

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

April 2020



Editor's Note: As we go to press, TFL is shut down until further notice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This newsletter, although created during the crisis, is mostly a look back at TFL events that happened pre-crisis, between January and early March. We make reference to the current situation for context, and in terms of the future which, as of this writing, remains uncertain. Staff have been busy working on various projects and in contact with each other via email, text, and a weekly virtual meeting, with a special focus on sharing quality information and resources with patrons and the public via our website <https://www.thompson.lib.me.us> and our Facebook page. We are adapting to the new normal and finding new ways to connect with the community (like online Story Time, programs via Zoom, and poetry & book talks on Instagram, etc.). The July newsletter will cover library happenings from April through mid-June. Stay tuned and stay healthy.

A Slam from the Heart by Tom Lyford

Of all the adult programs the library offers our patrons, the “Story Slam” sits atop the list of my personal favorites. Yes, it’s always invigorating to attend a meet-and-greet with a published poet, best-selling novelist, or non-fiction



Emcee Bobby Keniston

writer. And it’s just practical to learn how to make your own laundry soap at a tenth of the supermarket cost, or how to maximize your composting techniques to better grow your veggies. Plus, it’s just cool to encourage patrons to sample a number of hobbies ranging from identifying animal tracks in the snow to discovering how easy it is to knit and purl. And for those suffering from I-think-therefore-I-am syndrome, the drop-in discussion group we like to call The Philosophy Circle is just the therapeutic ticket. So I’m guessing that leaves Free Friday Popcorn and Movie Night as the frosting on our programming cake.

Most of what’s listed above leans towards the practical, the structured, or the more cerebral. The “story slam” on the other hand is a whole different animal. For starters, the slam follows an almost breathtaking lack of traditional format. No one (including the host or hostess) knows who the volunteer speakers will end up being, or even what it is the audience (which gets the choice to actively participate or just sit back and watch) will get to hear. It all begins with a general one-word or one-phrase prompt being selected and then publicized in advance. From this, willing participants are challenged to develop an oral, non-fictional, 4-8 minute presentation relating some pivotal, personal experience. The volunteers, by the way, are coached not to read their offerings from prepared pages or to use notes: the me-to-you eye contact and conversational tone helps to generate a warmer sense of community and togetherness.



On the cozy evening of February 21st, the prompt for this Voices from Home Oral History Project Story Slam (held at Center Coffee House) was “Changes.” So OK, here is only a partial list of shared personal experiences offered up for the appreciation and subsequent admiration of the audience: how one man’s futile struggle against becoming a “werewolf” taught him humility; how a lone traveler crossing Texas and getting (sort of, but not really) “kidnapped” overnight by a couple of good ol’ boys in a pick up truck boosted her self-confidence and improved her outlook on humanity; how a 1960’s high school boy, haplessly finding himself the subject of an impromptu sci-fi-like “medical experiment,” was exposed to the changes in the world of high tech; and especially how a spiteful act of verbal cruelty by a partner in an abusive relationship became, in retrospect, the welcomed “gift” that transformed a woman into the obviously independent powerhouse of an individual she is today. It was a stunning, thought-provoking evening that had its listeners wondrously living vicariously through the spoken memories of the volunteers. A successful A+ evening.

Personally, I can’t wait for the next one (Emergency! Virtual Story Slam) scheduled for April 17th at 6 pm. (See our Facebook page for details.) Unfortunately it will have to be orchestrated online this time, thanks to Covid-19.

The Voices from HOME Oral History Project is also collecting stories about life during the COVID-19 pandemic and other times of emergency and upheaval in our online Emergency Archive. Contribute a story, image, oral history interview, or video at: <https://heartofmaine.omeka.net/emergency-archive>.

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Page 2



Composting Compendium by Tom Lyford

It turns out that composting is a hot topic in Piscataquis County. We had to add a number of extra chairs to accommodate everyone who came. Many of the attendees had already been experimenting hit-and-miss with indoor and outdoor composting but still they came hungry for advice from our presenters, Nick Jackson and Sarah Mahan of Atkinson's Jackson Regenerational Farm on that last Friday in February.

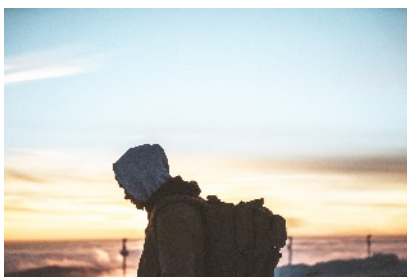
The information was so well organized and presented that even I, a blank slate on the what's and why's of composting, could understand it. I learned that composting transforms waste into valuable soil, saves space in landfills, and saves money on trash disposal. I was amazed to learn that these small "mountains" of soil, leaves and garbage behave somewhat like "bread machines" because they're not just sitting there—they're doing something: "cooking" (decaying), "baking" up a Super Soil additive for growing healthier vegetables or more robust flowers. What seemed most incredible to me is how hot these decaying layers of fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds and filters, and eggshells, etc., can get: upwards of 130 degrees Fahrenheit, sufficiently hot to run pipes through the larger compost piles to provide your farm with hot running water.



There are items that ought *not* go into in your compost: meat, bones, or fish scraps (they will attract pests in outdoor compost piles); perennial weeds or diseased plants; banana and peach peels and orange rinds, which may contain pesticide residues; and sawdust contaminated by machine oil or chain oil residues from cutting equipment. A great deal of technical information was also disseminated about such things as achieving the proper ratios of nitrogen, carbon, air, and water for feeding the microorganisms which maximize the process of decay.

Whether composting in your own backyard or at a community garden, this session was a goldmine of information. (Visit JRF at <https://jacksonregenerationalfarm.com/> or on their Facebook page).

Helping Our Homeless by Kim Brawn



"We were hoping to bring community members together with community leaders to discuss our homeless population," said TFL librarian Michelle Fagan. "But it was not a good turnout, I was disappointed."

Michelle believed that the AARP Coffee Talk at Central Hall Commons on February 25 would shine a spotlight on rural homelessness, which is often considered invisible because "we don't see them on our streets" like in urban areas. Adrian Cronkhite with the U.S. Census Bureau and Archie Curry from

the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter were among the guest speakers who "shared lots of good info, like how the census is getting numbers on the homeless population around the country and what the homeless shelter does."

"We need to acknowledge that it's here," Michelle said. And now, because of the COVID-19 crisis, shelters are having to minimize the number of beds. The homeless can't get the care they need, and hygiene is a struggle.

Michelle suggested that people get involved by having conversations about homelessness and what it looks like in our local communities and take action by donating needed items to shelters or food pantries.

"We may not always recognize them," said Michelle. "But they are out there and need help."

For more information on the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, go to <https://www.bangorareashelter.org> and for the latest on Central Hall Commons events and resources, visit their website (<https://www.centralhallcommons.org/>).

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Page 3

Garden in a Box by Kim Brawn



Piscataquis Regional Food Center (PRFC) has launched a pilot project, funded by the Quimby Family Foundation, called *Garden in a Box* that will provide a full container gardening experience for about 20 people. These gardeners will attend a series of workshops, the first of which was held on Thursday, March 5 at TFL.

Merrilee Schoen, PRFC's Community Food Services Coordinator, called it a "wonderful turnout--a good mix of general community members and our registered Gardeners." This

pilot project is designed to include the general community whenever possible along the way, especially at the learning workshops.

The program, "Basics of Container Gardening," proved to be a great general introduction to growing veggies in a container. PRFC and UMaine Cooperative Extension have teamed up to create content for the monthly workshops that will guide participants and the public through the growing season. This first workshop featured a presentation by Susan Stevens, a Master Gardener Volunteer and Garden Coach, and Trisha Smith, Home Horticulturist with the Cooperative Extension Office of Piscataquis County.

Susan discussed finding the right spot for your container and pointed out that you don't need many tools to succeed. Her sage advice: "No trowel, use a spoon!" She also talked about the importance of watering schedules. Many audience questions followed and Merrilee said that there was a "robust discussion" on how to keep deer and turkeys away (and cats too, who mistake it for a litter box?!). And, of course, folks wondered what seeds work best and which plants grow well together.

Merrilee hopes that people left the workshop realizing that "growing their own vegetables is possible even with limited mobility, limited space, and/or limited resources." There are experienced gardeners out there to help "so I hope people feel encouraged and empowered to try growing something, even if it's just one plant...or imagining what they'd like to see in a container, on a windowsill, or in a raised bed."

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, the *Garden in a Box* Free Learning Series will continue until December 2020. And especially in these uncertain times, growing your own food can improve food security, health and nutrition, and even mitigate climate change.

For now, in-person community gatherings have been postponed but Merrilee says PRFC will still be hosting them online, on Zoom, and videos will be uploaded to their YouTube channel "PR Food Center." DVDs will be available for those who don't use or have access to a computer. Upcoming workshop topics include: Getting the Most out of a Small Space; Pollinators, Predators, and Pests; First Harvests and Succession Planting; Plant Diseases; and Seed Saving.

Merrilee welcomes guest bloggers to share their hits and misses re: their own container gardening experiences at <https://www.prfoodcenter.org>.

(For PRFC updates and more information, visit their website and find them on Facebook.)

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Page 4

My Baby Wrote Me a Letter by Tom Lyford

*"Gimme a ticket for an aeroplane...ain't got time to take a fast train...
lonely days are gone...I'm a-goin' home...my baby wrote me a letter."
--The Box Tops (1967)*

When was the last time you wrote a personal letter to someone? Notice I did not say send a tweet, a shout-out on Instant Messenger, or an email. I'm referring to picking up a pencil or Bic, putting it to paper (once called "stationery"—remember stationery?), then hand-writing a few paragraphs of personal "news updates" you feel an out-of-town friend or relative needs to catch up on, sealing those pages in an SASE, and trucking your "letter" to the post office for delivery.

I suspect today's teens will say "Never," though perhaps not. I know I haven't written one in years, odd because letter writing was once of the utmost importance to me. I used to write long letters to my parents and cousins and best buds. And back in college, the discovery of a letter from my steady girl waiting there in my college dorm mailbox was a thrill, as was my Fort Leonard Wood's Basic Training sergeant's voice barking out, "Mail call! Lyford!"



Fast forward to January 2020 with the formation of TFL's Letter Writing Group that meets on the first Tuesday of each month (from 4-5 p.m.) to rediscover the joys of this simple, essential—and almost lost—art. "What's that like?" I asked Greta Schroeder, our director. "What happens in that hour?"

"We have stationary, pens and stamps to share," Greta told me. "And all ages are welcome." She went on to explain that they'd begun by exploring calendar themes like writing after-Christmas thank-you letters or letters with a Valentine's Day intent. Asked how many people were showing up, she said that attendance has been small, but the time spent together was a fun, very social, and rewarding event.

Now, pushing 74, I continually find myself marveling over the fact that most of the practices I just automatically take for granted as still "being a thing" not only faded out of style before today's teens were born, but had already completely disappeared into obscurity. So, letter writing has pretty much gone the way of phone booths, VHS tapes, and kids being able to tell time on a clock with actual moving hands. (Hey, get off my lawn! ☺)

Sadly, the letter writing group had just gotten off the ground when, like all of our other in-house programs, Covid-19 hit and forced TFL to close its doors. But when we re-open, I'm honestly planning, and looking forward, to joining the little gathering to see if I can recapture some of the magic I enjoyed in my youth.

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Page 5

Innovative Artists by Kim Brawn



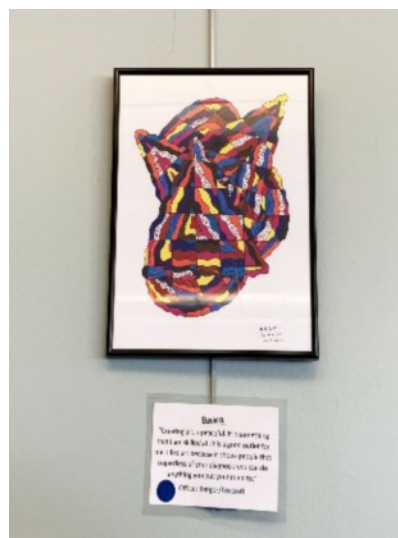
Geneva Gerrish returned to TFL as February's Artist of the Month with colorful, vibrant new pieces that brought a dynamic energy to our space. An artist since childhood, Geneva still prefers to create with pencils, ink pens, and gel pens (especially the glitter kind!). Her style has been described as hyper-realism and cartoon surrealism. She finds people to be her most fascinating subjects. Geneva couldn't contain her excitement as she dropped off her latest work. She was anxious to share it, while patrons and visitors were eager to see it. (You can find Geneva on Facebook at Genevawesome Art.)



In March, the talented and creative individuals of Living Innovations (from the organization's central and northern Maine locations) filled TFL with a wide array of inspiring artwork. Living Innovations provides support to people with intellectual disabilities or autism.

Those viewing the display were asked to vote for their three favorites. The top three vote-getters were to have their work displayed at the State House in Augusta as part of the "Lest We Forget" exhibit this month. The event draws attention to those with disabilities from across Maine and the agencies that support them. (Unfortunately, this event has been cancelled for now due to the COVID-19 crisis.)

Thankfully TFL had the opportunity to host this wonderful art show, coordinated by Living Innovations' Teresa Hess, that casts people with disabilities in a different light: as creative artists who express themselves and realize that what they've made is worth sharing and appreciated.



THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Page 6

Balsam ILL Basics by Kim Brawn

Here's a Q & A with TFL director Greta Schroeder that gives a good overview of our new Balsam Interlibrary Loan service.

What is Balsam ILL and why is it a benefit to our patrons and to TFL?



**Maine Balsam
Libraries**

Balsam ILL is a group of libraries within the Maine Balsam Libraries consortium working to increase resource sharing/interlibrary lending. Balsam ILL libraries allow patrons to make holds requests through the Balsam Catalog--meaning library users can request material from any participating library at the click of a button.

Participating libraries include Abbott Memorial (Dexter), Guilford Memorial, Hartland Public, Henry D. Moore Library (Stueben), Newport Cultural Center, Ogunquit Memorial, Shaw Public (Greenville), Simpson Memorial (Carmel), and Thorndike Library (College of the Atlantic).

Being part of Balsam ILL benefits our patrons because it increases their ability to discover and access the resources that other participating libraries offer. Patrons also now have access to more copies of popular titles and more format choices (large print, audiobooks, etc.)

It benefits the library because it expands the collection that we are able to offer our community, making it larger and more diverse. Using the Evergreen system to facilitate and keep track of interlibrary loans is also easy and efficient! Another upside is that we are working more closely with other librarians in our consortium--for example, a cataloging team has been developed (Val, TFL's cataloger, is involved with this) to talk about standards and procedures.

How do patrons access it and search from home?

I am planning to make a video for our website (<https://www.thompson.lib.me.us/>) but here are the basic steps:

- Patrons need to set up a username and password (call or email the library to do this or do it in person when we reopen to the public).
- Once that is set up, select "Log In" at top right corner of our website and enter your username and password.
- The default search library is Thompson Free Library--this needs to be changed to Balsam ILL.
- Then, search by title, author, or keyword. When you find something you are interested in, click the green check mark that is labeled "Place Hold."
- Choose to be notified by phone or email, and then submit!

How is it working?

So far so good! Since November our patrons have requested 278 items from other Balsam ILL libraries, and we have lent out 104. We expect to see these numbers grow when we get back in action. It is definitely still a work in progress, with libraries continuing to join and patrons continuing to learn that this service is available.

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Page 7

Future Famous Writers of America by Tom Lyford

When an area teen begins taking out every how-to writing book in your library collection, well...you notice it. And if you, yourself, happen to harbor a passion for writing, then you ask the question, don't you: "So. I'm guessing you're a writer?" And when the answer is a resounding *Yes!* followed by a robust avalanche of youthful jibber-jabber, punctuated at the end by the fervent and wishful hope that just possibly you might know of some teen writers' group in the area...? Well, it occurs to you, doesn't it, that you might have a budding little Harper Lee or John Steinbeck on the other side of the circulation desk. So, what do *you* do? You implement that program. And that's what happened this January.

Right away we established a suitable time for a meeting, posted notices on our Facebook pages, and sent posters to Foxcroft Academy. Lured by their common passion (and perhaps by my promise of free snacks), four young writers began showing up at the Thursday evening sessions with a fifth from the high school promising a desire to attend after the current sports season ended. It was a small but encouraging beginning and I was immediately encouraged by their bubbling enthusiasm and creativity—they actually began by challenging each other with their own creative writing assignments.

And then that long winter series of Thursday snowstorms began shutting down all evening school and library events. On top of that, it was turning out that all four could never seem to make it on the same evening, two of them living 20 and 40 miles away respectively and both having part-time jobs that sometimes interfered. And alas, just when the hope arose that Punxsutawney Phil's promised early spring would ride to our rescue, Covid-19 squashed that hope under the viral toe of its boot. So, long story short, it was a wonderful idea and one that I'm anxiously looking forward to pursuing once again whenever this sheltering-at-home madness—that we all hope flattens the curve—ends.

Looking Forward by Kim Brawn

Here's a sneak peek at our upcoming speaker series, that due to the COVID-19 crisis, may switch from in-person to online. Stay tuned to our website and Facebook page, and local papers for details and updates. This series is sponsored by a Bicentennial Grant from the Maine Arts Commission with the goal of exploring topics and perspectives overlooked in the traditional narratives of our state's history. (As of now these programs are scheduled for Thursdays at 6 p.m. with dates & times subject to change.)

May 7 - Mary Freeman, assistant professor of History at UMaine, will speak about the politics of slavery in the era of Maine Statehood.

May 28 - Susan Pinette, director of Franco American Studies at UMaine, will speak about the Franco-American experience in Maine history.

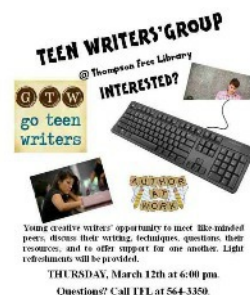
June 18 - Mark Alan Leslie, author, will speak about the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Maine, including Klan activities in our region in the 1920s.

Aug 20 - Kevin Johnson, photo archivist at the Penobscot Marine Museum, will share historic images of Dover-Foxcroft from the Eastern Illustrating & Publishing Co.

Sept 17 - Andrew Barton, professor of Biology at UMaine Farmington, will speak about the history and future of Maine's forests.

The library is still working to host a Let's Talk About It series *Defining Wilderness: Defining Maine*

<https://mainehumanities.org/lets-talk/defining-wilderness-defining-maine/> that was to run from May 12 through June 30 (every other Tuesday at 3:30). This is sponsored by the Maine Humanities Council and facilitated by Kathleen Ellis, poet and English professor at UMaine. *However, as of now, the Maine Humanities Council has canceled all face-to-face discussion groups for their spring session. We'll keep you posted if we move the series online or reschedule it.*



THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Page 8



In March, Women's History Month and Maine's Bicentennial converged for our Celebrating Maine Women display.



Many fiber arts fans flock to TFL so that made us the perfect stop for Pine Tree Hospice's Quilt Raffle. Patrons and visitor alike admired this beautiful quilt which will be raffled off to benefit this important community resource.



Barbara Lockwood's much appreciated handiwork.



The Maine Room is ripe for time travel thanks to Sebec resident Gayle LaVallee's vintage postcards. Her Dover-Foxcroft collection is neatly arranged under the glass tabletop and it's like stepping into the past. Gayle, who buys and sells items and offers free appraisals, says that all of these postcards are for sale. Once we open our doors again, be sure to stop by and explore local history through this fascinating compilation..



Everybody LOVES Lego Day!



Newsflash! TFL is now on Instagram! Follow us @tf_library—we look forward to connecting with you!



Michelle's Teen/Adult Craft was starting to build momentum before the shutdown. Here, those involved make awesome safety pin bracelets. "We have had a pretty good turnout. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves and they all got to take home their creations," said Michelle. It's a great way to de-stress and chat while being creative. She hopes to have more sessions in the the future.