

ALICE IN A WINTER WONDERLAND

Jan Brett's National Book Tour is coming to
November to December

Portsmouth/Durham, NH • Camden, ME • Dover-Foxcroft, ME • Scarborough, NH
Atlanta/Dexter, GA • Tallahassee, FL • Memphis/Callowayville, TN • Searcy, AR • Lafayette,
Fresno, CA • San Jose/Palo Alto, CA • Hood River, OR • Seattle/Tacoma, WA

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2025

Jan's Winter Wonderland

by Jon Knepp

Jan Brett's visit to Dover-Foxcroft on November 30th was amazing! I could fill up this newsletter and it probably wouldn't fully describe the experience. Michelle and I both grew up with Jan Brett's books, illustrations and characters as a large part of our childhood, as did our children. SeDo teaches an entire Jan Brett unit to local students. She is maybe the most-loved children's author amongst our patrons. And she does not disappoint in person!

When Michelle told me last spring that she was going to apply to have Jan Brett stop in Dover-Foxcroft on her national tour for her upcoming book *Alice in a Winter Wonderland*, I told her to go for it. "I never thought I'd have Jan Brett in Dover-Foxcroft," said Michelle. "She is such a seasoned author

and a big deal. When I applied I really didn't think we'd get her to come. A total long shot!"

Over the summer, Jan's publicist Rhalee said that, though she loved Michelle's proposal, we had not been selected for Jan's tour. Disappointed but not surprised, Michelle called back in September asking where Jan would be stopping in Maine, since she wanted to go see Jan wherever she was. Rhalee shocked Michelle by saying she had been thinking about Michelle's proposal and asking if she was still interested in hosting Jan. We all were thrilled! Then, we realized how much work we had ahead of us.

Though Michelle set up a storywalk of *Alice* outside the library, we chose to host Jan at the Center Theatre, as we knew many people



would want to see Jan and the Theatre would be able to accommodate a lot more people a lot easier than the library. We also lined up a small army of volunteers, with titles like line manager, page flipper, and, perhaps my favorite: "Hedgie handler." Hedgie is the beloved hedgehog of Jan's books, played by our own Shannen Rhoda, who "looked forward to it for a long time!" But, as she found out, it was "very hot and [she] couldn't really see anyone." Luckily, Shannen's kid

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Jan Brett (continued)

Amper stepped in as the aforementioned Hedge handler, steering the beloved hedgehog through the crowds.

With all the preparations lined up, we had only to wait for Jan to arrive in her custom-wrapped tour bus. Previously the temporary home of a touring Lenny Kravitz, Jan and her husband Joe Hearn arrived in the Alice in a Winter Wonderland tour bus. Impossible to miss, we thought the conspicuous vehicle missed the theatre. After Shannen (pre-Hedgie) chased down the bus, we learned that Jan wanted to make a quick stop at Walgreens. As the bus pulled up to a theatre lined with expectant kids waiting to see Jan stop off, it started flurrying, providing the perfect backdrop to Jan's arrival.

The event itself was a whirlwind! Michelle and I were the runners, making sure all aspects of the program ran smoothly. Though they came in on a bus fit for a rock star, Jan and Joe were the nicest guests we could have asked for. "She and her husband were lovely," Michelle related. "She was kind and down to earth. Very easy to talk to!"

Joe is Jan's roadie when she's on tour, setting up mics and carrying her easels. (She repaid the favor when he toured with the Boston orchestra for years. Joe and I spent a lot of time together and he was highly complimentary of our town and the whole experience. "It's just like a postcard!" he told people over and over.

Jan gave a brief talk about her inspiration



for Alice and her artistic background before demonstrating her illustrative talents by drawing her Mad Hatter (an arctic hare) in only about ten minutes (we got to keep the drawing and will have it framed in the near future!) After the formal program, Jan signed books for hundreds of attendees. At one point, we were worried that Jan would run out of time and some in line wouldn't be able to get books signed. Joe reassured us "we'll be here as long as it takes, she loves doing it!" Jan showed this again and again, giving her time and attention to speak to each and every person, promoting reading, art, and following one's passions.

And just as quickly as she appeared, Jan left! But not before engaging my kids Cooper and Andy in one last discussion of Dungeons and Dragons. We were all left in the afterglow of just how special an event it was. Everyone was grateful to have been there, according to Michelle "especially teachers who have taught her stuff over the years. They were all so excited and happy to have had a chance to meet her and hear her speak." Michelle says she doesn't think she'll be able to top bringing Jan to town, but if I know her, she's going to try!

Thanks to everyone who helped make this event possible, and especially to Jan (and Joe) who were both everything you wanted them to be and more. They say that you should never meet your heroes, but you can safely make an exception to that in Jan's case.

 **Watch this on Youtube**
go to: bit.ly/TFLyoutube



Walking in a Winter Wonderland

By Kim Brawn

Ms. Michelle (a.k.a youth services librarian Michelle Fagan) was busy putting up two Story Walks this year! The stunning landscape of Halls Christmas Tree Farm in Sangerville was the backdrop for a beautiful story called *Who Would Like A Christmas Tree?* written by Maine author Ellen Bryan Obed and illustrated by Anne Hunter.

Later, in celebration of bestselling children's author and illustrator Jan Brett's visit to Center Theatre in Dover-Foxcroft, Michelle shared Jan's latest book, *Alice in a Winter Wonderland*, along TFL's walkway.

These self-led story walks are always fan favorites. "People enjoy them every year and this year also having one at a Christmas Tree Farm was definitely a big hit! They are a great way to get outside and read a book as a family. It is hard to deal with weather at times—books get waterlogged, and wind rips them down sometimes." But, like the characters in these books, Ms. Michelle always perseveres!



Home for the Holidays

by Kim Brawn

Each year Hometown Holidays captures the spirit of the season with all sorts of activities across Dover-Foxcroft. "It's good to see an event that brings the community together and glad we can host part of it at the library," says director Jon Knepp.

Once again, the sweet smell of anise filled the library on Saturday, December 7 as TFL's Shannen Rhoda made her signature pizzelles for those attending to taste and enjoy and maybe try their own hand at. "We made about 75 cookies with kids of all ages," said Shannen.

Meanwhile, youth services librarian Michelle Fagan was getting crafty. "We made a



gingerbread man ornament. The kids could decorate it however they wanted with the materials I had. I love how busy and happy the library is for those few hours. People are excited for all the town festivities, and it is yet another time for community members to meet and chat—totally worth the mess!" laughed Michelle.

The cardmaking project drew an enthusiastic bunch as well. "It was brilliant having so many kids and parents come and make cards for homebound folks. We have very caring and creative people in our community!" said 4-H leader Camilla Gosselin.



Family Ties

TFL has three family-oriented monthly programs that run through May: Family Fun Night, Family Book Club, and Sensory Play Group. Strong family ties—including caregivers—are the driving force behind these groups. "Family programs are important because they are a chance for families to engage in a space that doesn't have all those 'things we should be doing' all around them. They can just be here and enjoy having fun together. They also give time to connect with other community members. When we grow as healthy families we grow a strong community," says TFL's Michelle Fagan. (For more info and dates & times of upcoming programs, check our social media, website, or contact the library). —Kim Brawn



School Days

by Kim Brawn

There is a palpable shift when they arrive as if someone flicks a switch. The volume and energy in the library are pumped up—it must be homeschool day!

Twice a month on a Thursday at 1 p.m. the homeschool group arrives with moms (sometimes dads) in tow for youth services



librarian Michelle Fagan's popular program. So how is this "school year" going? "It's going well. We have the same families as last year and they all have really grown pretty connected as a group. I really enjoy the families, and it is always fun to see what kinds of projects they will do for our unit studies. The kids like to do the unit projects. They are able to be creative in making the project and they are all getting better and enjoying presenting to the group," says Michelle.

The original aim of the program was to bring homeschool students together but now it's also about giving kids a choice in what they learn. "I give a topic, and they usually get to decide what little piece of the topic they

want to learn about. My goal changes all the time but creativity, friendships, and reading are things that continue to be a focus," Michelle says.

Last fall, Michelle also started a monthly homeschool drop-in program (1-2:30 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month through May) as a way to bring homeschool kids together in a less structured and educational way. "It's just nice for kids and caregivers to get out and meet other families and give them time to be at the library with other kids who might learn like they do," says Michelle. (All homeschoolers are welcome during drop-in time; you do not have to be a member of the homeschool group or a library patron.)

What's New, Pussycat?

by Kim Brawn

I'm jealous. There I said it. Why? Because I don't get to work on, undoubtedly, the coolest Saturday of all: Caturday. The third Saturday of the month is the day that TFL's director Jon Knepp brings his fabulous felines, Freya and Andy Jr., to hang out at the library during his 9 a.m.-1 p.m. shift.

Jon says that "They enjoy exploring a much larger, new environment every month. They run to the cat carrier as soon as they see it . . . they really enjoy it! Freya walks up to visitors while Andy Jr. usually gets his fill of



socializing by 11:30 am and starts climbing as high as he can get in the library. At first it was a welcome surprise, but the word has started getting around and now we have people come in specifically to see the cats."

Caturday co-host Shannen Rhoda agrees, "The cats have been a big draw, bringing people into the library just to visit them. People will linger after choosing books, to spend a few minutes visiting the cats. No complaints! Kids come in and go on a scavenger hunt to find the two cats. Sometimes even Jon and I lose them in the

library with all its hiding spots."

(Update: due to a scheduling change, it looks like I'll be working Saturday, March 15—you guessed it—Caturday! ☺)



BOOKS a Million!

Once we fling open TFL's original front doors on All Hallows' Eve, all sorts of creepy creatures and spooky beasts make their way up those steps, anxious to get their hands on free books—the best kind of treat (ok, a little chocolate is good too!). TFL's Ms. Michelle reports that 275 books went out the door! "Our biggest Halloween yet!" she said. —Kim Brawn



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Loving a Forest No Matter What It Takes

by Jon Knepp

Vermont-based forester Ethan Tapper stopped by the TFL on September 19th to discuss his new book *How to Love a Forest*. Ethan's approach to forestry isn't typical. While most woodlot owners look to maximize the value of their lot or leave their woodlands "untouched," Ethan focuses his work around doing what is best for the forest itself. This includes managing invasive or blighted plants, while managing the wildlife, promoting helpful species (and the right number of them.)

I found Ethan's book and presentation both to be fascinating. Some parts I already knew about such as the disruption of the food chain in the northeast. This extirpation of large predators and competition led to the



explosion of whitetail deer, which drastically changed the flora of New England and lowered its biodiversity. Other aspects were brand new to me. A good example of this disease morphing beech trees from a predominant canopy tree to one that will never grow to reach maturity. Beech outcompetes other trees in the forest but ultimately succumbs to one of a list of diseases before ever reaching maturity. Our forests can no longer be "left to nature," as every forest in North America has been altered beyond recognition by humans.

Ethan is a great speaker and he has a great message. Stripping forests of the most profitable trees is an unsustainable practice. But so is the benign neglect approach of so many well-intentioned landowners. Sometimes to love a forest, you need to hug a tree. Sometimes you need a chainsaw or a deer rifle. As Ethan has shown at his beloved Bear Island, to truly love a forest, you need to do what is best for it, no matter how hard that is. I can't recommend his book, available at TFL, enough. To find out more about Ethan, visit his website: ethantapper.com.

 **Watch this on Youtube**
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Well-Balanced

Keeping our balance is top of mind this time of year. In late September, physical therapist Susan Garrettson stopped by the library to share her expertise, insights, and practical tips on how to maintain and improve our balance. It's important to understand what factors may be affecting our own balance and then find ways to change the situation.

We had good turnout for this informative and interactive 101 session. All participants seemed especially interested in learning balance hacks to use in their daily lives.

"Susan enthusiastically emphasized the importance of balance to prevent falls and demonstrated many exercises to build up balance and strength, followed by the attendees trying the exercises along with her. She also distributed a handout with helpful suggestions including links to YouTube videos containing additional exercises. A great teacher and an excellent class!" said attendee Pat Juska. —Kim Brawn



Warming Hearts and Minds

Even the grinchiest had to smile and feel a warm glow at the wonderful holiday trimmings at the library. Our resident décor queen, Ms. Michelle, always adds her special touches, like the candles in the windows, while Jon hangs the amazing Finestkind wreaths. We had beautiful Hanukkah symbols such as menorahs and volunteer Pat

Juska gave us a wonderful arrangement to brighten the dark days. And we had two trees this year: the lobby area had the wonderful town remembrance tree put together by Cindy Schmand-Philbrook and next to Ms. Michelle's desk was our incredible storybook tree—thank you April Taylor and Erma!
—Kim Brawn



Screen Shots



Thanks to the Shaw's employees for raising \$600 for the library at their associate BBQ in October (and thanks for letting me keep the novelty check!)



New tonies arrived with lots of fun stories!
Borrow a Toniebox and up to three tonies just like you borrow books!



Jumping on the Jan Brett bandwagon with this whimsical bulletin board tribute!



Meet Hedgie, our TFL Greeter! A fun way to promote Jan Brett's D-F visit and liven up the entryway!



TFL's Shannen Rhoda reminds us that YA books are not just for teens and spooky stories never go out of style!



What better place for a surprise (and it was!) 80th birthday party for Barbara Lockwood than the Thompson Free Library where she has played so many roles, especially loyal patron and supporter.



At the New England Library Association conference in Portland, I met my doppelganger Jo Knapp, from Rhode Island.