

Christine

This podcast is produced on the ancestral homeland of the Nooksack and Lummi people. They have been its stewards since time immemorial, respecting the land, river and ocean with the understanding that everything is connected, related and alive. We acknowledge the elders and their collective and individual plights and achievements. We consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration and settlement that bring us together today. And we pursue ongoing action to build lasting relationships and grow together so that all may prosper.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories, a podcast to open your eyes to all the ways your local public libraries matter. Join us as we reveal the power of sharing at the library. I'm your host, Neil McKay, Online Experience Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System and today...

OK, we're rolling.

Mary

Alright.

Neil

I'm here again with my boss, Mary Vermillion. Hi, Mary.

Mary

Hi, Neil. Hi, Neil. On a beautiful Friday, it's gorgeous outside. I know you have a great interview, but there's a couple things we just wanted to get to mention before we get into the heart of the matter today. So the first is, hey, if you live in Lynden or if you love the Lynden Library, there's something exciting going on out there.

Neil

What's going on in Lynden?

Mary

They're getting new carpeting in Lynden.

Neil

Oh boy.

Mary

So, that is big. So, the city of Lynden owns the building, and we offer the library services there. And the city is installing beautiful new carpeting at the Lynden Library. So, if you're going out there in the next

few weeks, you're going to see a little disturbance I guess is the best way to say it. You know, change. You're going to see some changes. We're going to have to shift things around, move things around as they, you know, slowly work their way through that library and install new carpeting.

Neil

That's right. Well, and it's important to note that while they're installing the library, we aren't closing the doors.

Mary

Oh no, not at all.

Neil

The doors are open to patrons, but you do have to be aware that there will be a little, a little disruption.

Mary

Yeah.

Neil

Things might be moved in different places. And you know, as with any, any construction, any remodel type stuff there might be some noise and there might be some smells.

Mary

Yeah, I mean, you know, it's just, yeah construction, you know, and carpeting. And so you may have to, yeah, ask for some help. "Where did you move the magazines or whatever?" Or yeah, you can just skip the whole nonsense until they're done and then do curbside pickup because they're offering curbside as well. So, all kinds of options. We just want to let people know. And if you have never been to the Lynden Library.

Neil

Oh, it's huge and beautiful.

Mary

Beautiful library. That's one of the beauties of the Whatcom County Library System is you can visit many libraries in Whatcom County and so maybe give it a few months and then go out there and see Lynden and it's beautiful new carpeting.

Neil

Yeah, you can roll around on the floor, I guess.

Mary

Yeah, maybe that will be an event that they have, twister, they'll do twister or something or just, you know, just carpet rolling as a thing.

Neil

New carpeting's always fun. I still remember when in the 70s when my mom, you know, she just had it in her mind that she wanted red shag carpeting.

Mary

Had to be shag.

Neil

Had to be shag, had to be bright red. I mean, this was bright red and.

Mary

Neil, your mom, remind me of her name.

Neil

Jane.

Mary

Jane, after my own heart, I had red shag carpeting in my childhood bedroom.

Neil

Really? Wow.

Mary

Loved that.

Neil

We had it in three rooms.

Mary

Wow.

Neil

You know, and as a kid, of course it was lava because the carpet is always lava.

Mary

Oh, sure. Yeah, right.

Neil

So, it worked out really well for all of us.

Mary

OK, now we're going down the whole carpet tangent. So, let's get ourselves back here into the present day and.

Neil

Yeah. What else is going on that we need to talk about?

Mary

Besides carpet.

Mary

It's Whatcom Reads season.

Neil

Oh yes.

Mary

And we spent a lot of the last show talking about Whatcom Reads with Claire, but just a reminder to everyone that we are inching our way toward the author events. There's lots of things going on now. Lots of lead up events where you can come together in community and discuss themes from our book this year, which is *Red Paint: The Ancestral Autobiography of a Coast Salish Punk* by Sasha Taq^wšəblu Lapointe. And Sasha will be here March 14th through the 16th for author events. So.

Neil

In person.

Mary

In person. Yeah, except for the one on Saturday, which is an online event. But there are five different ways that you can engage with the author and just a reminder to folks one more time that for the author events pre-registration is required, so please go to whatcomreads.org/events and you'll see all the information there for the lead up events as well as how to get your tickets for the author events and seating is limited for some of those events, so you'll want to, you know, don't delay, get your tickets today.

Neil

Don't delay.

Mary

So, we're really excited about that. Are you, which ones are you going to, are you going to all of them?

Neil

I am going to as many as I can, you know, of course, the Mount Baker Theater one, which will be huge and.

Mary

So, the Deming Library event Thursday, March 14th, that one is definitely limited seating at the Deming Library, then Village Books Chuckanut Radio Hour and Arianne True, who is the Washington State Poet Laureate, will be in conversation with Sasha and Swil Kanim is the musical guest at the Radio Hour. So get your tickets for that. And then Sasha leads the Art and Craft of Writing, in which she shares, you know, how she approaches writing and maybe, I don't know, maybe she'll do some writing exercises with us. We'll see. That's at Northwest Indian College on Friday, March 15th.

Neil

That would be exciting. Yeah. Yeah, that one. I'm hoping to go to as well.

Mary

Yep, I'm going to be there and then we talked about Mount Baker Theater. And then on Saturday, Kristen Millares Young is going to be in conversation with Sasha online and they're friends and fellow authors. So, that should be a really great conversation. And, you know, Kristen was our, she kicked off our Whatcom Reads events for this year. I know you were at that workshop too.

Neil

That's right.

Mary

So, as we said in the last episode, she's bookending Whatcom Reads 2024. And the exciting thing about the Mount Baker Theater event, of course. Well, there's lots of reasons to be excited about it, but we announced our 2025 book at the end of Sasha's presentation.

Neil

It's kind of like, you know, sometimes when you're when you're involved in a thing and it ends just like if you're reading a great book and it ends, you kind of sometimes there's that, that pause where you're like "Ah, OK." But that's not the case in Whatcom Reads. It's like as soon as we're at the last events we announce next year and so we get to get excited all over again.

Mary

Yeah. And we take a little bit of a breather, couple deep breaths, but then we roll right back into promoting it. Yeah, yeah.

Neil

But that's the time. That's the time where you get to check out the book and start reading and get that, you know, in your system before you start attending events again in the fall.

Mary

Right. Sure. Yeah. You know, that that is true about Whatcom Reads, you know. Definitely there are, there's the season of events, but it is a year-round program because you're reading the book, you're talking to your friends about the book, you're hopefully, you know, maybe contacting us with some

ideas. So yeah, we just hope to see everybody invite everyone to come on out for the Whatcom Reads events and hope to see you there. We're really excited to welcome Sasha back to Whatcom County.

Neil

Yeah, that would be great. OK, what else? Is there anything else we have to talk about?

Mary

Ohh, there's so much, but hey, let's get into what you the heart of today's interview, which is you sat down with Christine Perkins, Executive Director of The Whatcom County Library System and Tamar Clark with the, she's our Teen Services Coordinator here at WCLS. And you talked to them about their digital literacy project.

Neil

Yes, it was an interesting conversation because digital literacy is a thing. It's a kind of a buzz term that maybe people don't really understand what we're talking about when we say digital literacy, but really it's about not getting scammed.

Mary

Right.

Neil

It's about being a little more savvy and you'll hear Christine talking about this a few times, just like calm down and pay attention before you jump into things online and, but this is a project that Christine and Tamar did in partnership with the University of Washington.

Mary

Yeah. Yeah. And I think that, you know, that's a really important thing to note is that we're doing this in partnership with the Center for an Informed Public at the University of Washington, and they received a grant from the National Science Foundation. And I just think it's important and exciting to note that, you know, we were asked to participate in this project and Christine and Tamar, as they will discuss in their interview, came up with a proposal and an idea and the UW was like, yeah, let's do that. So, it's exciting project and you know, they you guys say it in an interview, but I would encourage everyone to go to the web page which you will discuss, and I know you will have linked in the show notes there's just a lot of resources here that will be really helpful for people and just test yourself. See if you can get how easily you could be scammed. You know it's something for all of us to think about.

Neil

Right, right.

Mary

And there goes a tour group past our door.

Neil

With Christine leading it.

Mary

and with Christine leading it. I was listening to the news this morning and somebody was talking about how deep fakes will be such a big part of the election this year, already happening with, you know, these deep fake phone calls that are going out from different candidates. And we are just not aware of the level and the sophistication of these scams and so the advice that you're going to hear here with your interview with Christine and Tamar to slow down, to not get emotionally invested, to ask questions, to say, wait a minute. This is too good to be true is probably good advice. It is good advice.

Neil

Yeah, and one of the things that that is really important that they stressed is the library is a source for information. If you're not sure, talk to, call the library or pop into the library. Our staff is trained to kind of weed out the truth out of what's going on.

Mary

Yeah, it's a really interesting role, compelling role for libraries and you know, Christine says it in the interview. It's not new. We have been doing this. We, the library staff are trained and can help you navigate this digital world. It's just not something a lot of people I think were aware of. So, this project has been a real opportunity to elevate awareness of the skills that library staff and librarians have and an invitation for people to say, "hey, you know, if you're feeling a little overwhelmed by all this, we can help." Come in and talk to the library staff.

Neil

Yeah, yeah. Just keep us in mind. We are always there for you, for so many things.

Mary

Absolutely. So let's hear it.

Neil

Alright, let's go.

Tamar

I'm Tamar Clark. I'm the Teen Services Coordinator. So, I work with teens and our youth staff throughout the county.

Christine

And I'm Christine Perkins. I'm the Executive Director of Whatcom County Library System. Tamar and I've been working for the past, what, year and half.

Tamar

Almost two years, yeah.

Christine

So, it's a collaborative project with the University of Washington Center for the Informed Public. They have a grant with the National Science Foundation, and they've asked a bunch of libraries in Washington state as well as some in Texas, to think about ways to help the public increase their digital literacy skills. So that's what we're doing.

Neil

OK. And so how is that taking shape here at the Whatcom County Library System?

Tamar

Well, as Christine mentioned, we've been working with this team, and we came up with this idea to try something a little bit different than normal, which is rather than providing just a, you know, person to person program or something like that in our branches we thought we would go to the source and create these quizzes online.

So, people in the county might discover them when they're scrolling through their social media feed, and it would pose some questions about potential scam. And they are would have to make a decision about whether or not they think it is false or true, and maybe look through some of the clues. And then at the very end, this is brought to you by the Whatcom County Library System.

And we hope that they think about some of the stuff that we brought up in the quiz, but also to come to our website and maybe explore some other potential ways in which they can help keep their own, you know, idea, you know, are their own flags out there for looking at potential scams, but also to come into our library and see our staff as people who can help them navigate this online space.

Christine

Yeah, so this project is really developing some ads that we can use on an online environment like Tamar said, either in your social media feed or it could come to you when you're doing a Google search, could come to you when you're streaming some video. Say if you're on Roku or another streaming platform, you might see an ad that comes up that says "can you spot a scam?" And if you got a minute and you're kind of intrigued, you might click through and do our survey to help point out some skills that might be useful to you when you're doing online shopping in particular.

We decided in the whole realm of scams out there, we we're just going to be really narrow in our focus right now, focus on scams that could happen if you're trying to shop in an online environment.

Neil

I see. OK. So that resonates with me because often in my e-mail, in my personal e-mail, I'll get an e-mail that says "invoices due" and maybe it's something that I don't remember, you know, because I do some online shopping.

Christine

Sure.

Neil

And so I might have. So, what would I do? What would I do in this situation?

Christine

Be very cautious. The number one thing that we're really trying to communicate to people is that the type of people doing the scams are counting on you and your emotions to influence how you respond and they are trying to trigger you in acting in a certain way. So, our number one advice is to just take a breath. Think about it for a minute. Do not act quickly. Stop and ponder and try to understand "why is this pushing my emotions and what is the person who's pushing my emotions trying to get out of it?" So, that's our number one and you know that is a good tip for life, but it's really particularly useful in this digital world.

Tamar

Yeah, and I mean, unfortunately, some of these bad actors are getting more and more sophisticated. And even, I mean, I feel like, "oh, I've got this." We've been even thinking about it and studying it, but you know, I feel vulnerable when I'm scrolling through my social media feed, my brain is turned off. I'm trying to quote on quote relax and my guard is down.

So, I think all of us, you know, it doesn't hurt to remember that these are things, these are small, simple steps we can take to just pause and think and really look at some of the source material for what's coming at us, but also not to be super cynical either, right? Like one thing I like to get across when I work with teens on digital literacy is not everything out in the Internet space is something to be super suspicious of. There is truth out there. There's facts out there. There's real people out there. But we do need to have some skills in our toolbox in order to help filter out that stuff, and right now it's a little bit of a Wild West, the Internet. So, this is the library is here to help you build that toolbox up.

Christine

Yeah, absolutely. That's why we focused purchasing scams because shopping online is great. You can find things you can't find in local stores. You can get things at great prices you might not be able to get. You can find used or secondhand things that people are selling in our community and a lot of that is legitimate and could be a great thing for the shopper, the consumer, but you have to be a little bit savvy when you're going into those kinds of transactions and Whatcom County Library System can give you a little bit of an edge so that you're making smart decisions.

Neil

So, is it? Let me ask you this, is it easier for younger kids to navigate this digital literacy than for someone like me who's, you know, the oldest person in the room almost anywhere I am these days.

Christine

I'm gonna say no.

Tamar

I don't know. Yeah. I mean, I think it's a mixed bag, right. Yeah. You might be a little slower to adapt to certain situations or new technology, but you also have kind of a life experience and some ways to help monitor some of those ups and downs of your emotion so that you know to like maybe take a step back and go, is this really real? But you know, I think some younger folks in the younger generation also have, they are definitely much more literate when it comes to how to use it and they're so quick at it. But

maybe that quickness is, is what we're asking for them to just take a step back and really think about what it is that you're consuming.

Christine

Yeah. I did just read a study that said digital natives, people who grew up using technology, don't have as, they're not as risk averse, maybe as some of the older folks, so they just feel like they might get scammed now and again and that's just the price of having the convenience that they want to be able to just click on ads and buy stuff very quickly so they have a higher tolerance for misbehavior, I guess.

Neil

I'm trying to think of a metaphor to work with this, and I'm thinking like driving on the freeway. Younger kids, you know, they're right out of drivers training. They know the rules and they know what to do, but they're also maybe more impulsive and an older person like me might not be paying as, might not notice some things that a younger person would know.

Christine

I'm scared to get on the highway when you're out there, Neil. No.

Neil

I've been riding the bus for a while now, so we're safe. But I have that experience. I have that kind of muscle memory and that ability to be patient and just relax a little. I don't know.

Christine

Sure. Well, one of the things that I think we're trying to get across is some of the skills that we can share with folks are applicable not only for purchasing things online, they're applicable for evaluating websites, evaluating data that you're finding online or in any context actually. So those digital literacy skills are really just information literacy skills.

Neil

OK. And that idea of taking a breath, not jumping in with your first impulse is also something that's like relevant for a lot of things in life.

Christine

Sure, if it's too good to be true, it probably isn't. Right.

Neil

Let's think of an example.

Christine

Well, so one of our examples is purchasing a car online, right?

Neil

OK.

Christine

People do that. It's almost astounding cause it's a huge purchase, often thousands of dollars, even for a used vehicle, but you can do a reverse image search. You can try to get a sense of the image that the seller is purporting to be the vehicle they want to sell you is actually their vehicle. Or did they just get a stock image off of some used car dealers website? So that's one thing. You can check is this really the vehicle that you're looking for? You can search for details about the vehicle, what's the year of the car? What's the model? What are the features? Did they offer those features in this year? Etcetera. So, there's a lot of fact finding that you can get to support. What are cost for other similar vehicles of that time? Is this one a screaming deal? Why is it such a screaming deal?

Tamar

So, all the things that Christine just mentioned is in, in the library speak, we call it, you know, a lateral search. So, you basically are just opening up tab after tab after tab and you're asking, each tab is a different question. So, you would just want to be a questioner. You want to just ask those questions. Oh, was there really a Ford Bronco produced with this kind of engine in 1994 or is that, you know, potentially one of the scams or, you know, those are the questions that you should be thinking about and asking yourself before you go ahead and make that next step.

I think you know another piece to this is making sure that as I said before that we're not too, too cynical. But we also want, you know, people to have the skills. So, what it, how do you do a reverse image search? What is this lateral thing like? Those are really quick things that we can teach people when they come into any of one of our libraries and really it just starts from a question. What question do you have about buying something online? We'll help you figure that you know go through the process of figuring that out .

Christine

Right. Our website www.wcls.org/digital-literacy goes through these different quizzes so you can quiz yourself if you haven't come across the quizzes already. And it also has a list of different resources. And some online tutorials that you can walk yourself through, there's a really great one about "can you spot a fake face made in, made by artificial intelligence?" And what are the clues that you can look at to really get a sense if an image is real or not?

So, there's a lot of different things like that we have a link to great book list that we have in our library system that talk about digital literacy. So if you really want to dig into it, you can check out a book from the library and learn more. Our staff are always happy to talk to people as well. We would really, really encourage people if you ever have a question like call us before you, you know, hit buy or before you forward a questionable source on to somebody else like call us, come into the library. Bring your phone in with you and show us what you're looking at and we can help you suss out what's what.

Neil

I guess that's one of the biggest takeaways from this, is that you can walk into the library and that's what folks are trained to do, and that's what they're there for, is to help you navigate, you know, this online world. So, if you're confused, if it's just a little overwhelming, you've got people right in your community who are, you know, they're ready to help you.

Tamar

Right. You know, and it's such great skills. As Christine mentioned, just for life in general like to all the stuff we have to navigate whether it's shopping or all the decisions we have to make that seem really tough whether it's medical or other ways, you know, those are those are big questions we're at, that are thrown at us every day.

So, these are all great skills to both teach our young people, but also help out our elders with because they might get that phone call from a scammer or they don't know what to do about that. So, making sure the people in your life, whether young or old, have the tools they need to be aware and just not like I said not to be super scared or fearful. We're not trying to produce that, but we do want people just to feel like they're confident as they move through this digital space.

Neil

Yeah. So, it feels like we've had a lot of positive response from this already. Is that your take on this? Are people responding to this?

Christine

It seems like it. They're looking at the quizzes and clicking on our website and coming in and talking to staff about it, which is great. I've had several conversations with people recently where they've related times where they've been tripped up a little bit by a scam and these are people right here in Whatcom County, who have felt like they're being scammed. They get a scary message up on their computer. They call a number and then the next thing you know, they're going down a terrible path where they might be giving away sensitive information to people who really shouldn't have that information.

One person even went so far in talking with someone where they were directing her to go to the ATM and withdraw money and put it in a magazine and send it to FedEx. I mean, it was horrible. And I just want to let people know for one, that's not a normal phone call if someone ever starts telling you that you can just hang up, it's OK. But if you want reassurance, hang up and then come to the library and we'll talk to you about it more and help you sort out what to do next.

Tamar

Well, yeah. I mean, I think what's interesting is most of us have experienced something along these lines, right? Like we've all, it's not that foreign. So, you know already we're filtering out some of it, but it's good to be talking about it and not doing it in private, you know, be thinking about this as a community issue and we're here to help everybody work through it.

Christine

My own dear husband...

Tamar

No, no, no.

Christine

...Happened to him. Just this a little while ago, I hear cursing coming from the other room and he was on the computer and he realized he had, about, was about to fall for something and ended up having to just hard turn off the computer and sure enough turned it back on. We were fine.

Tamar

Good.

Christine

But you know, you're just not quite paying attention and it can get you.

Tamar

Yeah.

Neil

Right, right. Yeah, we have all gone through this. I consider myself pretty, tech savvy and even so, every once in a while, you know, with me, it's an e-mail that says you're past due on something and it seems legitimate, but I know that I can always, especially if it's an account that I own, I can always go to a website rather than respond to the e-mail, and if I have an account, they'll tell me legitimately.

Tamar

Yeah, it's a good skill.

Neil

Or call the bank or whatever. But yeah, so this is a great public service that we're offering. I'm really proud of being part of an organization that's kind of, that's doing things in the public interest like this. I hope we do a lot more of this kind of thing.

Christine

Well, and you know this is not new. We've been able to do this and have been doing this for years, but it's really just bringing attention to it and that's what we're hoping to get the word out. That this is something we can do with people.

Neil

Yeah.

Tamar

Right. And what's great about this group that we're working with, it's not just here in Whatcom County, but, you know, their efforts being made in public libraries all across the state who are going to be trying this out as well. So, it'll be hopefully, you know, lots of different fronts where people get to hear this information. Yeah, I hope it helps.

Neil

That's great. Yeah. So if you at home, if you have any concerns about anything, you know what to do, you can come to the library. You can...

Christine

Give us a call.

Neil

Give us a call.

Christine

Or visit our website.

Neil

Or visit the website, wcls.org/digital-literacy and that I'll have a link for that in the podcast notes. All right. Well, thank you, Christine and Tamar, for being here. It's always fun to talk to you.

Christine

Super. Thanks so much, Neil.

Tamar

Yeah, it's been great. Thanks Neil.

Neil

Well, that's our show. Be sure to visit our digital literacy page at wcls.org/digital-literacy. I want to thank our guests, Christine Perkins and Tamar Clark, for talking to us about the Digital Literacy Project. And as always, thanks to my boss, Mary Vermilion, the calming presence, if there ever was one. Your mind will answer most questions if you learn to relax and wait for the answer. And thank you loyal listeners. We hope you enjoy our show. Until next time, this is Neil McKay for the Whatcom County Library System.

(Interlude music plays)