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THE BOOK OF NOTICING: Naturalist to appear in Guilford and Westbrook, July 12, 15

By Ann Gamble Anngamble41@gmail.com Jul 7, 2017



DEEP RIVER >> Author Katherine Hauswirth's new work, "The Book of Noticing, Collections and Connections on the Trail," features essays inspired by frequent walks, family and an ever-present thirst for learning.

Hauswirth plans several workshop/book signings to share her work and inspire other budding nature writers, including Wednesday, July 12, 4-6 p.m., Guilford Free Library, and Saturday, July 15, 1-3 p.m., Stewart McKinney Refuge, Westbrook. A full list of scheduled events is available on the author's website, fpnaturalist.com/book-of-noticing-events/.

As inspiration for future essays, the Deep River author recently spent time as a writer in residence at Maine's Acadia National Park. While it may be easy to notice the natural world when surrounded by so much rugged splendor, she says that it is just as possible to appreciate nature in our every day travels.

"I've had an affinity for writing since I was very small, but got away from it in high school," Hauswirth says. After moving to Connecticut from New York about 20 years ago, she began to reconnect with writing, honing in on nature writing for about the last five years.

She credits her slow-paced walks and passion for paying attention to nature to her walking companion, an aging beagle named Molly, who has since died. The author also took to heart a quote from poet Mary Oliver, "attention is the beginning of devotion."

What Hauswirth attends to is the natural world, whether deep in the woods, at the edge of a pond, or in the parking lot behind her workplace. Even, she says, in a potted plant, because that's nature too.

Her book also includes essays inspired by a previous writer-in-residence week at the home of naturalist Edwin Way Teale in Hampton, Conn. She writes about the creatures and plants that she sees, and what they bring to mind as she watches them. Her essays include references to other nature writers, naturalists of long ago, life stages, snippets of hymns, and her research done to simply to satisfy her own curiosity. What she does can be summed up as paying attention, or noticing.

Hauswirth writes about finding a word important to her, "When I looked up 'attend'....I was reminded that it means so much more than show up. Showing up is just the first step. My favorite part of the lengthy etymologic summary...is this part, literally 'to stretch toward,' the notion is of 'stretching one's mind toward something.'"

She ends the section with this: "My soul stretches along with my mind when I am attending to the birds' dawn chorus, the scent of freshly fallen pine needles, even a lone, garden variety ant hurrying along in its determined quest."

The back cover fittingly lists "Nature/Wellbeing" as the categories the book is filed under.

At a recent workshop at Connecticut Forrest and Park Association in the Rockfall section of Middlefield, Hauswirth arrived wheeling a suitcase full of her favorite resource books. She talked about her book, read an excerpt, distributed a packet of tips for writing about nature, and then sent the 12 or so attendees out on the trails at dusk to observe, reflect, listen and write.

After returning about 30 minutes later, the participants were encouraged, but not required, to share what they had written. One wrote poetically about a tree's scaly bark and its similarity to her own recent medical diagnosis; another described the depths and variety of greens she could see through the picture window as she had chosen not to walk the trails. This writer wrote about the trepidation felt entering the darkening woods and wonder of seeing an owl up close in the wild for the first time.

Hauswirth says that she is frequently amazed by people's creativity. She remembers a previous workshop participant: "One woman always wanted to write, but didn't think she could do it. She ended up putting together a beautiful piece written from the perspective of the dock."

"The Book of Noticing" is published by Homebound Publications, 2017. Hauswirth has also written many published essays and two self-published books, but says her latest book is, "more representative of where I am." She also writes as part of her "day job," but in a drier, more technical form for an Old Lyme company.

Hauswirth collects more than ideas on her walks. She and her son Gavin, now a teenager, created a “cabinet of curiosities,” a box that holds mementoes from their excursions, and fodder for her essays in the colder months when she can’t get outside for her morning rambles.

“I really hope that when people read this book they are motivated to look around, use all of their senses, and take time to be in nature.” For her, she says, “It goes beyond the labels – what the leaf is, etc. It makes me more contemplative, and more connected. I hope that other people can feel that too, then the book will be a success.”

