

# lake living

FALL 2024 • VOL. 27, NO. 2



## The Meat of the Matter

PLUS

BUILDING LONGER TABLES  
IN PRAISE OF PRINT  
TRAIL UNTIL RAIL  
FINDING RHYTHM  
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## editor's note

I'm always surprised when a theme emerges in an issue of *Lake Living*. It has happened often enough that it shouldn't surprise me, but it does because it's never by intention. This issue is no exception.

It started with the suggestion of an article on local meat producers, which led to a series of interviews with farmers and processors, and the most challenging piece I've written in all the years I've been doing this. It was also hugely informative with regard to the husbandry community that exists in our midst. And that's where the theme comes forth—community through connectivity. The farmers and producers who do the hard work of feeding us are connected to each other through an invisible web that extends farther than you might think.

"Building Longer Tables" is a delightful look at how food connects us to each other, from seed to supper. Meryl Kelly, who considers herself a local food liaison, is the link that connects the farming community with each other and ultimately with us.

"Trail Until Rail" is about thirty-one miles of recreational trail that will eventually connect nine towns along the Mountain Division Corridor.

While I may be seeing connection as a theme for this particular issue, it has likely been a consistent theme in *Lake Living* since its inception. It may be that what I've been doing all these years is crafting love letters to a community that connects us on a daily basis. Without a doubt, it has been the most enriching aspect of publishing the magazine these many years. "In Praise of Print" is my way of expressing gratitude to all of you for sharing the journey with me.

Laurie LaMountain

*Editor & Publisher*  
Laurie LaMountain

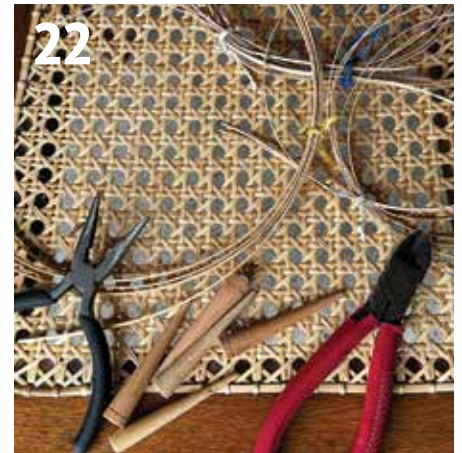
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**6** the meat of the matter  
BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

**12** building longer tables  
BY PERRI BLACK

**16** in praise of print  
BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

**18** trail until rail  
BY LEIGH MACMILLEN HAYES

**20** tiny tech house  
BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

**22** finding rhythm in weaving  
BY LEIGH MACMILLEN HAYES

**24** too much of a good thing  
BY COLIN HOLME

**26** the bookshelf  
BOOK REVIEWS FROM BRIDGTON BOOKS

COVER PHOTO BRANDON MCKENNEY

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# The Meat of the Matter

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

*“The reality is, just because it is local, doesn’t mean it’s good. Just ‘cause you throw on a hat and call yourself a farmer, doesn’t mean you know what you are doing. My goal with our market is to educate people about truth in the industry and help them select good quality products and know where to source them. You would be shocked by how many people don’t even know what species hamburger comes from.”*

NICHOLE SARGENT, SOUTHPAW PACKING COMPANY

## Thunder Hill Farm

**D**ottie and David Bell of Thunder Hill Farm, LLC, decided to raise Scottish Highland cattle on their farm in Waterford, Maine, in 2003. Dottie grew up on a dairy farm and was in 4-H as a kid. The farm sits on land that had been in David’s family for generations but hadn’t been tended or supplemented for years when they decided to farm it. They purchased additional acreage from a neighbor and, together, they

managed to build the soil back by bush hogging, mowing, trimming, and no-till seeding.

Now, from May to October, their cattle are grass-only fed by rotationally grazing. Their fields produce three crops of hay per season and all the haylage they need to feed their animals throughout the winter months. Haylage is produced from grass that is cut earlier than hay and wrapped in airtight plastic to naturally ferment, resulting in higher moisture and carbohydrate content.

“The livestock on our farm are respected and raised humanely. They have room to roam, shelter when they choose and a year-round supply of spring fed water.” According to Dottie, they only have one bad day in their lives.

Each season, the Bells aim to process 12 to 15 head to fill the market need. From a progression standpoint, that used to mean keeping 15 cows, a bull, 15 two-year-olds, 15 yearlings, and 15 calves, which is a lot of head to feed. They found they couldn’t sustain that many animals, so they pivoted in their progression program and decided instead to keep just five cows, rent a bull, and buy 10 or 12 calves each November from Highland farms in New Hampshire and Vermont and raise them for a year. That was working really well — until it wasn’t.

“In the last couple of years, the processor (Southpaw Packing), will no longer take animals with horns over 4” long. And I totally get it. The abattoir got hurt with one of my animals and the inspector said if that happens again, you’re done. They are a humane slaughter processor, and that means humane for the human as well as the animal,” says Dottie.

Dottie’s stepbrother, who is in his 70s and still working on the dairy farm where Dottie grew up, has begun breeding some of his dairy cows with beef lines and Dottie is able to buy her beef/dairy cross steers from him. She appreciates that it has brought her full circle to her childhood farm, but points out that she can’t always bank on how many he’ll have for her.

“Another stumbling block for a small producer is the shortage of processors. In order for me to make ready-made meals, it has to be USDA inspected. I can’t just go to a butcher shop and have them do my animals. I need to know that it’s an inspected plant. I like the humane handling at Windham Butcher [Southpaw Packing].

The stalls are clean, access to the building is easy, and I like that the cuts I get are uniform and packaged nicely for the consumer to appreciate. The consistency of what they do is of value to me.”

The limited number of in-state meat slaughter/processors is definitely a hurdle for small producers in Maine, and she praises Nichole Sargent, who owns Southpaw with her husband Leon, for trying to get students interested in meat processing and cutting as a profession.

Larger Maine producers face a different hurdle. Smaller slaughterhouses like





Southpaw can't accommodate the volume they are producing for supermarkets and they have to transport their animals out of state to larger facilities.

Dottie sells strictly through the farm and at farmers' markets. "If I don't have bacon in my cooler, I can say to a customer, 'go check Patch Farm.' We've built a community of farms working together," says Dottie.

"The local part is important to me. When people shop with me, that money stays here. It goes into my pocket, which then goes to Paris Farmer's Union, which then goes to Southpaw Packing. There's no middle man. A lot of people don't realize farming is a business. I don't lug these coolers around because it's fun. We enjoy it and are happy to do what we love, but it is a business. And, yes, the prices have to be sustainable to keep that business going."

The other thing people don't realize about small local farms is the land stays open. Many farms are selling out and getting paid more money to put solar arrays on the land. Dottie speaks to the generational aspect of being a farmer and the fact that her sons are unlikely to take the reins after them; that they have jobs that provide them better pay. Farming is hard work and it's getting harder to make ends meet, which is why farmers are opting instead to lease their fields to solar companies.

"It's tempting," she admits, "especially at our age. But farmers want the land open. And when that land is open, you've got it for hiking, snowmobiles and ATVs. And as long as those participants use it appropriately, it stays open.

It's just one more reason we should support local farmers. They are doing the hard work that gives us options. Once they're gone, so are the options.

### Patch Farm

Brandon McKenney and BrennaMae Thomas-Googins started Patch Farm in Denmark, Maine, in 2015. That first season they raised four pigs. They've raised pigs every year since and now do about thirty pigs a season. Typically, they will buy piglets in the spring and harvest them in the fall.

At some point in time, they kept two females piglets and bought a boar from

Misty Brook Farm in Albion, Maine, who raise pure Tamworths, known for producing excellent bacon. Every breed Brandon has raised is considered an Old English breed.

They bred the two females with the boar and for the last five or six years have not had to buy piglets. When Zeke aged out (it happens to all of us), they bought another boar from Misty Brook and Boris has taken over his duties.

When I comment that Boris is one lucky pig, Brandon agrees.

"Oh, yeah, it's a good gig if you can get it because you work like a handful of days a year (work, quote unquote) and otherwise you're just kind of hanging out, getting fed, and lounging around. It's a way better alternative than what would have otherwise happened to him," says Brandon.

It so happens Boris reached retirement this year as well.

For the last five or so years they've done a combination of keeping a few females as breeders and bought a few sows in from other breeders. The plan for the next year or two is to weed out the breeders and get away from farrowing (the process of birth-





ing a litter of pigs). Brandon points out that keeping pigs in winter is difficult in Maine and they don't have great infrastructure for it. The first few years they ended up farrowing over winter, when it was way too cold. Sows will have on average eight to sixteen piglets per litter. The last few years, they've tried to push their farrowing to warmer months, and it actually works out better for Southpaw Packing.

"Leon once mentioned that most people raise pigs for fall processing. That means everyone wants dates in October/November and then, come January/February, he's got way less animals coming in and that's bad for their business. He has encouraged people to try to change the way they think about the calendar. If we weren't selling through the stand and the market year-round, it would be tougher, but because we have year-round outlets, having it spread out over different months is actually better for us."

Brandon gets that to really make a go of it they would have to scale up their livestock production — and that's a tricky balancing act for a small producer. It leads to a conundrum a lot of farmers who raise livestock are facing. Is it worth it? The answer is largely up to customers like me. If I'm going to eat meat, here's why I should get it from local farms. If I know who they are and how they farm, I'll feel better about it, and ultimately, if I pay a little bit more than at the supermarket, maybe I'll consume less — and that's a win-win.

Brandon shares that when he was in high school he went to a punk rock concert at the State Theater where they displayed PETA images behind the stage. After the concert he did a deep dive on the internet and ended up adopting a vegetarian lifestyle for several years. His reasons for doing

so were rooted in the ethical treatment of animals, like being opposed to confinement, but also what effect unethical treatment of animals has on the humans who inflict it, because, he points out, it's not really good for them either. He concedes he controls his animals through electric netting and fencing, but acknowledges they are ironically at any given moment just one dead battery away from wandering onto his neighbor's lawn.

"So I became a vegetarian and I was never super dogmatic about it. And I was that way until 2013 when we moved back here from Washington State and decided to start a diverse farm that could supply as much of a family's diet as possible," says Brandon.

They were using their Journeyperson stipends to sign up for as many classes through MOFGA as possible, and one class BrennaMae signed up for was nose-to-tail pork processing. It's a two-day workshop that encompasses killing, hanging, and gutting two pigs. She was pregnant by the time the class rolled around and worried about nausea so Brandon took her place, even though he was still vegetarian at the time.

"It was eye-opening. But it was a great way to be introduced into properly tending to the end of an animal's life and doing it in a respectful way," recalls Brandon.

Following that, they bought a whole pig from Gina and Geof Hancock, who then owned Alma Farm in Parsonsfield, and that was his first foray back into eating meat.

With regard to "the one bad day" adage, Brandon says that when they bring their pigs and the occasional cow to Southpaw Packing in Windham, the biggest reason he chooses their facility is that it's clean and it's stress-free getting animals in there.

"We've gone to four or five butchers around the state before we settled on just going to them. It's not that the other places don't do good work, but Windham is above and beyond. So, yeah, like our pigs have one bad day, but that bad day is really only a bad morning. We bring them on Sunday night and then they're in a stall with clean bedding and water and are around other pigs. I always think, well they're like having a little sleep over with these other pigs. It's a bad ending, but I don't think they suffer in any way at the end."

I had met with Nichole that morning and shared with Brandon my sense of her commitment to the industry and to all of her farmers due to the fact there are so few processors out there and she doesn't want

to let them down. He wholeheartedly agrees and adds this:

"Every time I've been in there since they took over the business she was talking about some grant that she was trying to get. And it was never phrased in a selfish way. She was always talking about providing better opportunities for the farms that work with her. It makes you feel better about going there. And feel supported."

## Peppermint Fields Farm

Peter Fletcher's family has been in Fryeburg since his ancestors settled Haley Town in 1783. Emily Fletcher's parents moved to Fryeburg in 1938. Her father was a doctor in town for forty years. In 1973, Peter and Emily bought 23 acres of land off Menotomy Road and started clearing it for Peppermint Fields Farm.

"We've been pretty much self-contained here since 1976 when we built the house," says Peter.

They started raising 100% registered Angus cattle and were members of the Maine Angus Association. But that all changed around 2007/2008 when the Great Recession hit. Many of the Angus operations in the Northeast that had previously sponsored sales at their farms ceased operation when the bottom fell out of the real estate market. As sales began to dry up, it was no longer economically feasible for them to transport registered cattle west. Peter says they were faced with the decision to either stay in the registered business and try to transport the cattle farther west, or go into the beef business and have them processed here in Maine. They chose the latter.

With what they have for land base, they are able to run twenty to twenty-four brood cows. Out of those, they select the top heifer calves to put back into the herd and all of the bull calves are turned into grazing steer. Their cows are 100% bred by bulls that Peter purchases from a cattle ranch in Kansas. Their Angus herd is purebred and carries the original bloodline of cows they started with from Hobson, Montana. As of a year ago, to increase hybrid vigor, they started crossbreeding their Angus cows with Shorthorns, resulting in Speckled Parks. Both breeds are naturally poled, meaning they don't have horns.

"That's one thing we have always done. We have always bred for temperament. Anything that has a disposition, you can't afford the liability to have that animal on the farm because of personal injury," says Peter.



Their herd is 90% pasture-fed. Haylage provides the other 10% in winter. Up until three years ago they purchased all their hay from either New York State or western Vermont. When they first started importing it, the quality was exceptional but over time it deteriorated. That coincided with a decision to downsize their herd from around 50 head to 25. When they did that, they purchased the equipment needed to produce all their own haylage from the property.

“We used to calve in January to have a string of eight to ten head in various classes to show at regional fall fairs. That meant we would breed some of the cows so that we’d start calving in January. Well, as you can imagine up here back in the early ’80s, it wasn’t uncommon for overnight temperatures to drop to -20° with the wind blowing, and they never seem to want to calve in the daylight, they always seem to want to calve at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. It’s always just been Emily and me. So what we do now is turn the bull out January 1st, and then it’s 280-283 days, which makes it October the

fourth when we’ll have our first calf come. I much prefer them to calve out in the open environment than in the barn. They do so much better,” says Peter.

The calves are then left to run with the cows from mid-May to around the first of June, at which point they’ll separate them in order to break the bond.

“As you can imagine, it gets very loud here,” says Peter.

Peter is a numbers guy. He tells me that in 1935 there were 7 million farms in the U.S. Today, there are less than 2 million. According to the Department of Agriculture, from 2017 to 2022 the number of farms fell by 7%. During that same five year period, the U.S. has lost 20 million acres of agricultural production land due to development. And we’ve lost 70% of the nation’s cattle feeders.

“People don’t realize that America has been a net food importer since 2019. Already, within the last decade we have lost 106,000 cow/calf producers across the country, which basically is what we are,”

says Peter. “Fryeburg used to have a cow population of probably 3,000 head — and now you’re looking at it.”

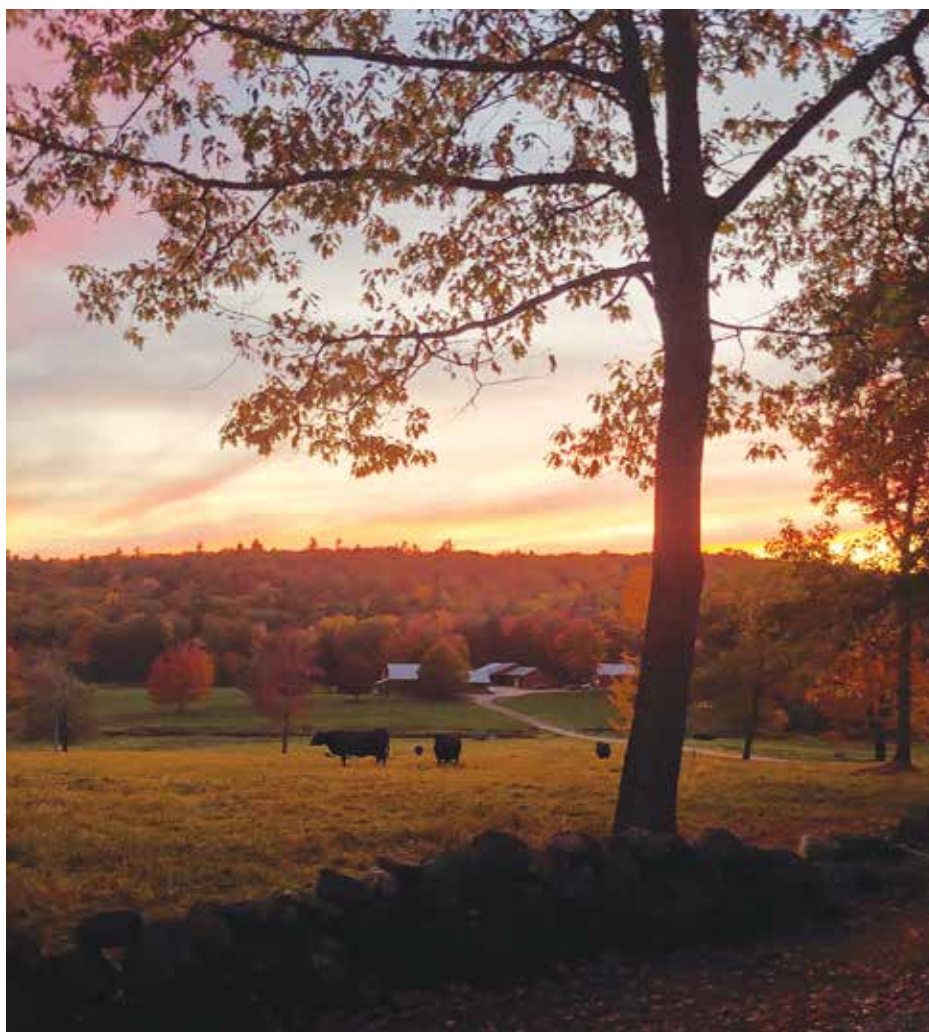
“The number one issue we have today is lack of veterinarians. The average student graduating from veterinary school has incurred anywhere from \$350,000 to \$500,000 student debt, and it has reached a point where there aren’t the livestock there used to be, and very few [veterinarians] will go into cattle. Our veterinarian was eighty years old when he retired. The problem now is that the FDA has banned the use of any pharmaceuticals unless you have a valid prescription from a veterinarian. When you come with cattle, for instance at a fair, you end up with viruses. And now you can’t get any of the pharmaceuticals to fight them without incurring a vet bill, and that is an issue because there are no veterinarians,” adds Peter.

Scheduling his animals for processing has also become more of a challenge, especially since COVID, but he has nothing but praise for Leon and Nichole. He has worked with them for years and did what he could to assist them when they acquired Southpaw Packing. He gets that it’s a challenging business and not a lot of people would have the fortitude or the stomach for it.

“There are only three facilities in Maine that are USDA inspected, and they are one of them. A USDA inspector is right there at all times. But when they can’t get help, they’ve had to cut down on their production and now you have to have dates a year in advance. Our customer base fluctuates with the economy and lately we’ve found cost has accelerated to the point that we don’t believe people have the money to buy a whole animal or a side of beef anymore. The cost of harvesting an animal right now is \$1,100. But as much as anything, it’s what do you do with this land if you take the cattle off it? It’s not suitable for crop land. And if you just leave it, within three years you’ve got a forest again.”

I’m compelled at this point to ask Peter the question I’ve asked all three farmers, which is, with so many “issues,” why do you keep doing this? His answer was the best.

“Anybody involved in agriculture really can’t answer that. It’s a way of life. It’s a genetic abnormality is what it is. We do it twelve months a year — rain, snow, doesn’t matter — chores have to be done. And the thing that’s difficult for family life is the livestock always comes first, because you took on the responsibility of that animal and it’s your responsibility to take care of it.”







## Southpaw Packing

Nichole and Leon Sargent took over managing Windham Butcher Shop in December 2018 and purchased it in February 2019. In August 2021, they bought an existing meat market and opened Southpaw Meat Market in Raymond. Both businesses operate under Southpaw Packing Company, Inc.

Leon had been in the business since he was a little boy. He went from farm to farm with his uncle, setting up mobile slaughter/processing sites. As an adult, he worked for Windham Butcher Shop in various capacities for over 15 years before he and Nichole took it over in 2018. Nichole worked as a human services provider for thirty years and has worked extensively with people with developmental disabilities. She considers herself deeply spiritual and practices Reiki, which allows her to feel grounded in their work.

“The slaughter house in Windham is where the animals come in live and go out in little packages, which is a process people don’t understand. That’s the disconnect,” says Nichole. “I was raised to know where my food came from, to respect what I have, and be grateful for what I have on my plate. But when I get asked what I do for a living, I’ll often respond, ‘do you really want to know?’”

Unfortunately, there are times when the ensuing conversation doesn’t go well and people can be cruel, but she adds that some of her best friends are vegan or vegetarian, and they have wonderfully deep conversations about the food industry. She feels it is ultimately about mutual understanding and choice.

Nichole also draws heavily on her experience in health and human services by running a mental health campaign for the meat and food industries and farmers and processors. One in five farmers commits

suicide daily in the U.S., and just recently, three individuals in their local farm/processing community took their lives. She cites many contributing factors: age, depression, financial burdens, addiction, and the fact that the meat processing profession itself carries a heavy burden.

She raises money for NAMI (National Alliance of Mental Illness) Maine through its “Slicing Through the Stigma” campaign, works with Monique Coombs of the Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association, and is a big supporter of 4-H. She also works closely with Dr. Colt Knight, Associate Extension Professor and State Livestock Specialist for the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service in Orono. Nichole and Leon’s youngest daughter is in her senior year pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science degree at UMaine. Dr. Knight is one of her professors.

“We see it all. We’ve done a lot of work and taught courses with Dr. Knight to educate people on improving their husbandry skills and industry knowledge. Getting the farmers there is a struggle—especially the new generation. Raising animals in Maine can be challenging on a lot of levels, so knowing how to raise and care appropriately for your herd is essential. Also, pre-pandemic, there used to be seasonality in our industry, but no more,” says Nichole.

She speaks to the need for more cohesiveness and collaboration within the industry, for local customer support for farmers and producers, and for politicians and legislators to work with them before they write legislation.

Regarding oversight in the industry, she points out they have a USDA inspector standing over them 24/7. They have to follow strict, fully documented guidelines and

could be shut down at any moment if they are not followed. Additionally, the inspector can randomly test a carcass, and the product is held until results are released. Farmers/producers can be flagged on a national registry if they flunk, and their product is condemned.

But she cites a lack of skilled staffing and aging equipment as their biggest challenges. They recently lost two wonderful employees (a couple) who were struggling financially in Maine and made the tough decision to move to Mississippi with their family. Even with a good wage from Southpaw, they were unable to make ends meet, with housing and childcare costs being the main factors. Regarding equipment, three pieces would help with packaging, labeling, etc., but would cost over \$300,000. And they currently have a piece of equipment for which they have already put money down that has been sitting in Germany for over a year. Then there’s the quintessential refrigeration.

“The expense of HVAC labor has increased 62.5% since 2020. When you’re fixing an old facility almost daily, it’s expensive. You have to do it because it’s all refrigeration. It hits our bottom line. But how can we go up and not affect our customers?”

She constantly searches for grants that will allow them to stay in the meat packing industry, but admits it’s a humbling process not unlike being rejected by a high school crush. The hours invested in writing and completing each grant, the waiting game—when you get one it’s thrilling, when you are rejected, it’s crushing.

It’s no coincidence that their operating cost increase coincided with the onset of the pandemic. Nichole says they spent their first year getting their feet wet, the second year finding their groove, and they were hitting their stride when COVID hit and pulled the rug out from under them. Utilities, staffing, cost of goods . . . it all added up. Despite that, she is determined to provide for her customers on both ends of the transaction. She wants you to know how much labor went into those two pork chops you bought at the farmers’ market or farm. She wants you to realize a farmer worked hard to provide you with a product that came to you with a USDA inspection label on the package. And she wants you to know each label was put there by a seventy-eight-year-old dedicated Southpaw employee who is not yet ready to retire.

“If you want to continue to buy local, then you need to support your local producers and processors,” she says. “My passion is the food industry as a whole.” 🌻



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# Building Longer Tables

BY PERRI BLACK

*“A meal is never just a plate of food. It has the power to change the world. To bring people together. To tell the story of who we are, and where we’re going. That’s why I started talking about longer tables when others wanted to build higher walls.”*

CHEF JOSÉ ANDRÉS, WORLD CENTRAL KITCHEN FOUNDER

Each one of us can choose to make our little corner of the world a better place, and that is vitally important to know. One simple thing we can do to improve our communities is buy more locally-produced food, which builds regional self-reliance and supports the agricultural economy. Maine is the first state to vote in a “Right to Food” amendment to the state’s constitution, providing residents with an unalienable right to grow, harvest and consume their own food, including protections for rights to seed saving and sharing. When we Mainers, and the many visitors to our state, opt to buy food from local farmers and producers, it benefits them, keeps dollars in the area, and enables us to consume healthier and tastier food.

Meryl Kelly of Bethel is doing her part, and then some. She is helping build longer tables by connecting local farmers and agricultural producers with restaurants, businesses, and the general public. She also runs a small farmstand at her home, caters local farm-to-table dinners during the warmer months, and is the mother of a three-year-old son. And she works a “regular job” in the office of Bethel Kitchen Designs. A very busy woman indeed.

Meryl admits the motivation for her business is wanting to eat well. She worked as the manager of Libby’s Bistro and SAaLT Pub in Gorham, New Hampshire, for a number of years and got to know local food vendors in that area. She used to pick up produce from local farms for the chef to include on the restaurant’s menu. She later



worked for Le Mu Eats, an Asian-influenced restaurant in Bethel, but decided to get out of food service when she became pregnant. Instead, she offered to go to local farms and buy food for Le Mu and the owner agreed, creating her job as “local food liaison.”

She enjoyed dealing with the farmers and having ready access to good food, but she was driving a LOT – thinking, “nobody in their right mind would drive eight hours a day to do their grocery shopping.” She figured since she was driving around anyway, why not post her route online and offer a pick-up and delivery service as well. That has since morphed into The Local Food Connection of Bethel, Maine, which she runs today.

Basically, her business is a farm-to-doorstep delivery service (sort of like Hannaford To Go) featuring products from about 30 farms in the Bethel area, and extending to Patch Farm in Denmark, Thunder Hill Farm in Waterford, and Shady Grove Mushrooms and Highview Farm in Harrison. The number of farms, products, and customers Meryl

deals with fluctuates with the seasons, but a variety of vegetables and fruit, meat, grains, baked goods, dairy products, mushrooms, and items such as homemade jams, jellies, preserves and soap are usually available. When I tell her one farmer I spoke with said she is “like a drug dealer only with vegetables; she travels around and hooks people up with vegetables,” Meryl laughs and says it’s funny, but fairly accurate. She is often meeting people in parking lots to hand off “the goods” or “sneaking down to the basements of restaurants” and slipping a box in around a delivery from a large food distributor.

Each week, farmers send her a list of what they have to offer and drop it off at her farmstand, or sometimes she picks up from the farms. She posts the list on her Facebook page every Tuesday; customers choose items from the list, decide if they want to pick up their order at her stand or have it delivered (within the Bethel area) for a small service fee, then call her to place an order. Her farm-

stand is open daily from sunrise to sunset; cash and Venmo are accepted.

Meryl has been involved in the farm-to-doorstep business for about two years and her goal is to make it full time when she feels it can pay her bills. So far, she’s been able to hire baker Shelby Levesque, who owns Shelby’s Cakes and is part of The Local Food Connection, to do some of the driving. And she’s taking strategic steps to improve and expand the service, particularly making the online ordering process more convenient and user-friendly.

Her years in the food service industry have served as a basis for her to source local foods for restaurants. If a chef is particularly organized and interested in using local foods on their menu, she will work with farmers to grow crops specifically for that restaurant. For example, Abbott’s Family Farm in Sumner, Maine, grew lemongrass and Musquee de Provence squash especially for Le Mu Eats. Her other accounts include The Elizabeth, in Bethel, and Sunday River,







where she supplies special events and VIP packages. She started a “Just Local July” challenge in Bethel that has since been adopted by Sunday River’s Health and Wellness Committee. Resort employees are challenged to cook using locally-produced foods and weekly winners receive baskets filled with recipes and local products.

Meryl is particularly impressed by European food culture and its relationship to eating, with a focus on shopping daily for fresh products in specialty shops (bakeries, butchers, cheese mongers, etc.), rather than supermarkets. It’s all about buying locally and cooking creatively; going to the market and being inspired for dinner by what looks good that day. She says changing up a menu depending on what’s in season and available at any given time can keep diners interested and prevent chef burnout. She loves knowing who produced the food she eats and thinks about the farmers when she prepares her meals. When she sits down to eat a salad, she thinks, “oh, BrennaMae grew this lettuce and Hannah did these cucumbers . . . every single night I get to eat with my friends!”

A meal she had at a “really great” restaurant in Italy with her former boss was one of the inspirations for her catering business. She said they didn’t speak the same language as the servers, but a bottle of red wine, a bottle of white, and a bottle of olive oil were placed on the table and they just kept bringing food out until they (the diners) couldn’t breathe anymore. It was an amazing dining experience that inspired her to create farm-to-table dinners for people who love good food.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Meryl recalls, “everything was getting so vitriolic and everyone was at each others’ throats 24/7 freaking out about politics.” She felt people just needed to calm down, take a step back and remember that we are all human

beings trying to make it work – and we all have to eat. She wanted to bring people together through communal meals so she partnered with some local farms, set up tables in their fields, and featured products from their farm on the menu. The goal was for people to get to know each other over a good meal, ideally strengthening the community and resulting in a better understanding of their similarities, rather than differences. Thus, her catering business, A Longer Table Homestead, was born.

She still caters these dinners at different farms during the summer and they are open to the public. About 20 to 30 people attend each event and she tries to make it as affordable as possible to encourage participation. She has finished presenting dinners for this year but plans to continue them next summer.

In the meantime, Meryl is committed to making our area as food independent as possible. The Good Shepherd Food Bank in Auburn, Maine, reported that, in 2022, 13 percent of Maine’s population (180,000 people) experienced food insecurity, including one in five (46,000) children. Local farmers can help alleviate some of this problem. The Local Food Connection’s mission is to “encourage all community members to grow, prepare, serve, purchase and consume local foods.” It strives to educate the community about the economic, health, and sustainability benefits of buying and consuming locally-produced food. It also empowers people of all ages to develop a stronger and more cohesive community through participation.

Everyone can do a little bit to make the world a better place. Meryl Kelly is doing a lot, and setting an example for others to follow. Her commitment to local extends to artists and artisans—the traveling tables she uses for her farm-to-table dinners were built with labor donated by The Congo Craftsmen, a group of retired men from the Bethel area who attend the same congregation (hence the name), and she uses locally-produced pottery and linens on the tables.

“Food is one of the best ways to bring community together and everything I do is in that vein of trying to create community,” says Meryl.

Supporting local farmers and inviting people to gather at increasingly longer tables to enjoy good food and company is a great way to start. ☀

**More information is available on [The Local Food Connection Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.**





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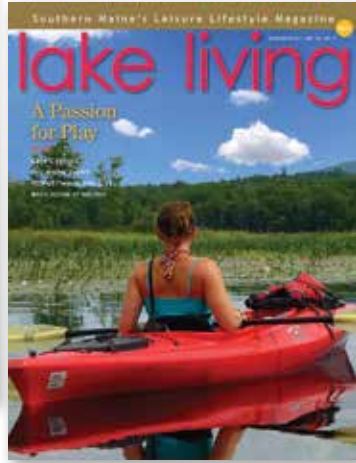
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# In Praise of Print

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

Periodicals, as they are referred to in a past that implies a lack of instantaneous news, provide a connection to place that online reporting cannot—and does not care to—address. The wins and losses in high school sports, public notices, and even the obituaries, which my Dublin-born husband refers to as the Irish Funnies, connect us to community. There is an intimacy and locality in print media that is lacking in online content. But . . .

Stephen Khan, Executive Editor of The Conversation International reports that “online audiences have come to expect new content daily or even hourly. Casual readers are less willing to wait for a weekly or monthly print magazine to arrive in the post or on a newsstand. The ready availability of free, or significantly cheaper, digital content may deter them from purchasing print subscriptions or individual issues.”

According to Axios, one-third of U.S. newspapers as of 2005 will be gone by the end of this year, and currently more than 200 counties in the country have zero local news outlets. Given that these “news deserts” are more likely to be in lower income areas in which broadband access is less prevalent and the political landscape in general is so polarized, credible print journalism has never been so necessary.

Think about it, when was the last time

you bought a newspaper or magazine? Chances are, even if you’re still reading them, it’s on your phone or on your computer. When the online version of *The New York Times* can provide minute-by-minute updates, why would you want to wait for your news? It begs the question, for how much longer will we refer to them as newspapers?

My answer is that not all news is “breaking.” Rather than being salacious or anxiety-inducing, it can be informative, entertaining, and even grounding. Instead of tuning us out, it can tune us in to our communities. It can connect us to our neighbors and even ourselves. And there is something reassuring in riffling through the pages of a magazine or newspaper that you simply can’t get on a screen.

I’ve spent the past twenty-seven years dedicated to the print medium. Because *Lake Living* is a “periodical,” it has made zero sense for me to try to provide up-to-the-minute reporting, but that has given me an editorial latitude I would not have imagined possible when I launched it in 1998. I can honestly say that I have learned more about the region in which I live, and have a much greater appreciation for how unique it is, by researching, interviewing, and writing about the legions of talented people who call it home. It has, in no uncertain terms, affirmed my faith in humanity.

When Dianne Lewis, who has been my graphic designer, occasional editor, and steadfast friend for the better part of twenty-five years, suggested I make this issue’s food piece about local meat producers, it sounded like a great idea. Writing about issues that activate me has given me the most satisfac-

tion—whether on water, the environment, food, equity, or menopause. So I wasn’t prepared for how difficult it would be to write “The Meat of the Matter,” and I’m deeply honored by the people who contributed to it. It is, by far, the most ambitious piece I’ve written for *Lake Living* and was one of the few that reduced me to tears. My hope is that it will encourage people to think. It did me, and ideally that’s what all “news” should do.

The number one question I’m asked is how we continue to come up with ideas for interesting stories. The truth is, it’s probably been the easiest aspect of publishing *Lake Living*. And the likely answer is that I listen, observe, and love my neighbors. Even when they are not entirely lovable. But mostly it’s down to brainstorming sessions with Leigh Macmillen Hayes.

Thanks to Leigh, who has stuck with me ever since she so graciously suggested I needed an editor, we’ve continued to put best foot forward. But it’s time to wrap things up. I feel immense gratitude to Cummings Printing Company and the many advertisers who have made *Lake Living* possible all these years, to the businesses who have welcomed it with open arms, and to all of you readers who have expressed your heartfelt appreciation. My most fervent hope is that it has made a lasting impression. That you, dear reader, have been informed, engaged, and entertained by both our stories and our growth.

If you or anyone you know has a desire to take the reins, please don’t hesitate to contact me. It is my one and only baby, but I believe Hillary was right when she said it takes a village. You can reach me at [lakeliving@fairpoint.net](mailto:lakeliving@fairpoint.net). ☀





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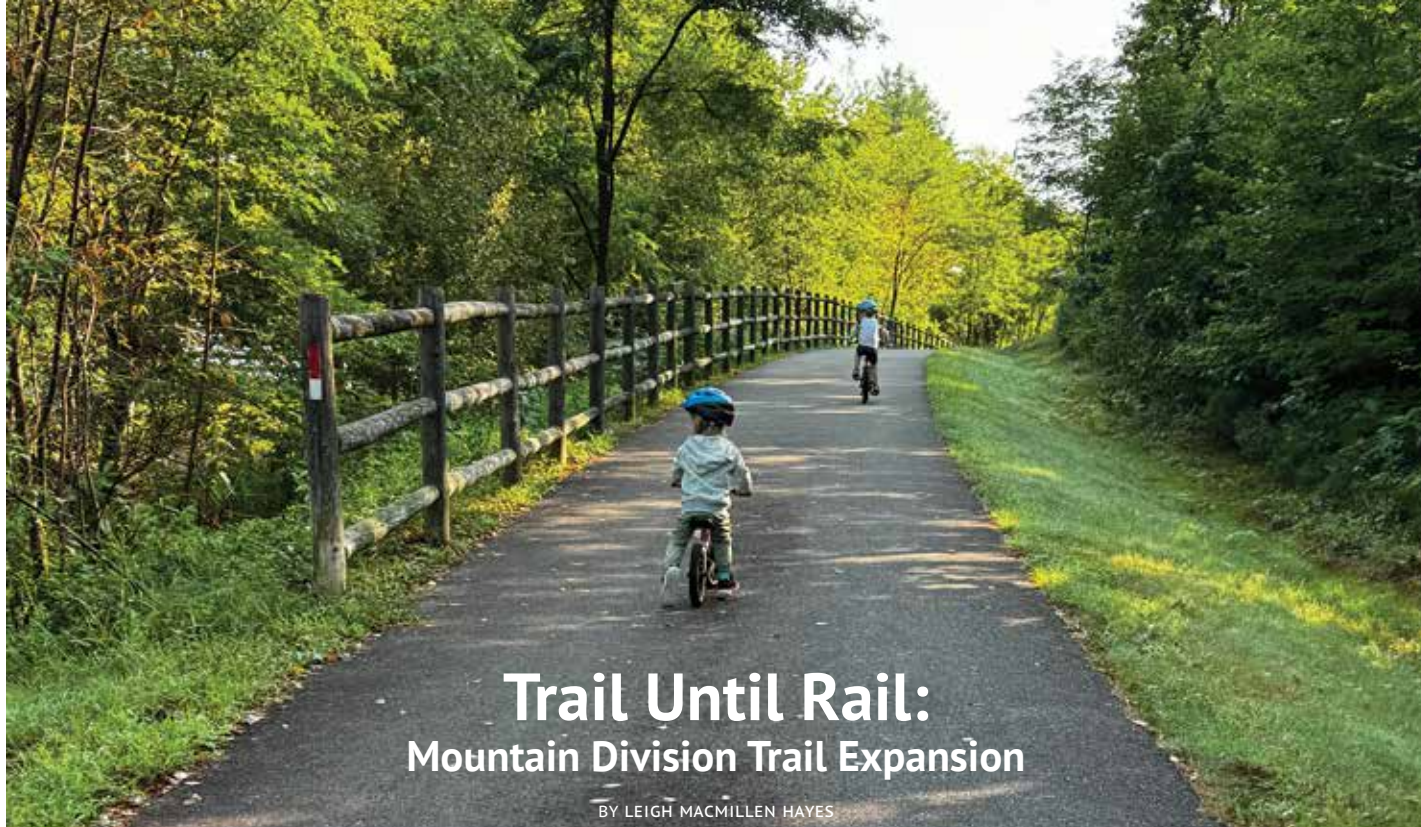
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## Trail Until Rail: Mountain Division Trail Expansion

BY LEIGH MACMILLEN HAYES

Once upon a time, as in the 1870s, the Portland and Ogdensburg Railway (P&O), opened to offer rail service between Portland, Maine, and Fabyan Station, Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, with plans to expand to Ogdensburg, a port on the St. Lawrence Seaway in New York. In 1888, Maine Central (MEC) leased the P&O and renamed it the Mountain Division as it served communities along the rail line from Portland, through Crawford Notch and across New Hampshire to Saint Johnsbury and Northeastern Vermont.

The train was seen as a means to increase the speed of transportation (think stage coach up until then) and open up opportunities to transport freight and passengers, thus increasing business along the way, including the tourist industry. In fact, in a *Bridgton News* article published on November 7, 1873, Amos Andrews, a land owner in Lovell, “said he was convinced years ago, that sooner or later the iron horse would open this region to the traveling public, and this mountain [Amos Mountain] would become a place of resort.”

MEC did bring passengers to the area, including via the \$1.00 Ski Train to Fryeburg during its heyday as the “The Ski Capital of Maine” in the mid-1930s when the first rope tow was built on Jockey Cap; and then another on Starks Hill, both located not far from the rail line. Local residents saw the ski areas as a means to support businesses during the Depression.

By 1958, however, passenger service was suspended and freight transport diminished. In 1981, MEC sold the Mountain Division rail line to Guilford Transportation, and after seven years freight service stopped completely.

According to a timeline on the Mountain Division Alliance’s website, in 1994, “concerned that the rail right of way would be lost, Alix Hopkins, Director of Portland Trails brought people from over 20 groups together to form The Mountain Division Alliance. Out of this group came the vision for a rail with trail connecting the 9 communities [Portland, Westbrook, Windham, Gorham, Standish/Steep Falls, Baldwin, Hiram, Brownfield, and Fryeburg] along the rail corridor from Portland to Fryeburg.”

Dave Kinsman, former president of Mountain Division Alliance, recently wrote in an article published by *The Brownfield Newsletter*, “In 1994, the rail line was abandoned by Guilford Transportation and the Mountain Division Alliance was created to convince the State of Maine to purchase the rail bed right-of-way. The vision that a bicycle and pedestrian trail could be built along the rail line connecting Fryeburg to Portland came about at this time. Other abandoned rail lines have been broken up and sold off for development. We have seen this happen in the neighboring states of New Hampshire and Vermont. In 1997, the State did buy 40 miles of rail line, and added five more in 2009.”

Many years, and meetings, and legislative acts later, five miles of gravel trail opened from South Windham through Gorham and into part of Standish. The minds behind all the work to bring this to fruition were excited to see how much use it received. In 2009, this section of trail was paved to increase the number of visitors who strongly prefer an even surface over gravel or dirt.

The Fryeburg section of the trail received funding in 2010, after the new Maine Visitor Center opened in 2007, which provides information and amenities to trail users. The four miles of paved trail between the center and Route 113 at the Brownfield town line was completed in 2012.

I’ve walked both sections of trail, but the Fryeburg section in particular on many occasions year round, for even in the winter though the trail is not plowed, its fairly flat and serves as part of a snowmobile trail. I’m a hiker/wanderer in the woods by nature, but the Mountain Division trail always amazes me with all that it has to offer as it passes through a variety of habitats. Flowers and trees and insects are many, but some of my favorite discoveries have been Eastern Towhees and Blue Indigos and a Red Fox and White-tailed Deer and Painted Turtles and even a goat or two. Plus there are the granite mile markers reminding me of the history as the trains made their way to and from Portland.

Sometimes I feel as if I’m alone in the world out there and other times I pass or



am passed by walkers, runners, bikers, and people in wheelchairs or pushing strollers. Age and ability do not matter, and there are benches along the way for one to rest. All trail users are polite and make sure to let one know that they are approaching from behind.

The trail is great, but it only goes so far. As the wind blows gently through the trees that border it, however, I've heard whispers of an extension to link the Standish section to the Brownfield end. And for the trail to extend to Portland as well. Turns out it's more than just a whisper.

According to the Maine DOT website, Maine law gives the Department of Transportation Commissioner the authority to establish a Rail Use Advisory Council to facilitate discussion, gather information, and provide advice to the commissioner regarding the future use of a rail corridor. A twelve-member Mountain Division Rail Use Advisory Council was created in June 2021 to study and review the 31 miles of state-owned, inactive rail line in order to make such recommendations for its future use.

Frequent meetings occurred between September 2021 and April 2022, at which the civil engineering consulting firm, HNTB, "presented feasibility studies for future rail, rail with trail, and interim trail/bikeway use options and economic benefits."

It was determined that restoring rail use would cost \$60,000,000. For rail with trail the cost would be \$148,300,000. Remov-

ing the rails and building a **trail until rail**, which would keep the rail bed intact so the trail could return to rail if needed, would cost \$19,800,000. The final vote was 11-1 in favor of a paved Trail Until Rail.

Senator Rick Bennett proposed a bill in support of this recommendation to the Maine State Legislature—LD404. Hundreds of testimonies were provided online and in person and in Letters of Support for this Bill. The overwhelming number were in favor of the Bill (over 92%). Testimony was submitted to the Legislature from all communities along the corridor for development of the extended trail. LD404 passed the House of Representatives and Senate by a super majority vote in late June 2023.

After thirty years of work and thanks to the efforts of so many people, on July 6, 2023, Maine Governor Janet Mills signed LD404 into law, authorizing MaineDOT to remove the railroad tracks and construct a 31-mile, multi-use trail until rail on the Mountain Division Rail Line between Fryeburg and Standish.

Concerns have been raised by some that once the tracks come out they will never come back. Trail Until Rail means that this will be an interim trail because it can be pulled up and the tracks restored to rail should the return of train operations be economically viable. As is stated on the alliance's website: "Most major rail corridors are federally protected in perpetuity (that's forever!) If the tracks ever need to go back in for train service, they will."

Terry Egan, vice president of the Mountain Division Alliance, Andrew Walton, secretary of the organization, and his young sons, recently walked/biked a short portion from the Maine Visitor's Center in Fryeburg with me.

Andrew's sons are ages five and two. From his home in Steep Falls, currently he must travel thirty minutes in either direction to access the trails and he looks forward to the day when he can get onto it practically out the door. "I really would like both boys to enjoy the trail closer to our home so we don't have to pack up."

Terry says that when she moved to Maine upon her retirement, the Mountain Division Trail was an asset, especially as she has lots of visitors who are avid cyclists. She reached out to get involved with the Rail Use Advisory Council, and has found "Rick Bennett to be an unbelievable advocate for the trails. He has just worked tirelessly," says Terry, "to keep this moving along. He

shows up at selectboard meetings in these little towns and answers questions."

Both Terry and Andrew see this as an opportunity to benefit businesses and maybe even encourage development along the way. But, as they explain, it will take time and be completed in phases. The hope is that as one section of trail design and engineering is completed by the engineers and ready for construction, another section will immediately hit the drawing board, to cut down on lag time and ensure the completion of the entire 31 miles of new trail more quickly.

The project will be split into six segments or phases with the Brownfield end being the first. Within the next two years, if all goes as intended, the trail will extend from its current ending on Route 113 to Route 160 in Brownfield, thus passing through half of the town. There will be some kinks to work out with some of the sections, but those will be addressed as needed.

One of the goals of the Mountain Division Alliance is to educate townspeople so they understand what the towns are committing to in the long term. Abutters also have questions and those are being addressed as they occur.

As avid volunteers who serve in a variety of capacities for their hometowns as well as the Mountain Division Alliance, Terry and Andrew know that there is a lot of enthusiasm about the trail since people have seen how the two working sections are in regular use. This past summer over 227 visitors used the trail daily.

Andrew also brings more eyes to the trail via social media and with events such as Chalk the Trail, where kids and adults are invited to get out and draw on the pavement for two hours one Saturday in July. Chalk and bubbles are free, there are snacks, and the Mount Washington Valley Bicycling Club provides free helmets to young and old. This has been such a hit in Fryeburg, that it's now offered in Gorham as well.

When I ask what else they think they should tell me to educate people about the future of the trail, Andrew replies, "Get involved. Check out the Mountain Division Alliance website. If you have questions, email us. I do get questions all the time about the progress and updates about construction plans."

Trail Until Rail. This is the new once upon a time for the Mountain Division Trail and I can't wait to see how the story unfolds 🌟.

FMI: <https://mountaindivisionalliance.org/>







# Tiny Tech House

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

Steve Richard has lived off the grid before. The first time was in a house he built in Minot, Maine, and he credits that experience with informing the design and construction of the tiny house he is currently finishing on a small lot in a quiet, rural neighborhood. His new Tiny Tech House is 12x26' with lofts on either end. The sleeping loft is 10x12' and the storage loft is 6x12', for a total living space of 504 square feet.

The storage loft houses the electrical system, which consists of four EVO lithium iron phosphate batteries, an inverter, and a charge controller. A 30 amp wire goes into the 3000 watt (W) inverter that feeds the panels supplying all of his electricity. The inverter, which takes the DC battery power and converts it to AC, is also a charger. Should he run low on electricity, there is a generator outside, that when turned on, feeds to the inverter, which turns into a

charger and bypasses the batteries to feed the whole house. All the lights stay on and the charger runs simultaneously off the generator. In a nutshell, the system is being fed and charging at the same time. The charge controller feeds the batteries and regulates the amount of flow so it can't over charge the batteries.

The solar panels, inverter, and monitor are all made by Renogy, an off-grid solar power system innovator based in Chino, California. The Renogy ONE Core monitor provides 24/7 energy analysis in the house, but also connects to the DC Home app on his phone so he's able to monitor his energy use from anywhere, at any time.

He shows me his phone and says, "If I continue at the rate I'm at right now, with the lights on and the refrigerator running, the batteries are 82% full and I can go 50 hours."

All the appliances are small and within 30 amps. The Giantex portable washing

machine, which contrary to its name is tiny, takes 300 W. An Eccotemp tankless water heater provides instantaneous hot water and offers flexible average settings ranging from 11 to 17 W. Seven amber drop-pendant lights purchased from Hayes Ace Hardware use about 5 to 7 W each, and the recessed lights use around 8 to 10 each. The only "big" loads are the adorable Morus portable dryer (which uses 1100 W but dries over 60% faster than conventional dryers), the countertop oven, kettle, and induction hot plate.

"I can't run my oven, washing machine and dryer at the same time. It'll be lights out," says Steve. But he hasn't found that's ever an issue.

Steve bought the property in 2019, cleared it in 2021 and put the septic system in by himself, which necessitated bringing in a lot of fill. The 4' frost wall foundation and slab were poured on July 25, 2022. He then had to build the foundation up with truck loads of sand that he shoveled in and painstakingly leveled with a tamper.

"I had a tamper, gummies, and my headphone" is how he recalls getting the job done.





He framed his house with Maine weather in mind. The cathedral roof is an engineered truss system insulated with high density R-49 fiberglass insulation. The exterior walls are 2x6 with R-21 insulation. The siding is vinyl shingles and the roofing is architectural asphalt.

His sole heat source is a low-profile Martin direct-vent propane heater manufactured in Quebec, Canada. It requires no electricity and the flame adjusts to the temperature of the room to prevent overheating and gas wastage. Just set it for the season and forget it.

The pre-finished pickled V-match pine for the walls and cathedral ceiling came from Hancock Lumber in Bridgton. The downstairs ceilings are 6" V-match pine stained in Minwax semi-transparent Special Walnut. The flooring is Luxury Vinyl Plank (LVP) that looks surprisingly like aged oak.

The windows are made in Belfast, Maine, by Mathews Brothers. Founded in 1854, they are "America's Oldest Window Manufacturer." He chose all horizontal sliders because he didn't want big windows in a small house. The 24x38" FAKRO skylight in the sleeping loft not only brings natural light into the space, but opens upward to provide both ventilation and a second-level emergency egress. The Craftsman-style front door is painted Ben Moore Hawthorne Yellow.

Steve designed his tiny house down to the last detail.

"Everything, right down to the placement of the windows, is my design. I actually designed it all on graph paper upstairs at Beth's Cafe."

He also spent a tremendous amount of time sourcing materials, appliances, and space-saving furnishings.

The butcher block kitchen countertop is made of acacia wood and accommodates a Fulorni 25" drop-in stainless steel sink that is ingeniously designed to serve as a multi-functional workstation. Accessories include a drop-in acacia wood cutting board, colander and roll up drying rack. Floating shelves in the kitchen area are designed to free up valuable countertop workspace.

A Vissani counter-height refrigerator with freezer is unobtrusively tucked in a corner at the end of the kitchen counter.

The aforementioned washer, dryer, and on-demand hot water heater are discreetly hidden behind slatted doors in an inverted space in the living area.

A maplewood StudioBAAM loft ladder



handcrafted in Canada is cleverly designed to slide up against the wall to save floor space when not in use, and can easily be moved from one loft opening to the other.

The toilet is a Swiss Madison wall-hung, dual function toilet with in-wall tank. The bathroom mirror has push-button technology for on/off, anti-fog, and lighting.

When we spoke in early September, Steve was preparing to construct a 6x12' deck on the front of the house. Eventually, there will be a 12x20' deck

on the side, but he hopes to have everything else finished this year. In the interest of zero upkeep, the decks are composite and the siding is vinyl shingle.

Steve estimates the total cost of his Tiny Tech House somewhere between \$120,000 to \$140,000, including the land, clearing, septic, and foundation. But he points out that he has a lot of sweat equity invested in it. His intention was to live self-sufficiently. His Tiny Tech House has made that a reality. 🌞





## FINDING RHYTHM IN WEAVING

BY LEIGH MACMILLEN HAYES

Cane is the outer skin of the Rattan Palm stalk, a vine that grows in Asia and Africa. Once harvested, thorns are removed from the bark and it is refined into fine strips, valued for its strength, flexibility, and non-porous nature. In ancient times, cane was used to create baskets, beds, shields, and other items.

Weaving cane to form chair seats was introduced into England during the 17th century. “In the mid-19th century, caning became the most highly regarded seat material thanks to a German cabinetmaker named Michael Thonet. His No. 14 chair from 1859 transformed the furniture industry. The simple nature of the chair and its caned seat gave the chair exceptional lightness, meaning it was less expensive to produce and easier to transport.” (Rachel Granholm: *The Antique Journey*, “Cane Furniture: Then and Now”) In addition, it provided a clean, hygienic seat that didn’t encourage parasites and mites and other bugs known to infest upholstery at that time.

In the midst of today’s disposable culture, lake region resident Richard Joseph

promotes sustainability by recaning chairs with broken or missing seats. “If I see a chair that is broken, I feel it is my mission to give it a second chance.” Traditional hand caning from hole to hole is not a common practice today.

He fell in love with this time-honored art about 35 years ago when he and his first wife took a caning class at a local Audubon Society. Richard was a special education tech by trade, but discovered he had a knack for caning and it soon became one of his hobbies.

Most of the chairs he works on come from yard sales, where he checks the underside to see if there are tiny holes around the chair rail, which indicate it had been caned. Some seats are covered in plywood—a quick fix for a broken chair, but by turning the chair over, he can spot the holes if they exist.

New projects begin with the stripping of old paint or stain to reveal the warmth of the wood’s natural patina. Dirt and dust are vacuumed away. And then rungs or legs or any loose or broken pieces need to be repaired. If any of the old cane is still at-

tached to the chair, it must be meticulously removed. Once all of that is completed and he has measured the diameter of the drilled holes on the underside and the distance between each, he can determine the width size of the cane needed and order a coil, which typically comes in 270-foot roles.

Richard’s tool box includes a caning needle, caning awl, caning pegs that look rather like over-sized golf tees, the coil of natural fiber, binder cord, scissors, dish pan, spray bottle and sponge, clamps, small mallet, glue, and other assorted supplies.

Caning patterns were originally a broad weave, but over time they evolved into finer and more closely woven designs. Richard employs a time-honored seven step method, beginning with the longest strands for step one, the first vertical weave. Each individual chair dictates the weave based on the shape of the seat and the size and placement of the holes.

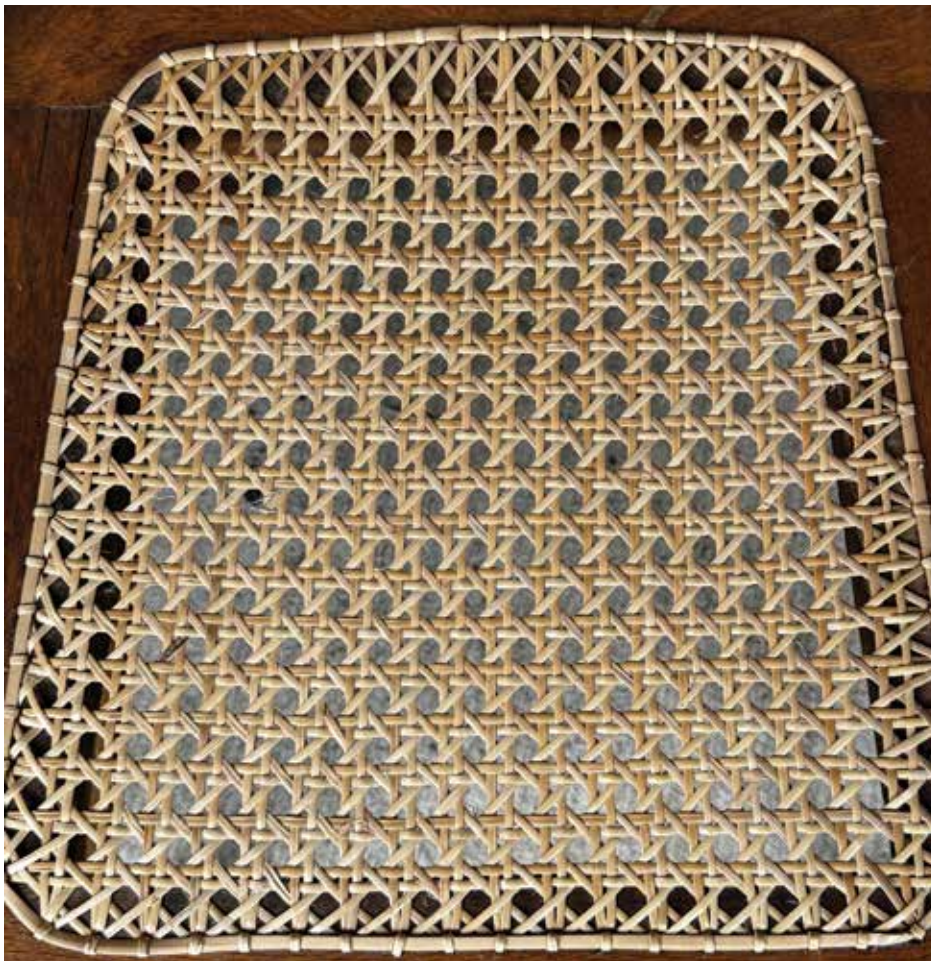
After soaking the cane, he places a peg in the center holes of both the front and back rails that surround the inside edge of the seat. With cane uncoiled, he removes the peg at the rear of the seat, and threads the fiber through the center hole, leaving a bit hanging before replacing the peg, which will hold it in place. With the cane shiny side up and flat, he then threads it through the center hole of the opposite front rail, and again places the peg in the same hole to hold it in place. From there, it is a back and forth effort from front to back repeatedly, always checking to make sure the shiny side will face upward in the end. It may sound easy, but there is a lot to consider, including amount of slack, creasing by the hole, making sure strands are parallel, and keeping the cane moist, plus soaking other strands, but not for too long. Once he completes step one on the right side of the chair, he repeats the same moves on the left, again, beginning from the center peg.

Step two requires doing the same thing on a horizontal line, making sure to lay the cane across the vertical strands. Step three is called “The Second Vertical” because he now runs a second set of strands slightly to the side of those in the first step. Throughout all of this, as he comes to the end of a strand, he places a peg in the hole to address it later. Once step three is completed, Richard starts to tie off the loose ends by turning the chair over and raising each loop just enough to create a knot.

The first four steps are referred to as “the settings.” Then it is time for “the crossings,” where the real weaving begins.

In step four, a second set of horizontal





strands are passed through the side rail holes, except they are woven to bind the other three strands together. Richard not only canes chairs, but he's also a musician and composer, and it's in this step that it seems he finds his rhythm as he pulls the strands over and under, over and under from side to side beginning with the horizontal paths as both hands work in synchrony.

With step five, he adds a diagonal weave as he goes under the verticals and over the horizontals. And you guessed it, step six is the opposite diagonal weave, going over and under the previous set of diagonals. "Some people only complete one diagonal," says Richard, "but the second diagonal gives the chair more strength."

Richard has been known to procrastinate about the final step, completing the first six steps on several chairs before settling down to work on the binding off for each one. Working on the underside, all knots must first be trimmed with the ends pointing toward the center of the chair. The binder cane, which is wider and heavier, is intended to cover the holes and is woven around the perimeter of the chair rail.

All in all, it takes about ten to fifteen hours to cane a chair, and that doesn't include the time to strip it and make any other repairs. Recently, he completed fifteen chairs in four months. Right now, however, his focus is turning to his music as the Lake Region Community Chorus rehearses for its Christmas concert.

It's difficult to find this same quality in today's factory-made furniture. The work is repetitive, but meditative in nature as the intricate weaving requires attention to detail and lots of patience. Practice makes perfect and Richard says that caning requires a lot of practice.

"I kinda think it's cool that I can do something a lot of people cannot do," says Richard. "And it goes hand in hand with the patience that I need to compose music because I'm one of those people who will keep tinkering with a song until it sounds just the way I want it to sound." By weaving material through a wooden frame to create a comfortable and durable seat, Richard practices an age-old skill and is a part of a lineage of artisans who extend the lifespan of chairs and reduce waste.

Finding rhythm in weaving one strand at a time, Richard Joseph preserves tradition by giving new life to old chairs. ✨

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# Too much of a good thing?

The far-reaching effects of abnormally warm lake water

BY COLIN HOLME

This past summer, Lakes Environmental Association (LEA) documented record-breaking temperatures on local waterbodies. In mid-July, our automated buoys on Long and Highland Lakes both logged temperatures above 87° Fahrenheit at sensors three feet down. On several lakes, landowners reported 90°F readings at the surface. During this hot spell, we heard many people lamenting that a dip in the lake was no longer refreshing.

But our lakes are more than just swimming pools, they are living ecosystems, which support a wide variety of life. And when temperatures increase, these systems can change in both subtle and dramatic ways.

In June of this year, cyanobacteria blooms that resulted in beach closures and health warnings were issued for parts of Winnepesaukee and Winnisquam Lakes in New Hampshire. These two large and popular waterbodies are about 40 miles west of Sebago and are recreational hotspots in New Hampshire's Lake Region. Cyanobacteria, also known as blue green algae, thrives in warm water, and some of the species have the ability to produce toxins that target the skin, liver, gastrointestinal tract, or nervous system. Alarmingly, some studies have also shown that landowners around lakes in New England with regular cyanobacteria blooms have higher rates of serious neurodegenerative diseases.

After a couple weeks, those June cyanobacteria blooms in New Hampshire dissipated and lake-life went back to normal. But unfortunately, they came back for a second round in August and also popped up on nearby Androscoggin Lake in Leeds, Maine. Unlike Winnepesaukee and Winnisquam, the August cyanobacterial bloom on Androscoggin Lake was categorized as a "lake-wide algae bloom" and water clarity plummeted to under five feet.

Because these blooms on Androscoggin Lake have become more regular in recent years, some landowners have stopped renting out their property in August over fear of renter complaints. A little bit of missed rental income is minor, however, compared to the loss in value



*Invasive Variable Leaf milfoil blooms above the water when the water is warm and conditions are good for growth*

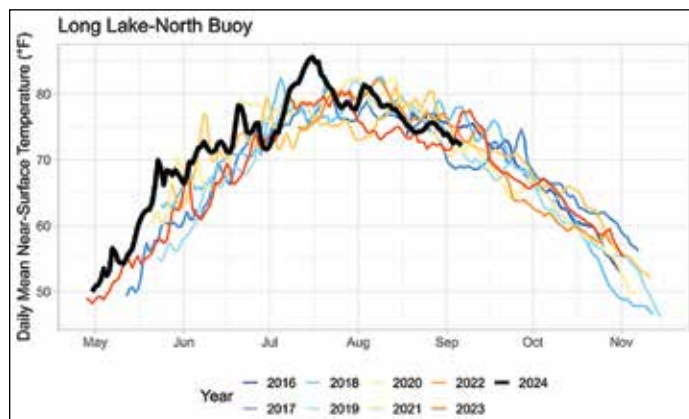
from property depreciation. University of Maine research has shown that as lake water clarity declines, so do waterfront land values.

Cyanobacteria are not the only bacteria that prefer elevated water temperatures. Pathogens like *E. coli* can also survive longer in warmer water. This problem is compounded by the fact that more people go to the lake to cool down on hot days and humans are often a source of harmful bacteria and viruses. Health effects from these pathogens range from gastro-intestinal distress, to fever, to even more serious problems.

Worryingly, our lakes are warming faster than the air around us. In fact, about twice as fast. Since the 1980s, lakes in northern New England have been warming by about 1.4°F per decade and that has resulted in an average surface water temperature increase of about 5.5°F.

The duration of ice cover in the winter has also been sharply declining. A comprehensive study by the United States Geological Survey looking at data from 1850-2000 found that ice-out for 29 New England lakes is happening nine to sixteen days earlier since 1850. That data is now almost a quarter century old, however, and we know the trend of shorter ice duration has only grown stronger. Last winter, Long Lake (for which we have ice data going back to the 1870s) had the shortest period of ice cover on record, approximately half the amount of time in past winters. Less ice and frequent warm spells in the winter means more unsafe ice conditions. While any ice can be dangerous, there is an expectation by visitors and residents that Maine lakes are safe to trek out on in the heart of winter. So, traditional winter activities like ice fishing, snowmobiling, ice skating, and cross-country skiing are now coming with more risk. We are already seeing regular cancellations of ice fishing derbies, winter races, and similar events.

With ice coming in later and leaving earlier, the growing season is longer and this may be one of the reasons we are seeing more cyanobacterial blooms. A longer growing season and warmer water is also better for plants that grow in the lake—especially plants originating from more southern locations—like invasive variable leaf milfoil.



*A graph from LEA's Long Lake buoy showing the dramatic heat wave in July of 2024 that resulted in record-breaking surface lake temperatures*



In the areas LEA is battling invasive milfoil, we saw incredible growth and spreading this past summer. While frequent and more intense storms likely brought in more nutrients to our lakes (another effect of a changing climate), elevated water temperatures made for very good growth conditions.

When we started controlling milfoil in the early 2000s, it only flowered some years. Because it was not typical, we would go out to photo-document this occurrence, which usually appeared in late July or August. The flowering blooms of variable leaf milfoil stick out of the water and are easily seen and are also an indicator of healthy, thriving plants. This spring, our milfoil crew saw huge swaths of milfoil flowering in mid-June, the earliest we have ever seen it.

As summer progressed, new patches of milfoil were popping up in areas where it has never been before. The calm inlet of the stream that drains Crystal Lake into Long Lake by the Village Tie Up in Harrison was surveyed by our divers early in the summer and found to be milfoil-free. However, in early September, one of our past board members reported seeing a significant patch between the two bridges. It was confirmed and later removed by our divers, but it was nonetheless a very alarming find and a testament to the vigorous growth of this invader.

Although we had a milfoil team in Long Lake much of the summer, compared to other areas, Long Lake is still in good shape. In areas where milfoil is more prevalent such as Sebago Cove and the Songo Bayou, it was a very bad year and many shallows areas were chock-full of this plant. Desperate pleas from landowners for LEA to address these hotspots streamed in regularly. Sadly though, many of these requests are coming from landowners who have never supported our work. The simple truth is controlling invasive milfoil is difficult and expensive, and state grants cover between a quarter and a third of LEA's actual costs. The rest is raised locally.

In order for our organization to keep waterbodies like Long Lake and Brandy Pond largely free of milfoil and make real progress in other areas, we will need significantly more funding. Regrettably, we have had to cut our crew sizes down in the last two years because funding from a private foundation dried up. Our crew of 20 went down to 18 in 2023 and 13 in 2024. To put that in perspective, that

**The simple truth is controlling invasive milfoil is difficult and expensive, and state grants cover between a quarter and a third of LEA's actual costs. The rest is raised locally.**

is 13 divers covering more than 6000 acres of water. A tall order and one that is only going to get more difficult to fill as our lakes warm and invasive milfoil grows more vigorously and for a longer season.

The only good news is that the Sebago Lake Region seems to be faring better than others. While many organizations and regions are struggling to create, equip, or maintain dive teams to address invasive aquatic plant infestations, we already have a solid crew with years of experience, along with equipment, and a fleet of specialized boats.

Compared to New Hampshire, Maine also has stronger shoreland zoning standards, and LEA has been working with landowners, businesses, and the towns to make sure these rules are understood and applied. Good shoreland zoning laws (and landowner's who understand them) help to keep excess nutrients, which fuel algae and plant growth, out of our lakes. These same laws also protect the buffers around our feeder streams and this in turn, keeps these waters cool, which is good for our lakes (and fish like brook trout, too).

It is also important to note that LEA has one of the most advanced lake and pond monitoring programs in the state. In addition to regular field sampling during the summer months, we have automated buoys, continuous lake temperature logging, and winter monitoring. We have the capability to detect toxicity in algae and our research team analyzes and reports out trends and unusual occurrences every year.

Our lakes are definitely heating up, but robust monitoring and strong mitigation programs can help us weather the storms to come – as long as there is enough buy-in from the whole community. 🌻



*An algae bloom on Androscoggin Lake in Leeds and Wayne Maine*



## the bookshelf

BOOK REVIEWS FROM  
BRIDGTON BOOKS

### JUSTIN'S LIST

After a busy summer, we are enjoying a slower, steadier fall, when we can have extended conversations with our customers, be better booksellers by offering recommendations, and catch up with friends. I haven't had time to read many recent releases, but here are a few of my recommendations from summer, as well as a couple from fall.

One fall advance copy I was lucky enough to devour in two sittings was *The Gray Wolf* by Louise Penny, due out in late October. This is another Inspector Gamache mystery after a two-year hiatus by the author, and it doesn't disappoint. A dark thriller involving domestic terrorism, Gamache, Isabelle, and Jean-Guy must solve a complex assortment of clues and messages left behind for them. But will their hard work and perseverance save the day, or is this a clever trap by an old enemy? No spoilers here . . . you will have to read it to find out.

*Real Americans* by Rachel Khong is a superb novel broken into three parts. It begins when Lily, a second-generation Chinese American and struggling intern meets Matthew, the heir to one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the county. Putting their societal and cultural differences aside, they fall madly in love. In part two, Lily is on her own with a teenage son Nick, who wishes to find his biological father and eventually does so behind Lily's back. Both parts move along and are enjoyable to read, however, it was the third part that really gripped me and answered my questions. Lily's mother Mei, a scientist, is the narrator looking back to her time in China during the Cultural Revolution and her eventual escape. The story structure works well, the characters are genuine, and Khong's prose is delightful to read.

A new work of history by Erik Larson always goes to the top of my TBR pile. *The Demon of Unrest* details the five months leading up to the Battle of Fort Sumter and beginning of the Civil War. When Lincoln was elected, it set off a chain of events that was probably inevitable, and it was fascinating to get an insider's look at the major players and events leading up to our country's greatest test. Larson uses historical sources to give vivid snapshots of

Lincoln, Seward, Fort Sumter Commander Major Robert Anderson, the rabid secessionist Edmund Ruffin, and the southern diarist Mary Chestnut, to name a few, and lets the reader decide who was responsible. As it still does today, information, lack of information, and misinformation all played a significant role.

There has been an uptick of customers simply looking for a light, funny novel in which they can escape from the daily grind. *How To Age Disgracefully* by Clare Pooley is a perfect match for them. At seventy years old, Daphne, who has kept to herself for years since her husband's death, decides to get out in the world and see what she has been missing. She joins the senior citizen's social club and attempts some internet dating, but her people skills are a little rusty, to say the least. She meets Art, a character in his own right, and they become fast enemies, until the town decides to tear down the Community Center building, and the members must band together to fight it. Between laughs, I found myself caring deeply for the characters in this feel good novel.

*There Are Rivers in the Sky* by Elif Shafek is a remarkable work of world literature and my favorite fall read so far. It is divided into stories of three characters, all connected by a drop of water and the ancient city of Nineveh along the Tigris River. Arthur was born along the sewers of the Thames River in the 1840s by a scavenger mother, but his incredible memory and tenacity will propel his destiny to become an archaeologist. Narin, a Yazidi girl, is uprooted from her Turkish home along

the Tigris River in 2014 and travels to Iraq where she and her people fall prey to Isis. And Zaleekhah, a recently divorced hydrologist, moves to a houseboat on the Thames in 2018 and determines to end her life in a month's time. Each story is a gem, and I look forward to going back and reading other works by this author.

*Shanghai*, a novel by Joseph Kanon, is a mixture of historical fiction and noir during World War II. Daniel Lohr, a German Jew and sometimes communist, is lucky enough to escape Germany right after the Kristainacht in 1938 and flee to Shanghai. His estranged uncle, who owns a nightclub, pays for his passage, and soon after arriving Daniel goes to work for him proving his worth. But Shanghai at this time is like the Wild Wild West, with competing crime bosses, corrupt officials, communists and the Japanese "Kempeitai," all wanting a piece of the action. Daniel and his Uncle Nathan have to tread carefully.

### SUE'S SELECTIONS

I love it when I happen upon a truly beautiful story by a skillful storyteller. *Sipsworth* by Simon Van Booy tells the story of a lonely, elderly lady, Helen Cartwright, who has moved back to her hometown in England and is methodically preparing for when it's her time to pass on. Until her curiosity of what other people discard leads her to become the guardian of a little creature, a gray mouse she names Sipsworth. Her new friend gives her reason to live . . . at least for a while longer. This story is meant to be read and reread . . . a real treasure!







## PAM'S PICKS FOR KIDS & YOUNG ADULTS

### *Little Turtle's Book of the Blue*

By Yuval Zommer  
Ages birth & up

Follow Little Turtle through the ocean depths as she introduces young readers to all the wonders and marine life found there. This colorful board book opens to vibrant illustrations as the story begins above and close to the water's surface. As the fish and mammals grow in size and the story dives deeper, the blue ocean tones grow darker. Playful, simple text paired with bold illustrations are sure to spark curiosity for the natural world.

### *The Dictionary Story*

By Oliver Jeffers  
Ages 2+

Words line up obediently row after row, followed by the pronunciation and definition. Dictionary stares longingly at the other books on the shelf, desperate to be like them by using the beautiful words in her book to tell a story.

Without warning, a ravenously hungry Alligator breaks through the pages in search of a Donut. More and more words start popping up, causing chaos and disorder throughout her book.

Playful illustrations take readers from A - Z in homage to all the written words in the English dictionary.

### *Millie Fleur's Poison Garden*

By Christy Mandin  
Ages 3+

An abandoned Addams Family-style mansion stands alone on a hilltop, away from the perfectly symmetrical, pastel homes with manicured lawns. Town rules prohibit houses from being different.

Millie and her mom move into the man-

sion, but Millie misses home. To soothe her homesickness, her mom gives her seeds from her old garden to plant. Quickly, Millie goes to work meticulously planting her favorite non-traditional plants. As tentacles and fanged-style plants take root, the townspeople demand the "poisonous" plants be removed.

Follow Millie on her journey to fit in with a community that at first glance judges her unconventional ways.

### *Birds of North America, Pocket Genius*

By Derek Harvey  
Reviewed by Aurora Killer, Age 10

I love how this book helped me research ideas for my school project on blue herons. It inspired me to write about field guides. I have field guides on birds, trees, mosses, sea shells and vernal pools. Field guides help me be smarter about the outside world. They have the perfect amount of information, enough so that you don't get bored. I recommend this field guide for beginners. It has good illustrations and a helpful index.

### *Impossible Creatures*

By Katherine Rundell  
Ages 13+

No matter where Christopher goes, animals of all sorts mysteriously seek him out. After returning from the forbidden hill with a baby griffin, Christopher's grandfather admits his family has been the guardian of the entrance to the magical world of Archipelago, which is home to mythical creatures. Inexplicably, the creatures are slowly dying.

Christopher and his new friend, Mal, a girl from Archipelago with a jacket that allows her to fly on windy days, are willing to risk their lives, all while a mysterious blond-haired man with a mole on his neck is determined to kill them. Add to the mix a Berserker Pirate named Nightstand and a marine scientist Irian, and the not always

safe adventure will keep you on the edge of your seat.

### *Hidden: A True Story of the Holocaust*

By Kati Preston, Illustrated by Dilleen Marsh

Ages 14+

Born to a Jewish father and Catholic mother, Kati's loving father taught her kindness and compassion and her mother provided all the comforts of a wealthy family. At a young age, a yellow star was placed on her chest, which she proudly wore until she understood the significance of the symbol.

With her father forcefully taken to a work camp and guards tracking down all the Jews, Kati goes to stay with Erzsebet, a woman her mother made dresses for and who is returning the kindness Kati's mother had shown her.

This graphic novel uses bold, powerful illustrations to take you through the horrors of Auschwitz and the life story of Kati Preston, the only family member to survive the Holocaust.

### *Powerless*

By Lauren Roberts

Ages 15+

The King of Ilyas has decreed all Ordinaries be banished in order to preserve his Elite society. Blaming the Ordinaries for the Plague, the king has fought to keep his Elite society extraordinary and empowered.

Paedyn Grey, an Ordinary in hiding, but one with an observant eye and excellent pickpocket skills, witnesses an attack in her hometown of Loot, and unsuspectingly saves the king's son, Kai. As a result of her Herculean rescue, she finds herself thrown into the king's deadly Purging Trials. Find out what happens between Paedyn and Kai as pretrial festivities take place, and Elite and Ordinary societies collide.

Fans of *Fourth Wing* will love this trilogy.





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