

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2024

Happy Holidayze!

by Kim Brawn

"It was so fun! The morning went by in a blur!" Trisha Smith's words pretty much sum up Hometown Holidays at the library on December 2. We had four stations this year, our newest addition Trisha from Cooperative Extension, said, "It was a great success for Piscataquis County 4-H. We set up in the front room with colored papers, markers and crayons, glue, glitter, stickers, and envelopes. Our service project goal was to make 25 cards for homebound folks who get deliveries from Piscataquis Regional Food Center. Kids were invited to make a card for someone they don't know, and then one for someone they do know. We exceeded our goal and hope to be part of the library's Hometown Holidays again next year!"



Meanwhile, Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society members Mary Annis and Phyllis Lyford went old school as they taught children and adults how to string their own garland using popcorn and cranberries.

TFL's Shannen Rhoda returned to make Italian waffle cookies called pizzelles. "It was an intergenerational good time," she said



and remembers thinking "Oh My!" when she looked up to see to a very long and winding line ready to try their hand at making a cookie or just sampling one. As noon approached, "I was surprised at how huge the crowd was one minute and then the library was basically empty the next as everyone moved on to their next stop," said Shannen, who wielded a vacuum as adeptly as she cooked pizzelles, helping clean up the cookie crumbs, glitter, and popcorn-covered carpet.

Youth services librarian Michelle Fagan saw big crowds in her area too, "Things went really well. We had around 62 people do cards and ornaments. The library was certainly buzzing with Christmas cheer! Everyone had a great time and the families enjoyed all the activities we had," she said.



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Still Caring After All These Years

by Kim Brawn



Michelle Fagan, youth services librarian, celebrated 10 years at TFL on Friday, October 13 and we surprised her (yes, for real, which was an impressive feat!) with an afternoon party that featured TFL peeps—past and present—and one of her all-time favorite treats: an ice cream cake. Here is Michelle reflecting on the last decade and her hopes for the future.

Q: How have things changed over the last ten years?

A: I have seen three directors, five different staff members, and many patrons come and go. My job has had a few changes over the years in title and responsibilities but the one thing that has remained is the love of having the kids know me and know that they can come to me for books, activities and to talk if they need or want to.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I love ordering and getting the new books in. I love Storytime and being able to read and play with the kids as well as form relationships with the families who come. Really, I just love our patrons, the regulars become friends and you grow to care about each other and share life happenings, the good and the bad. Caring about the community has been something that just came naturally in this job for me.

Q: What are you looking forward to?

I am looking forward to seeing what fun we can bring to TFL for the summer and I am excited to bring books and produce to communities this summer as well (more to come on this exciting project!).

Q: Any specific memories? Favorite programs?

A: I think my favorite programs are the inflatable planetarium. Families love it and it is something different for the community. I really was excited to bring Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers. They did a pirate puppet show. We had a huge number of people but also everyone left happy! For the adult programs I hosted I really enjoyed Hank Lunn who talked about German POWs on his family potato farm. I really enjoyed John Ford and Mark Nickerson coming to tell stories and talk about their books (*Suddenly, the Cider Didn't Taste So Good* & *Blue Lights in the Night*, respectively.)

Q: What would you like to see happen?

A: I would like to see all people be able to use TFL for free. I would like to see Piscataquis County bring on a bookmobile run by TFL to serve the whole county. Bring books and wifi to communities in our area that are in need. Small scale is good but not enough for this county. We could do great things for all our communities with a book and resource mobile.



It's Not Goodbye, It's See You Later



Alex's departure from the TFL in November brought lots of mixed emotions. We were happy that he was moving on to a prestigious new job, but we were sad to see him leave. In the almost three years he was here, Alex thrived in the technical services position and really made it his own. Beyond that, he was always willing and able to jump in and help with tech problems, historical research, shoveling, and light construction. The last one was a bit of a joke, but one of the last weeks he was at the library, he did help to put together the privacy booths we received this fall. Alex was always a wonderful employee and always eager to help out in any way he could. Alex, you're still very much a part of the TFL family. You're just the relative that moved to the big city that we see less frequently! –Jon Knepp

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A Warm Welcome

by Kim Brawn

Andrea Koltai-Price joined our TFL team on December 1 as the new technical services librarian. She's been learning the ins and outs of the library and getting acclimated. "Andrea is very familiar with Balsam (our library software & consortium), having worked at Guilford previously. She was on various Balsam committees, so I've worked with her on a lot of projects, and she's been a patron here for a while, so I knew her pretty well. She has all the necessary skills for the tech services position and the right temperament to fit in well here," said director Jon Knepp.

"I am happy to be here at TFL! It feels good to be back in the world of library work after a couple of years at home with the kiddos. Thompson's patron community is friendly and welcoming. It was fun to see everyone turn out for our Hometown Holidays activities," said Andrea who grew up in southern Maine. In 2016 she and her wife Lizzy purchased the old Street farm in Guilford and in 2017 started Helios Horsepower Farm. They sell certified organic veggies at their farm stand and through the Farm to Pantry program administered by Good Shepherd Food Bank.

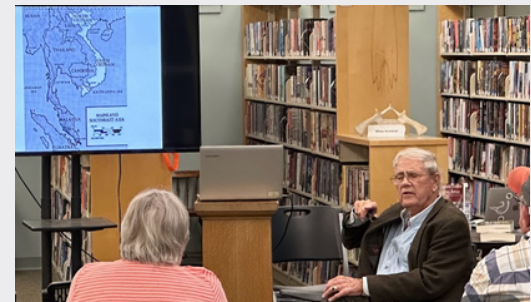


Calling All Remote Workers

by Jon Knepp

When I started looking into improvements to the library, I went back and forth on getting privacy phone booths. Some people seemed to really love them, others hated them. I knew that if we bought them, it would be a big swing. Luckily, I'm happy to announce that the Room privacy booths have been a big hit at the library! Patrons have been using them for meetings, classes, and phone calls. We've even had them used for video game binges, which isn't something I ever expected. Michelle and I have used them when we have intensive writing to do and want to be free from distractions. Sometimes, we want to use them, but they are both full! I'm glad to see that they are so well-loved, as I fretted over buying them for so long.

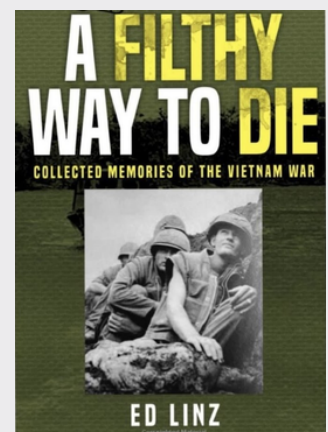
On the whole, the Remote Workers' Grant, which is using funds from the state library to improve the library's usefulness to those that work remotely, has been proceeding smoothly. We have installed two new heat pumps and a ventilation system downstairs. We also have a new patron use room in the works in the basement, and the entire downstairs will be renovated and modernized. Once the construction is complete, we will fill the new spaces with technology to better empower those utilizing them. We look forward to continuing with the project and to showing you all the finished project sometime in the new year!



Vietnam: Up Close and Personal

Greenville summer resident Ed Linz stopped by on October 5 to share with us his newest book, *A Filthy Way to Die*. He followed up his previous work, an oral history account of the Great Depression, with a well-researched account of the Vietnam War, mostly focused on Linz's classmates at the Naval Academy who fought in Vietnam. Through their stories, Ed adds a personal side to a war that happened on the other side of the world fifty years ago, but continues to affect us to this day. –Jon Knepp

[▶ Watch this on Youtube](#)



Every Breath You Take

by Kim Brawn

On September 21 Marie Therese (Terry) Martin stopped by the library to talk about her book, *And Poison Fell from the Sky: A Memoir of Life, Death, and Survival in Maine's Cancer Valley*. In it, she details life in her hometown of Rumford where the paper mill was the economic center of the town and also the generator of toxins responsible for disease and death.

At 12 years old she and a friend would play a game called “Don’t breathe.” As they made their way downtown the familiar smell of rotten eggs from the mill’s gases would permeate the air, causing them to yell “Don’t breathe!” and run as far as they could, holding their breath. “Until we’d gone far enough that we’d think the air had cleared and then we’d yell ‘All Clear,’” Terry explained. While on the surface it may have seemed like fun and games, “Those caustic fumes made our chests burn,” said Terry, all the while being cheerfully branded as the “smell of money” by others in the town.

After nursing school, time at a nunnery, and traveling Europe with a friend on \$5/day, Terry came back to Rumford. “I got it in my head to see my hometown from the perspective of the Androscoggin River,” said Terry, who talked her younger brother into borrowing a canoe and going out on the



river where she saw “a broader, darker view of my town and the paper making industry.” The river was being used as a sewer by every community and paper mill along the way. “It was, in effect, a landfill and toxic waste dump all in one,” she said.

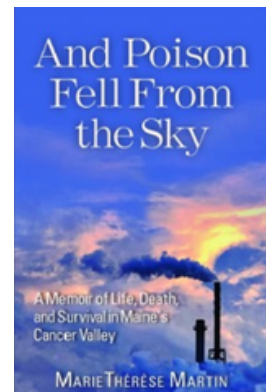
On some level Terry became aware that something was amiss and had an aha moment.

Eventually she recognized that there were layers of complicity involving the paper mill, church and the town—a circle of abuse. As a main character in Kerri Arsenault’s 2020 bestseller, *Milltown*, Terry, a registered nurse, was instrumental in the exploration of the area’s toxins and disease, providing primary-source documents and stimulating conversations. Kerri wrote the foreword to

Terry’s book and Terry told the audience about going to Harvard to speak to Kerri’s Environmental Studies class. Unlike those who the book’s foreword calls out, Terry did not turn a blind eye—she spoke up and demanded change.

Jon Knepp, TFL’s director, said that “Terry’s talk was fascinating. She has a ton of knowledge about the toxins released into the environment but also small-town politics and attitudes towards anyone disrupting the status quo. She faced a lot of pushback and hostility from others in town, but she persisted! She’s got an amazing story to tell and I’m glad she shared it with us.”

Terry’s book is available at TFL & visit marietheresemartin.com for more info.



 **Watch this on Youtube**

Birds of a Feather

by Kim Brawn

Here’s a surprising duo: Michael Good, a birding guide and naturalist (who’s not a novelist) and Sandra Neily, a Northwoods mystery novelist (who’s not a birder). Now what could they have in common? A sizable crowd turned up on the evening of October 16 to find out.

Sandy’s latest book, *Deadly Turn*, is a murder mystery revolving around the use of wind power in Maine, especially how it affects birds. She asked Michael to proof her book and tell her where she “went astray.” To understand the subject matter better, she read Michael’s testimony about how a wind project was not in a good place for bird migration.

Michael gives *Deadly Turn* two thumbs up, saying, “It kept me riveted for four days.”




Before introducing us to some of his favorite birds via a colorful slide show—his favorite being the snowy owl, which he calls his spirit bird—he told the audience that he recognizes that we are on Wabanaki land and the importance of learning the history of where we live. He specializes in ecotourism and is especially knowledgeable on how wind turbines affect the migratory pathways of birds.

Later, Sandy read an excerpt from *Deadly Turn* and talked about how she and Michael both share a passion for conservation and are concerned about deforestation.

TFL’s director Jon Knepp said, “I learned a lot about bird migrations (I didn’t know most Maine birds winter in Cuba) and about how building wind power installations on their migration routes can have such deadly effects. I always enjoy learning about the crucial role our state plays in the larger picture of our entire hemisphere.”

Find Michael at downeastnaturetours.com & Sandy at authorsandraneily.com.

 **Watch this on Youtube**

Who's The Boss?

by Kim Brawn



Tom Lyford, long-time TFL staffer and current volunteer, former Foxcroft Academy English teacher and Dover-Foxcroft poet-laureate, took a more-than-willing audience on a roller coaster ride of emotions during a late September afternoon under the pavilion. Billed as a Bonus in TFL's 101 series, it was a memoir of (mostly) relatable, somewhat traumatic, moments throughout his life.

Let's just say that Tom has struggled with trust issues from the VERY beginning, yes, I mean from birth. Sometimes the crowd wonders whether to laugh, gasp, sigh, groan, or cry but that's half the fun of Tom's entertaining romps. He reads from his books, ad-libs, and throws in a dash of poetry. But ultimately, he tells stories. His struggle with bosses—authority figures, really—like parents, coaches, teachers, doctors, even barbers (they reminded him of doctors with their smocks and sharp implements!)

He hated constricting rules and Sundays. Sundays meant church and church meant wearing that little suit with the tie that choked him. Sundays also meant no playing with cap guns. It never made sense to him. "Monday through Saturday you could kill as many bad guys as you wanted," he explained—but not on Sundays. The other rule struck even closer to his heart: no going to the movies, his favorite refuge.

Another edict that his mother tried unsuccessfully to drill into him was: "Stay away from the river." The river being the Piscataquis River and, of course, Tom fancied himself a Tom Sawyer-type. At one point, he

became obsessed with a bloated dead cow he saw in the river.

One day, probably not a Sunday, he and his older brother Denny were coming back from the movies when Tom decided to take a detour down to the river. Denny warned him not to go but Tom, around 10 years-old at the time, ignored him, so Denny reluctantly followed. Tom had spied three stones sticking out of the water—just a hop skip and a jump to the cow! But on stone number three, said Tom, "I landed splat-squish on the bloated carcass and rode it like a tiny California surfer." That line drew a burst of giggles and guffaws from the crowd.

When first married, Tom panicked when he realized that he now must wear the mantle of husband and all he thought that role entailed. The requisite manly man stuff. Well, things didn't turn out quite the way he planned. Today Tom has made peace with those battling bosses in his head and is content with his life—and wife of 57 years, Phyllis Lyford—his number-loving, woodworking, furniture assembling, bluntly honest critic and supportive partner.

At the end, he asked, "Who's the boss of me . . . you know who it is." His main goals are making Phyllis happy and making her laugh. "I'm gifted to call her the boss of me—who makes me happy."

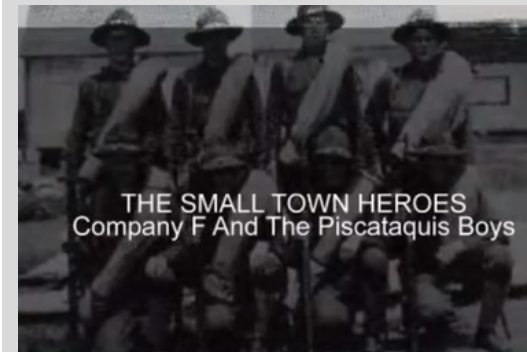
Tom's books are available at TFL and check out his blog at tomlyford.com.


 **Watch this on Youtube**



A Hero's Welcome

Dennis Lyford brought his long-delayed "Small Town Heroes" film to the library just before Veterans' Day. Originally made in 2019, the video details Piscataquis County soldiers who were mobilized to the western front in Europe during World War I. Jefferson Prestridge, who attended, shared "Maine farm boys have always joined up to answer the call to serve their country at a higher rate than most other states. The tribute to them by Dennis Lyford shows pride of community and respect for their service." We all enjoyed learning a bit more about our untold local history! See Dennis' video at: <http://bit.ly/47Ajilk> –Jon Knepp



 **Watch this on Youtube**

Did you know that many of our programs are streamed via Facebook Live at: www.facebook.com/thompsonfreelibrary and then uploaded to our Youtube channel: bit.ly/TFLyoutube? Look for this symbol with our stories to find recorded programs on our Youtube page.

The recordings can also be found on our Facebook page and links to the Youtube presentations are on our website: thompsonfreelibrary.org

Trick or Treat . . . Give Me Something Good to Read!

Tom and Phyllis Lyford reprised their roles as the welcoming committee at this year's "Halloween Book Giveaway." Approximately 175 books were given out and Tom's vivid description really sets the stage:

"If I must pull the one most joyful, overall impression out of my hat to sum up the evening's celebration, it's the amazement I witnessed (time and time again) in the eyes of so many unsuspecting newly visiting parents at the literally hundreds of shiny, brand-spanking-new children's books that each child was allowed to choose to take home for free!"

"I was amazed at the creativity and imagination that go into the costumes, children's and adults' alike," Tom continued. "The range spanned everything from sweet hilarity to the honest-to-badness, Monster Mash specters that strolled in through our front doors." —Kim Brawn



Shannen celebrated Indigenous Peoples' Day with books by and about Native Americans as well as lots of great ways to learn more about the tribes of Maine.



Her turkey-from-a-book stole the show as she highlighted a Harvest of New Books.

Go big or go home—or in this case go home with a BIG book!



Screen Shots



TFL shined in its holiday finest: trees, lights, wreaths and more to celebrate the season!



Michelle's cozy fireplace created a warm and comfy mood in the kids' section.

Thanks to Kazia Knepp for her help with layout!



Michelle decked the dollhouse halls in festive style with an incredible Christmas makeover! We love the dollhouse and are thankful for this special gift from the Norcott family!

