressed with how respectful Carey was as a facilitator. "I don't know exactly what she's doing. It's some kind of magic."

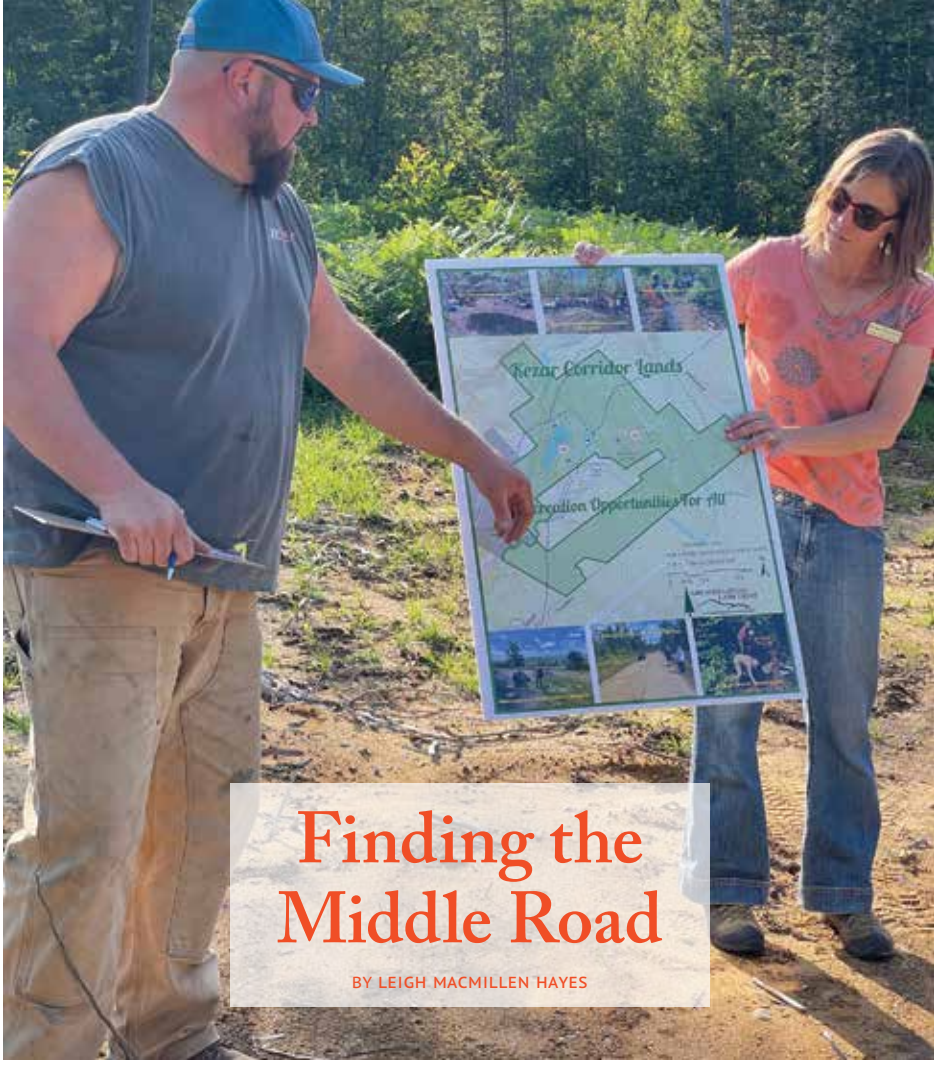
There is one caveat to the Death Café: it is not a grief support group. While those who have recently experienced a loss are most welcome, Dupree has resources ready if people need support beyond what a Death Café can offer.

Death is an experience that takes many people away from their everyday reality, but working with a death doula or attending a Death Café can prepare folks for the process. One of the skills Carey said she's developed in her work is the ability to be a witness, and the more time I spent with her, the more I was carried away by her stories, which portrayed death as a wondrous journey, a cause for gatherings full of surprises and love.

A few days after we attended the Death Over Drinks event, Carey sent me a video of her with Mrs. B. They were singing "You Are My Sunshine" together, Carey at Mrs. B's bedside, holding her hand, staring into her eyes. Their connectedness was remarkable.

"It seems like the moments around death can be really special," I finally concluded.

"Especially if you're open to them," Carey added. ☼



Finding the Middle Road

BY LEIGH MACMILLEN HAYES

He thought she was a tree-hugging hippie. And he was sure she thought he was a bull-dozing red neck.

"Those are stereotypes," said Erika Rowland, former executive director of Greater Lovell Land Trust (GLLT), "but that's not how I approached this. It was more about Rex as a business man."

Rex Rolfe, owner of Rolfe Corporation, an aggregate/excavation business located on Home Run Road in Bridgton, had been working to widen Dan Charles Pond Road and a section of Patterson Hill Road in Lovell. Simultaneously, the land trust was in the process of fundraising to purchase a large tract of land that the roads cut through.

When she saw how wide the road had suddenly become, Erika's first thought was, "Oh my goodness, that changes the character of things. How is the land trust constituency going to feel about this? It was a pretty significant change before our purchase even closed."

She wondered who had given Rex the right to create a wider road and had the landowner been notified. What she learned is that the two roads are owned by the Town of Lovell and the work was within the 66-foot allowance of the right-of-way. So her mind set shifted to forest management, knowing that it will look terrible to start, but the Maine forest will quickly grow back.

When he learned of the land trust's intention, and knew that GLLT's purchase would abut land where he had recently purchased a gravel pit, Rex reached out to Erika.

"Our initial conversation," said Erika, "was about how Rex felt about conservation in conjunction with commercial uses and how open he was to having that be a component of commercial development." She was pleased to learn he was open to the idea. Of all the land trust's service area, as she pointed out, what has since become Kezar Corridor Lands is the most vulnerable to commercial use as opposed to development.

Rex said, "It was kinda weird how well we got along and how similar we think. She gets it. She's just on that side and I'm on this side. That's one thing I realized—how much people have in common if you just communicate."

Rex explained to her that he was widening the town roads because they were unsafe. "It was more or less a jeep trail," said Rex. "You could drive a dump truck through, but it wasn't safe at all. We had many close calls with ATVs that we couldn't see and it was dangerous. I talked to the town about widening and improving it, working together with them and they were very good and easy to get along with."

Subsequent conversations between Rex and Erika centered around finding a balance or as Erika put it, "How can we make lemonade out of this lemony situation?"

And so she asked him if he would consider selling a thirty acre piece with Kezar River frontage that also incudes an esker. As the saying goes, it was a win-win deal. The triangular lot was the puzzle piece that turned the 1,315-acre property into a donut shape, with a hole in the middle owned by other individuals, and of course, Rex.

Erika recognized the unique qualities of Rex's triangle. "The piece of river frontage is almost a highlight of the entirety of the project because the people from Maine Natural Areas Program identified patches of old growth hemlock on sides of the steep cuts. It's such a cool place with high banks and floodplains."

Asked why he sold it to GLLT, Rex said, "I'm in the aggregate processing business. I'm in the development business. From a business perspective, it's not valuable as far as developing. It's in a Resource Protection zone. I can only go so far to the streams. Lovell has eskers, and there's one there that would be a tough place to build a house or road. I can't dig in it. I can't sell sand out of it. So I thought if I am going to sell I might as well sell it to somebody who is not going to develop it. Who better to sell it to than GLLT as abutters to protect it and make sure it never gets developed."

Rex grew up in the aggregate industry and has worked in gravel pits since he was in high school. As he explained, "There are glacial deposits and ledge deposits in certain areas. You try to find the most well-placed site, away from houses, on a state road or high traffic road, or on the outskirts of town, not right in the villages. Unfortunately, it needs to be near a river or stream, but you can't be too close. Placement is huge."

Pit size is determined by town regulations and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) permits. The DEP keeps a close eye on pits and visits regularly. While huge companies own huge pits that require significant engineering, the three pits owned by Rolfe Corporation are all under five acres of active use, which is all his company is allowed per permits. When he wants to open

another acre, he needs to reclaim an acre. "We process loam from the pit, screen it, respread it, hay and seed it, and grass will grow and eventually trees grow and nature takes over quickly," said Rex.

Best Management Practices are a huge consideration when developing a pit. First he has to create a road going into it, clear the area where the pit will be, set elevations, find water tables, create water controls to prevent storm water from washing anything away, and build noise buffers. Dust is controlled by either paving the road, as he's recently done to the first 500 feet of the pit on Route 302 in West Bridgton, or by adding liquid calcium. "Calcium saves roads," said Rex. "It holds roads together. You'd be amazed how much gravel you lose through dust over the course of a year. It's great for environmental reasons and financial reasons. Less maintenance, less cost." The site also needs to be 2,000 feet from houses.

Rex knows that no one wants a gravel pit in the backyard. He feels the same way. And he knows there are concerns about noise and dust and truck traffic. But, because many of us have homes and lawns and gardens and septic systems, and even dirt roads and driveways, we have a need for the products Rolfe Corporation produces locally. Here's what they make: loam, erosion control mulch, rip rap, drain sand, stones, winter road sand, concrete and gravel.

As it turns out, Rolfe Corporation built two parking lots at Kezar Corridor Lands recently. The first is at the corner of Old Waterford Road and Dan Charles Pond Road, and provides access to the Esker Trail. The second and larger lot is on Patterson Hill Road. That, in itself, was an issue, because the logger who widened the road had activated a landing that was not within the 66-foot width. But, here again, Erika and Rex talked about it and decided to turn the landing into a lot.

"People don't realize that the parking lot comes from a pit; from the act of blasting and crushing rock. You need it cuze if not," said Rex, "you're parking in the mud."

"Developing is never going to end until people stop coming here and stop having kids," said Rex. "With that said, it has to be done correctly with a lot of planning to do it as tastefully as possible; as smart as possible."

In the end, it's all about communication, education, and balance. This collaboration is a great example of why there needs to be a common ground, and GLLT and Rolfe Corporation found that middle road by making the time to sit down and talk. ☼

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