

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...

So here I am once again with my boss, Mary Vermilion.

Mary

Hi, Neil. It's great to see you.

Neil

It's good to be here.

Mary

Yeah.

Neil

We've got a really good show for this episode, yeah.

Mary

Yeah, yeah. What's going on this time?

Neil

Well, we're celebrating a couple of our staff who got promoted to branch manager this year.

Mary

Hooray, that is a great story. Yeah. And I think, you know for everybody listening, a lot of you are, you know, library fans. So, you know the library staff, everyone who works at the library are just amazing people, care deeply about libraries themselves and serving community. And so, it's really wonderful to be able to highlight to staff people who have been long time because I know who we're, I know who you interviewed. So, they're long time WCLS staff, people who were promoted to manager recently and at two branches, North Fork and Island on Lummi Island.

Neil

That's right. And so. Yes. So, we'll be, I don't think it's a secret. We'll be interviewing Erin Suda, who formerly of Deming Library is now Branch Manager at Island Library and Mariya Farmagey, who has been at North Fork Library since its inception and before that at the Maple Falls Library.

Mary

Yeah, I listened to a little bit of your interview with Mariya and that I didn't know that she'd been working at the, was the Maple Falls Library at the time. Now at Kendall since graduating high school, basically, you know.

Neil

Yeah, exactly.

Mary

So amazing.

Neil

She has a great story and so does Erin.

Mary

Mm-hmm.

Neil

And it's just, it's just that's just two of our staff members, everybody who works here has an amazing story.

Mary

Yeah. Yeah, that's one thing we've uncovered, you know, in our work as communications professionals here for the library system is just how many stories there are at, here at the library system, which is, hence the podcast.

Neil

That's why we're here.

Mary

That's why we're doing it, you know, because there's just endless stories to share. And so. So, I'm really looking forward to hearing your conversations with Erin and Mariya and let's just get right into it. But I'll just say before we do that, this one's for you everybody who works at WCLS.

Neil

All right. Well, let's get started.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil

Alright, I'm here with Mariya Farmagey. Hey, how are you doing, Mariya?

Mariya

I'm good. Thank you, Neil.

Neil

That's great now, so Mariya, you just got appointed as the manager of the North Fork Library. When did, when did you?

Mariya

That was December.

Neil

It was December? That was a long time ago.

Mariya

Middle of December.

Neil

And we're just getting to talk to you.

Mariya

Feels very recent to me.

Neil

It, it really does. Time is moving very quickly these days.

Mariya

Yes.

Neil

But, so how are you liking your role?

Mariya

It's been great. It's definitely been a learning experience as well, but, it's been really fun.

Neil

So, I have to say that you know it's a new position for you, but you've been at the North Fork Library. Have you been at the North Fork Library since it opened up?

Mariya

Yes.

Neil

And then before that, what were you doing?

Mariya

Before that, I was at Maple Falls Library. I started at the old Maple Falls Library on the day of my high school graduation.

Neil

Really?

Mariya

Yeah.

Neil

Wow.

Mariya

I was a page. That was the first day in the job.

Neil

And you've worked your way all the way up to branch manager now. So how long have you, wait a minute? I don't want to get the audience to do the math on this.

Mariya

Yeah.

Neil

So, you don't have to tell me how many years you've been working for the library, but you can if you want.

Mariya

Well, I did just say 2005 so.

Neil

Oh, you did? I didn't either hear that. All right. Well, that's.

Mariya

I guess I don't have to say that, but yeah, I started as a page in the old Maple Falls Library and then I went to Western Washington University, commuted and then applied for the PSA position with Georgina's urging.

Neil

Oh yeah, and Georgina was the branch manager at the time? Yeah.

Mariya

She was Georgina **Furlonghead**. She's also the person who worked tirelessly behind the scenes for about a decade before the North Fork Library came together.

Neil

Oh, to build that?

Mariya

To plan it and push that project through and campaign for it and fundraise and organize volunteers.

Neil

She did everything.

Mariya

Oh yes.

Neil

What was, what was the driving, what was the reason for building a library in, at Kendall, basically, that's where the North Fork is.

Mariya

Yeah. Georgina was intent on it being central location, so that roundabout was going to come in and it felt like it was on the way for people going up to Glacier and it was also on the way for people going up to Kendall. And the old Maple Falls library was in town hall, so we had to close everything, close curtains on the shelves and move all the furniture into small room and then take that, set that up at the beginning of each day so that.

Neil

Oh, every day you had to move the library. In and then out at the end of the day. Wow.

Mariya

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Every day. And so, because that was used as town hall. So, there were meetings, there were exercise classes, there were things going on in that building.

Neil

Wow. So, the building now at North Fork?

Mariya

It's just, it's library only.

Neil

The library does now. Does the library own that building?

Mariya

The Whatcom County System, Whatcom County Library System does own it now. The Friends have let the library be the owner and caretaker.

Neil

OK, OK.

Mariya

Of the building, so it eases the burden off of them for maintenance.

Neil

Yeah. Yes.

Mariya

Even though it's a, it's still relatively new, but as we all know.

Neil

Yeah.

Mariya

Maintenance is a necessity.

Neil

Well, it was just a couple of years ago where the North Fork Library celebrated its 10th anniversary, which was in the middle of COVID, right?

Mariya

Yes.

Neil

Because you cele-, you had an 11th anniversary celebration, didn't you?

Mariya

That's right, now that you mentioned that.

Neil

I remember because I went there, we couldn't, we couldn't, it wasn't feasible to have a celebration on your 10th anniversary.

Mariya

During COVID, yes.

Neil

Yeah. So. But as soon as you could had a huge party.

Mariya

Yeah. Katrina, yeah, organized that one. That's great.

Neil

That's right. Let's talk a little more about you now. We'll see how this goes, but tell us about yourself, about your story, and, you know how you got into lib- or why you were interested in the library?

Mariya

I was born in Ukraine in a small village called **Vasilika in the Ternopil Oblast**. And we, along with my parents, I'm one of five siblings and my grandmother. We lived next to a place that used to be owned by a **Polish pond**.

And during the Soviet Union, they fled, and that was used as a town hall and was also used by the library as the library. There was a library in there and I loved going. There was a little break in the fence, and I'd run over there and get my books and read.

Neil

Oh, wow.

Mariya

And I got in trouble for it a lot. There are chores to be done, the animals to be fed.

Neil

OK. And you're hiding in the library, looking at books.

Mariya

Garden. I was hiding everywhere. I was hiding in library, in attic, in the barn, under trees, in the corn field and my siblings and my cousin their favorite thing was to hunt me out. I got yelled at for reading a lot, so here I am.

Neil



So, here you are. It's like you'll never, you'll never amount to much if you're reading all the time, right? And then so then you came over to the, to the United States?

Mariya

Yes.

Neil

Where did you first land in the US?

Mariya

In Syracuse, NY.

Neil

Oh wow. And how long were you there?

Mariya

About a year, about a year I went to school there, learned English.

Neil

Yeah. And how old were you at that time?

Mariya

11.

Neil

So, you were learning English at eleven?

Mariya

Yeah, I was by the end of that year, I was able to read a big Charlotte Bronte novel, and I was back in the library.

Neil

Wow, that's you were back in the library. Wow, that. I mean, that just gives you such an advantage, though, to be able to read. I bet that was just really important to you back then.

Mariya

I've always loved reading.

Neil

And probably, I mean I don't know, tell me. When you were eleven in New York, were there books in Ukrainian that you could read? Did you bring books over with you?

Mariya

My grandma would occasionally, my grandma bought us a few books and an aunt from Kevi. She was, you know, from the capital. So, she gifted us a few books as well.

Neil

OK.

Mariya

And sometimes a bookstore would come to the local Ukrainian church and my grandma would buy a few titles for us. So, I did, we do have some that are inscribed, you know, there are a few copies, but my grandma would be like "To Marika on her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday"

Neil

Yeah. Nice. Marika, is that what your grandma called you?

Mariya

Mhm.

Neil

Oh, OK. That's sweet. OK, so when you got to Whatcom County, how old were you then?

Mariya

So, we lived in Kent for another year and then we came here because my family was able to borrow some money and buy a lot in Paradise. And we lived there in the travel trailer.

Neil

OK. OK.

Mariya

And you know, eventually they build. I mean, took some years but, I remember going down to the Maple Falls Library, where Georgina worked and there were books, and there were even movies, and that was pretty amazing. We're like the library has DVD's. Imagine that.

So, I remember that was Robin Hood DVD that Georgina requested and I was so excited. I was like, I can't believe it.

Neil

You requested it specifically for you, and because you would ask for it. Wow.

Mariya

I asked for it. Yeah, I don't know where I saw it, but that was, I remember going there and I don't think I could drive yet. So, I think I probably had my parents take me and didn't happen very often, but. I used the school library a lot, but that was fun. It was a treat to visit the public library like couldn't. And then I won a prize as a teenager doing Summer Reading. Actually, I did Summer Reading, and I had a friend who did Summer Reading. She won like a little package where you could ski up in the mountain and she couldn't get up there. So, she gave it to me. I got to snowboard actually. I got the rental and the lesson, and it was fun.

Neil

Wow. Wow. So, libraries been something that's given you a whole lot of joy and happiness. Yeah.

Mariya

It really has. It really has. Yeah. In so many ways.

Neil

So that kind of leads to my next question is about, you know, what's the libraries, what do you think is the library's role in the community? Like, what does the library do for a community or your community in particular?

Mariya

Yeah, I feel like there's so much. It's a gathering place. It's a place to just quietly relax. It's a place to programs. It's a place to meet people. We have people haven't seen each other and they just see each other in library. And it's our conversation. I always love seeing that. Looking for books that you know, sometimes people don't expect us to have, but I love saying that "Hey, I can request this from you. It's, you know, over in Ferndale or in Bellingham or we don't have this in system, but I can place this interlibrary loan for you." And I just love being able to say yes so, many times to people's requests, I think it's amazing.

Neil

That's great. Yeah. That is what the library is about, is saying yes to people.

Mariya

Mhm.

Neil

One of the things, you talked about programming a second ago, one of the programs you have, you work with Common Threads Food Truck.

Mariya

Food truck.

Neil

Tell us about tell us about what's goes on there.

Mariya

Yeah, the Common Threads Food Truck. Actually, that was a wonderful partnership that was born out of Community Conversations. It's a program that Travis does out of Western Washington University.

Neil

Travis Tennyson, right?

Mariya

Mm-hmm. And they do, we do these gatherings and talk about ideas and make partnerships, and Angelina was there.

Neil

That's the Community Connections, yes, which is a whole other program.

Mariya

It is, yeah. And then a representative from the Common Threads was there. And this idea of having a food truck for kids at the library was born out of that. Here we are.

Neil

And so, yeah. And so, what happens?

Mariya

So, kids, what we've been doing last year, and we plan on continuing this year is kids attend a Storytime on Tuesday mornings at library and right after they can stop by the Common Threads food truck and eat local, healthy food. Have a meal.

Neil

And how much does that cost?

Mariya

And it's free and it's free and adults can participate. They can make a donation and whatever that donation is and you can participate as well. So, it's just such a lovely program and it's happening at Deming as well and a few other libraries.

Neil

And so that's for North Fork, that's every Tuesday in the summer.

Mariya

Every Tuesday. Yep, beginning in July.

Neil

Beginning in July. OK. So yeah, look for that. What a wonderful thing and.

Mariya

Tuesdays in July. Yep.

Neil

And so, the kids are just eating and reading, just like they should be.

Mariya

Yep, listening to stories.

Neil

Listening to stories. That's great.

Mariya

Parents are mingling, which is also nice.

Neil

Yeah, that's a nice thing. It's a really interesting thing to have a place where kids can learn how to socialize with other kids.

Mariya

Yeah. Exactly. And sometimes it takes a few tries for a brand new library patron to, you know, realize that a Storytime is something you listen at. It's OK to join the group.

Neil

Yeah.

Mariya

And it can take a few tries for a little patron to be comfortable.

Neil

Right.

Mariya

But it's so fun, yeah, as they get into the routine.

Neil

Yeah, and they're quick learners, they figure it out and then they're socialized to where when you go to school, you know, you have to learn how to

Mariya

Yeah.

Neil

Do those kind of things too. So it's kind of a.

Mariya

It's so fun to watch them become more comfortable with library staff and with the sitting in in the circle on mats and.

Neil

Yeah, yeah.

Mariya

Listening and.

Neil

Alright.

Mariya

Enjoying being there.

Neil

And then get a free meal afterwards.

Mariya

That's right.

Neil

That's awesome.

Mariya

Courtesy of Common Threads.

Neil

Courtesy of Common Threads and the Whatcom County Library System.

Mariya

And the Whatcom County Library. Yep.

Neil

All right. Well, let's move on to what I like to do with most of my guests is to ask what have you been reading lately? Do you have a book recommendation for us?

Mariya

OK, I'm reading *A Lady's Guide to Fortune Hunting*. It was recommended to another staff member by surprise selections. I've love seeing those come through. I haven't. You know, I worked there. I haven't really signed up myself, but I've been really enjoying this time.

Neil

Yeah. Well, let's take a minute first to explain what Surprise Selections is.

Mariya

Oh yes.

Neil

So that's where well, maybe you can explain it better than I can.

Mariya

I can try. People can sign up to be surprised with the book chosen by someone at the library once a quarter and you can list your likes, you can also list your dislike, and you get a little surprise selected just for you.

Neil

So, some, we have an actual person. This isn't a computer selecting.

Mariya

Correct.

Neil

Choices for you, but based on how you, what you said your likes and dislikes were.

Mariya

Yeah.

Neil

A real library staff member is picking a book to check out for you every quarter, that's a.

Mariya

Yeah. And they it comes in a special little band and it says who selected it for you and it also gives you another recommendation.

Neil

Just in case you didn't like the one that you because sometimes you know someone will recommend something for you and you didn't like it.

Mariya

Just in case and it's.

Neil

Like.



Mariya

It happens some, yeah.

Neil

And then there's another choice for you.

Mariya

But people have been commenting on how these are books that they wouldn't necessarily read but have enjoyed immensely.

Neil

Hmm. That's great. That's great. And so that's a form that's on our website and I'll put a link in our podcast notes. Yeah, OK. So, let's get back to the book that you were reading.

Mariya

It's in my opinion, spin-off on Jane Austen, set in Victorian England and it was a good book. I couldn't sleep, so I've been reading past 3:00 AM.

Neil

OK. So, what's the like? What? What? How would you interest me? I'm not a, I'm not a big, I haven't read Jane Austen. Honestly, I've seen.

Mariya

OK.

Neil

One of those movies.

Mariya

Yeah. So. Kitty is, has lost both her parents. She's an older sister and the home they live in is going to be taken away. Because it's been mortgaged and she's going to marry somebody who's rich and save her home and her sisters sitting.

Neil

Yeah, OK.

Mariya

And of course, things don't always go as planned. It should have a very happy ending. That's what I'm thinking.

Neil

So, you haven't got to the end yet, so.

Mariya

I'm about 2/3 in.

Neil

OK, well.

Mariya

MHM.

Neil

We'll see how what happens and see if it has the happy ending or not.

Mariya

Oh, I hope it does.

Neil

All right. OK. Well, Mariya, this, it's always a pleasure to talk to you. It's always fun.

Mariya

Thank you, Neil.

Neil

You have a very joyous spirit that comes through and I hope all our listeners here head down to North Fork and congratulate you on your position as manager and we'll talk soon.

Mariya

Oh, thank you. We have a great team at North Fork. It's been a pleasure.

Neil

Yeah. Yes, you do. Yeah. All right. Well, we'll talk to you again soon.

Mariya

Thank you.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil

OK. So, I'm here with Erin Suda. Erin is the new Branch Manager for our Island Library on Lummi Island. Congratulations on your new position, Erin.

Erin

Ohh, thank you Neil. I'm so excited to be out on Lummi island.

Neil

Are you out there right now? Are you starting yet?

Erin

I had, no, I'm having my first shift this coming Saturday, will be my first regular shift out there. I did drop by last week to get ready for Summer Reading with the staff that was working and it was really fun. I've already started meeting people in the branch. It's really, it's a great library.

Neil

Yeah, if this audience has not been out there to Lummi Island and into the cute little library that's right across from the ferry dock, you should go for sure.

Erin

Yeah, dry dock is not an excuse to not visit the library because that's the one place you can definitely go as a walk on.

Neil

You can walk on. Yeah. You walk on the ferry, you cross the street when you get there and there you are. And how long have you been working for the Whatcom County Library System?

Erin

I just had my 20th anniversary year.

Neil

20 years.

Erin

2024 because I started in 04.

Neil

Wow, congratulations.

Erin

Thank you.

Neil

So where have you worked all this time?

Erin

I've been working at Deming. I've been very and, you know, I started at Deming with four hours a week and I was, I think what would have been like a system wide sub at that time, although we didn't quite have that position at that time. But I did a lot of subbing, so I was all over.

Neil

So, you went to all the other branches?

Erin

Yeah, I've worked it every, I've worked at every branch, including the jail and mobile service, you know, and the bookmobile.

Neil

Mm-hmm. And Point Roberts?

Erin

Yep, I've been to Point. I've worked there. I was really, you know, I think a lot of the when the new subs come on, that's kind of a point of pride. You wanna work at every branch.

Neil

Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. So, you've accomplished that in the last 20 years, but your mainstay has been Deming.

Erin

Yes. And over time I have increased my presence at Deming so, so most recently I've been like a solid 20 hours at Deming, always been a part time employee staying busy with other things in my life as well. But really, it's become such an important part of my life over the years is that serving the community at the library at Deming, and I think I'm a pretty big, big fixture there now. It's going to be a big transition for me and for the community.

Neil

Yeah, yeah, I was thinking that that community is going to, going to miss you for sure, but they can all go over to the Lummi Island if they want to see you.

Erin

Yeah. That's what I keep saying. And it's such a small library. We're only open three or four days a week there. And so, I'll always be there anytime the library is open. I mean, unless I'm sick or on vacation I will be there because, yeah.

Neil

Wow.

Neil

Yeah, because there's so few hours. Now I know that Brooke who was the former branch manager also filled in Ferndale sometimes, will you be doing anything like that?

Erin

Yes. Yeah. I also get to work 4 hours a week, Wednesday mornings at the Ferndale branch, and that's, you know, something that they've developed as a strategy for the managers of really small library branches that we work at a larger branch just to keep our kind of our

head in the game in terms of all the different kinds of things that can happen at libraries because yeah.

Neil

Oh yeah, because I imagine it's a whole different world with, you know, on an island in the library, you will quickly probably learn everybody who comes in.

Erin

I think so. Yeah. I definitely just already being there last Thursday, I met people who said, well, I'll be here every day the library is open. So, you'll really get to know me.

Neil

That's some, that's some dedicated patrons you've got there. But in Ferndale, I assume there are more people who maybe just pop in randomly, rarely, or, you know, even I, you know, I live in Bellingham, but I'll go out to the Ferndale Library or the Lynden Library sometimes.

Erin

Yeah, I love the Ferndale Library. It's a beautiful, beautiful building.

Neil

It really is,

Erin

And yeah, they did a great job designing that. I love the wetlands that they installed around the outside and the big windows. It's just a great place to sit and read a magazine.

Neil

Yeah, it's, it's both, both your libraries are really beautiful, as was Deming. Part of the idea of a library is this community center, where you can come and if the surroundings are beautiful. You know, it just kind of makes it even more of a community hub. So, you know, you've been really fortunate to work in some of the most beautiful libraries we have.

Erin

Yeah, I think so. And it's funny because I find Lummi Island Library to look like architecturally a lot similar to Deming. But it's mini, it's a sort of a mini but that kind of, you know.

Neil

Rustic?

Erin

That shingle rustic one, rambler style.

Neil

Yeah, log cabin-ish.

Erin

Mm-hmm. Yeah. I really love that style.

Neil

Yeah, that's really nice. So aside from working in the library, working with patrons, you also have had a lot of other projects that you've been involved with, do you want to talk about some of those?

Erin

Wow. Yeah, I've always liked to take on different projects. You know, Deming, we were always looking for things to do to connect with the patrons, to bring more patrons in and so you know, poetry I think was one of my early projects that I latched on to. We had some, we have a lot of, we always said we were just trying to find all these writers and artists and poets and people that are hiding out in the woods in East County and try to pull them out and get them to share their work a little bit. So, we have the Foothills Poet Poets group that we've been kind of nurturing and supporting over the years and doing a lot of poetry readings, especially like in the last decade, there's, we were, we would do a lot of book openings.

You know, when somebody would publish a new book and then we would do a poetry reading and it was. We also have the art at the Deming Library, which I've been less involved with the visual art, but it just kind of felt like that same sort of thing of just like really trying to put out the work of our local artists.

Neil

That's, you know, another interesting aspect of the library is it's kind of a place to share your work with the community. So, I've been to I was just recently at a poetry event in Deming where Robert Lashley was a, you know, great Whatcom County poet spoke and read his work and also another gentleman.

Erin

Bill Barack?

Neil

Bill Barack.

Erin

He's one of our classic east side poets, yeah.

Neil

He is amazing and you know, and he talked about and he showed his books that he created himself individually one at a time, handwritten.

Erin

Hand sewn.

Neil

Hand sewn. But you know, just beautiful work. You know that that comes from Deming, comes from that community, and I'm sure you're going to find a lot of creative people up in Island Library too.

Erin

Yeah, that is exciting because yeah, it's such an artist community out there on Lummi Island. And I kind of more aware of like the visual art and kind of craft work that's happening. And I don't know as much about what's going out there in terms of writing and poetry, but I'm excited to find out.

Neil

Well, and I know one of the things that also is common between Deming and Island Library is a strong sense of history and actually that was kind of how we met, you and I. When I first started working for the library, Michael Cox, our Deputy Director kind of paired me with you because I had some experience with filming and recording and stuff. What do you remember about that? Because I tell the story, I find that sometimes my truth isn't necessarily 100% accurate.

Erin

Oh, there's so many perspectives. It's good. Well, I just remember we were so excited to get a camera guy cause, I, that's my other kind of pet project at Deming of course was



doing local history and I was working with Lois Holleb, who was another staff member at Deming.

Neil

Who's also a poet.

Erin

Also, a poet, also a local historian, loves the local history stories and really great at connecting with elders in the community and so we did several elder interviews and of course we bought a little camera, video camera. It was a zoom camera and we bought some lapel mics and we were feeling very professional.

Going out to people's houses and getting it all set up with the, trying to get the light right and thinking about all the technical aspects and then recording. And you know, having some success with that. But when we heard that they had hired a guy who was really knew how to make video, we were really excited because we're like, "Ohh, I'd be great if we didn't have to do the camera part anymore."

Neil

Well, and I mean. I have had a lot of experience. I wouldn't say I was professional. I mean, I was professional in that I worked previously at the Ferndale School District and made videos for them.

Erin

Yeah, we were very impressed by those videos.

Neil

Thank you.

Erin

We were like "Look at this."

Neil

I was pretty proud of that and coming to the library system where that wasn't really on the job description of the position that I applied for but, letting Michael know, letting folks know that I did have that experience. It just kind of felt, it just seemed like there were ways we could use that experience and I.

Erin

Mm-hmm.

Neil

Yeah, I got connected with you during our preparation for our 75th anniversary and you had a project that was the history harvest you called it?

Erin

Yeah, we were doing history harvest all around the county. I mean, we couldn't do it every branch, but we did it at, I think, Lynden and Ferndale and Everson and Blaine.

Neil

Mhm. Yeah.

Erin

We had, we had the big history harvest events that were, you know, kind of the more advertised where we really tried to get a lot of people to come and then we just went to every branch and a lot of times we ended up making kind of our own little mini history harvest because they'd invite a few people to come and.

Neil

Right. And like at Island Library and that was where we were inviting people to come and tell their, a story about their library connection, and often it was "when I was a kid I remember the bookmobile" or my, you know, sometimes it was "my mother or my grandmother was one of the first librarians", and we recorded those stories. Point Roberts, that was a pretty amazing time recording with several women who were, who were on the Historical Society. They were members of the Historical Society, I think I remember.

Erin

And old friends.

Neil

And they were, they had been since they were children, they had gone to.

Erin

They all grown up there together, yeah.

Neil

If I remember the story, but they would go to the border, the Point Roberts/Canada border and walk across to the bookmobile from Towasen maybe it was.

Erin

Oh.

Neil

At one period of time when the Whatcom County Library System wasn't into Point Roberts yet.

Erin

OK. Mhm.

Neil

And so they would, they would get books that way, and then eventually the library got built. And you know, it was just, you know, it's just fun to listen to folks, especially, you know, folks who are my age and older reminiscing about these times and that you get that twinkle in their eye and then they're 12 years old again.

You know, it's, it was a lot of fun to sit and record. Although, I really kind of felt like, you know, you were, you were like the master. You had you, you were kind of doing stuff based on Story Corp training and things like that and all I really knew how to do was hold a camera and not shake. And when we did these history harvests, they were so, some of them were really busy and you had your hands full, you know, managing this whole thing where patrons were coming in and wanting to tell stories and there's cookies and there's people talking and everyone wants to talk to you.

Erin

And stuff, people bringing in photos and things that we were scanning and digitizing. Yeah. Yeah. No, you had to take a bunch of people off into the into the recording room and just get their stories. Yeah.

Neil

And interview them. And it was like, OK, I hope I can do justice and ask the right questions.

Erin

Aw, and we did some really long interviews too. We, I feel like we did get, you know, we interviewed Kevin Harris, who was a long time PSA and also was a manager at one time with Ferndale Library. And he's passed away. And so, you know, and he had a lot of stories.

Neil

Ohh he had a lot of stories and I had known him in Ferndale when I lived in Ferndale and he was, you know, he was friends of the family too. And so having he's sitting with him and talking, he was very relaxed and told a lot of stories. Ohh gosh, we probably talked for two hours.

Erin

We did. I remember thinking sometimes like, "is it OK that we go this long? Are we allowed to interview these for this long?"

Neil

I know it. Yeah, it didn't end up being a 2-hour long video that we put out because we had, you know, you have to edit it for time.

Erin

Well, I figured, yeah, I figured it was making more work for you the longer we were going on, but.

Neil

But the stories and you know, there were times when it was like I turned the camera off and then someone would start telling another story and I'd have to grab the camera and say, "Wait, wait, start over."

Erin

Yeah. Yeah. No, it's.

Neil

But that was, I mean, that was a really fun time, you know, working with you and of course, the one thing that came out of that that was unexpected, and this is what I remember, you tell me if you remember it like this.

We were at the ferry dock, you and I and I think I was just I was just like so happy that I was, that this was my job now to help do these histories because I had been, you know, fascinated by stories from my mom who was, my dad had passed away, you know, in the 80s. But, my mom had at that time was still, you know, telling stories. And I was, I was at

that age, where it's like I want to get all those stories, so I know all the stories from my family and I was I remember sitting with you in the car and kind of bragging about my mom and how she had, you know, she had, you know, dropped out of college and got married and had eight kids, went back to college and then she, you know, went to downtown Seattle to try and get a job, went to an employment agency and it was like they couldn't find her anything. She had a degree in social work, couldn't find her anything.

Eventually the owner had, was getting out and sold the employment agency to, you know, and when I was telling it to you it she sold it to my mom. And so, she was this woman who all of a sudden owned an employment agency in downtown Seattle. And your response, in my mind you this is exactly what you said. You said "That's funny. My grandmother owned an employment agency in downtown Seattle."

Erin

Yeah.

Neil

And it turned out that they were partners.

Erin

Yeah.

Neil

And who could, I mean. We were put together here in the library. Who knows, you know, just out of random happenstance and it turns out that your mother and your grandmother and my mother were partners running this employment agency in the 70s in downtown Seattle or the 60s, I think, early 70s.

Erin

MHM. Yeah. I think so. Yeah. Yeah. No, I, I was never aware of that. That was before my time. The agency or my grandmother I think left and your mother carried on after.

Neil

Yeah.

Erin

After my grandmother left the company, but so I never, but there's always been stories like that was my grandma was always very proud of her. Of her time as owning that employment agency and.

Neil

Yeah. Especially at that time, I mean that was a time when, you know, women did not necessarily, I think that was the time when women still couldn't get a credit card without their husband's signature.

Erin

Right. And in fact, my grandmother told me there was an association of unemployment of the Indus. There's an industry association, but you had to be a man to go to those association meetings. So, they had to hire a man or they had to. Yeah, they had to hire one of their men on staff to go to the association meetings cause they neither one of them were allowed to go.

Neil

Wow. So yeah, but I mean, I mean that's what the, all this talking about history kind of brought up for us and we have this connection that we never would have known, it never would have come up.

Erin

It is. Yeah. Yeah, we have to unbury, the connections are buried all under there, and sometimes we have to dig them out.

Neil

Well, and speaking of that history, family histories and stuff, can you tell me a little about what you and Katrina, the branch manager at Deming have been doing?

Erin

Well, we're working on, we've been working on digitization for our community. So, you know, because of the grants we got and the work we've done with a couple of different family collections that gave us the equipment and the know how so that we can take a families photo collection or memorabilia collection, anything kind of 2D and we can scan it and digitize it and put, upload it to the internet so that that family history, those photos of our community, become available to everyone in the world so that they can, you know, that has an internet connection.

Yeah. And so, we did that really successfully with the Galbraith family collection with the help, it's Galbraith Hellier family collection. And then also with the Nasset family collection. Other libraries have also done that in their communities and but then afterwards we still had all this equipment and so we just wanted to, we're just really wanting to invite the community, we're just advertising and bringing all the staff's skills, getting everyone trained up. So that if someone walks into the library with a box of their old family photographs, we can sit them down at the scanner. We can show them how to digitize it. We can show them how to save it onto a flash drive or upload it to a place, their Dropbox or wherever they want to keep it, and be able to then have that to share with their family with, with anyone.

And of course you know, there's times when things actually have the kind of historical value where we might be like "oh wow, there's pictures of, you know, the Grange in our community or the old schoolhouse in our community. Would it be OK if you shared that one with us?" And we would want to put that on to the state historic website.

So that that's kind of neat for us if we're able to see some of the materials that maybe that's something the family wants to share. They don't have to you know it's really for people to be able to save and preserve and share their own family histories.

Neil

Yeah, but also, you know, when there's something of value to the community, it's nice to be able to have a place where we can share and that was kind of what we were doing with the history harvest too is all of the video and not just the video, but the scanning of two-dimensional pictures and memorabilia we're going up on the, our, the rural heritage site. What? How do you say that?

Erin

Washington Rural Heritage.

Neil

The Washington Rural Heritage website, which it's available. I'll have a link in our show notes, but the Secretary of State, Washington, Secretary of State, is who manages the state library, is that right? Am I saying that right?

Erin

Yeah. That's exactly right. It comes. It's, it's our state, it comes out of our state funding to make this, to preserve this rural history and then also we're part of the Northwest regional hub for rural history as well. I'm not thinking maybe that's not rural history, maybe that's

just for history in general. So that's a that's a. That's Washington and Oregon and both of the history organizations on the state level are sharing materials. And so, there's another website there and then that of course feeds then into the national of the Digital Public Library of America, the DPLA, which is.

It's different. You know, it keeps going into these greater archives. So, it's that's the really big archive. So, some of our photos that we digitized here in Whatcom County, from the South Fork Valley, you can now find when you go to the national public, the Digital Public Library of America website. So, it makes things really accessible. Yeah. And I was going to say the other, the next step in the project that we're working on right now is to create a digitization kit so that it's not just, not just photos and documents and letters that could be preserved, but also VHS, cassette tapes, even 8mm film. So, we've just run into a few families who are like, "Oh, we have this amazing footage. You know that's on our VHS tapes from, you know, when Grandma was showing giving a tour of the farm and especially like the VHS and some of these things are pretty delicate. And you can really, you can lose those images altogether. So, it's not really expensive material but it, or I mean equipment, but it's not something that everybody wants to own and have in their house. It's kind of a perfect sort of library thing to share.

Neil

Right. Because you really only need it once to digitize the things that you have.

Erin

Yeah. So, I mean that we want to be able to offer that full array of, that someone can walk in with their old 8mm film and that we can digitize that and get it onto a thumb drive for them, so that they can share it with their family.

Neil

That's just a great service that we're offering. We're getting ready to offer it and you know and promote it. So, you heard it here first, folks, which is great. What else do we have to talk about? What haven't we talked about?

Erin

Book clubs?

Neil

Oh. Book clubs. Yes. Tell me about your book club.

Erin



Well, I mean, of course I'm, you know, I'm going through this transition of working, having worked at the Deming Library and I'm moving to Lummi Island. So, I'm gonna be saying goodbye to my Deming in-person, kind of traditional book club, the, the, the group that meets once a month and we've all read the same book together.

Neil

MHM.

Erin

And that group has been growing and just, we just have wonderful conversations. It's just been so fun to, we have a really good we, we read a really good assortment of fiction and nonfiction and all different kinds of things. Sometimes we read classics, you know, just everybody wants, everybody in that group wants to stretch. They want to read something they wouldn't normally read on their own. And we are like you said earlier, we are completely OK with being critical in our reviews of these books. We don't. Everybody does not love every book every time. That I can say for sure every time everybody does not love the book. So, it's really fun to be able to match a little bit about what we didn't like about the book as well as think about the things that we might not have noticed that someone else noticed that was really good about the book.

So, that's going to be sad to say goodbye to the Foothills Book Club, but I'm excited because I also get to be part of the What We're Reading Book Club, which is an online book club, it's for the Whatcom County Library System. It's our only kind of system wide online, so it's for everybody anywhere in Whatcom County. I mean, really anybody could come from anywhere because it's online. You just need the zoom link and we do have a heavy preponderance in that group of people who like science fiction and fantasy and graphic novels and horror. So, we're kind of there's a little. We love people who like to read contemporary fiction and historical fiction and all things. Everything is welcome there.

But there, you will, you will hear people get really excited at this book club about their most recent fantasy series, and that I'm going to continue to be involved in. Fortunately, there's another staff person from Sudden Valley, Liz Andre is also in that, and so she's going to kind of become the facilitator for the group while I'm settling in to my new position, but I'm not gonna not go because it's a really easy book club to be part of because you don't have to read anything specific. We just, it's we just kind of pop around and everybody talks about what they've read recently.

Neil

So, you're not all reading the same book.

Erin

No, but it's a great place to go if you want to hear some titles or get some ideas of something to read that you, that someone else really liked.

Neil

That's a great. I mean, that's a great kind of a, kind of a book club where everyone is sharing something different and you're just taking notes on this is on my to-be-read list now, yeah.

Erin

Yeah, yeah. And we do take really good notes, and we do make a list every time. So that's the other thing I recommend to people is even if you don't have time to come, you can still sign up for the book club online at our events calendar on the 1st. It's the first Wednesday of the month and so you can find it there and then you'll get the list. So, once you register for it, even if you don't come, we'll still send you the list of recommended books. We also talk about movies a lot, sometimes music, sometimes.

Neil

What about podcasts?

Erin

Yes, we've we have put podcast on there. It's kind of whatever anybody wants to share. Sometimes somebody will even read a poem like they're reading a really good poetry book, and they'll just say, let me just share one poem that I read from this book.

Neil

Really. Oh wow. OK. That's great, that sounds like a fun book club that I could be a part of.

Erin

Yeah, you can come, Neil, you're welcome.

Neil

Oh, maybe I will.

Erin

First Wednesday of the month.

Neil

All right. Well, that's great. I do have to ask if this really leads into the next thing which is what I always ask the, my interview guests, what are you reading now? What would you recommend?

Erin

What a great question.

Neil

Doesn't even have to be what you're reading now. What would you recommend?

Erin

Well, this is fortuitous because I did just happen to finish reading *No Two People* by Erica Bauermeister, which is going to be or what it is or Whatcom Reads book for 2025. So that means Erica Bauermeister is going to be coming to Whatcom County and visiting our branches. And now that I'm at Lummi Island, I'm really going to be hoping that we're going to get her out on at Lummi Island Library for an event.

Neil

That's an interesting idea.

Erin

That's just an idea. I'm planting it right now so everyone can cheer for that. You know, there is a setting this. So, it's a really interesting book. It's told from the perspective of lots of different people and the connecting thread is a book.

Neil

Mhm.

Erin

So, one of the little vignettes in there is set on an island that just seems an awful lot like Lummi Island, it's never named.

Neil

Really? And so, Erica Bauermeister is a Northwest Washington writer.

Erin

Yes, I think she's Port Townsend, isn't she?

Neil

She lives in Port Townsend now, but yeah, I know that she's been to Bellingham and Whatcom County, and yeah, so there's there is a possibility that that might be a real inspiration. Lummi Island might have been a real inspiration. Yeah, that's one of the questions that people will probably pose to her at the Whatcom Reads events where she shows up.

Erin

Mhm.

Neil

And that'll be next March, March 2025.

Erin

Yeah.

Neil

Yeah.

Erin

That's an exciting time to look forward to. Yeah, I think it would be really, you know, a lot of times we don't get to get a lot of the big things out on Lummi Island because you know we've got to cross a ferry.

Neil

Right.

Erin

You gotta make a ferry across.

Neil

Yeah, it's a tough place to visit if unless you're, you know. You have to plan to visit.

Erin

Yes, you got to look the ferry schedule up, but it's a 5-minute crossing

Neil

A beautiful fun crossing.

Erin

and the libraries. It's beautiful. Yeah, just being on the water is amazing. And then you just, you're right there. As soon as you arrive on Lummi Island, you're at the library, so.

Neil

Yeah. That's great. OK. Well, I'm going to say everybody listening should plan on heading out. It's a great summer trip.

Erin

And you know, there's some really nice hikes to be had out on the Lummi. We have a, there's a land trust, a conservation land trust that owns some properties and there, there's a beautiful hike. I think it's called the Baker, the Baker Trail.

Neil

Okay.

Erin

Which is it goes up the big hill on the south end of the island.

Neil

OK. Well, that sounds like fun. So, everybody, we should all head out there and say hi to Erin, pick a day that the library is open. You know, you'll see Erin there.

Erin

Yeah. Come out on a Saturday. There's a farmers market too.

Neil

Oh, there you go. Now we've got something to do. We'll bring it. We'll bring our out-of-town guests, and we'll just inundate the library and make Erin feel really welcome there.

Erin

That sounds great, Neil. You're welcome anytime.

Neil

OK. Well, thank you Erin for being here. I love talking to you. And we'll see what, what this summer results in, yeah.

Erin

All right, now that was fun. Thanks for having me.

Neil

Well, that's our show. I want to thank Erin and Maryia for talking with me and for their long years of service at their respective libraries. And of course, I want to thank my boss, Mary Vermillion, without whose strong support this podcast would not be happening. The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers. Thanks for joining us today. Check out our previous episodes at [wcls.org/podcasts](http://wcls.org/podcasts) and let us know if you have enjoyed listening. You can e-mail me at [neil.mckay@wcls.org](mailto:neil.mckay@wcls.org). Take care, friends.