THE GUILFORD REGISTER

ADVENTURES & STORIES FROM THE MAINE HIGHLANDS

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THE POLITICS OF CHANGE

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HIKING THROUGH PISCATAQUIS COUNTY

Beware of the Pendulum

By John McNamara

I avoid political conversations, even with my own family. My mother, my brothers, and I have learned to steer clear of the subject because we've become so polarized that the middle ground has all but vanished. You're in, or you're out, for or against, black or white; and gray is no longer a place anyone wants to stand. I think that's a mistake.

My wife is a lifelong Democrat who spent decades raising money for Democratic candidates, and even we rarely talk politics. I'm about as agnostic as they come: some call me a conservative Democrat, others a liberal Republican. I prefer Independent. The issue, not the person, should drive the decision. When we stop talking about issues, we stop solving them.

That's why I'm worried about November. Whichever way the midterms go, anger at the country's current direction is running high, and anger rarely makes good policy. We saw a wave of frustration after the last election cycle, and the risk now is bigger: a wave so focused on undoing everything and punishing the other side that we swing the pendulum back. Then the next group reshapes the country in its own image, just as the last one did. Red or blue, the cycle is the same, and it serves parties, not people.

We need the pendulum to rest in the middle for a while, maybe a few terms. That doesn't mean nobody gets to hold strong opinions. It means being a little less angry and a little more curious. It's easier to blame someone else than to solve a problem, and easier still to get mad at a neighbor than to ask why they see things differently. But arguing over who's right has produced little besides distance between people who share the same streets, schools, and grocery stores.

I still believe in this country. We've had setbacks, some serious, but we were built on the idea that justice belongs to everyone and on a dream we call the American Dream. That dream isn't dead.

I know it's easy to say it is, given what food, housing, and gas cost today. Those pressures are real, and no one should wave them away. But rising prices don't kill a dream. They ask us to rethink how we reach it, and maybe to redefine what it is. Is it owning a home? Raising kids? Earning a lot of money? For some, it's a happy life, or a quiet one closer to nature. The dream is whatever each of us makes it, and the freedom to pursue it without ridicule or violence. Not every dream is financial.

Part of what keeps us angry is how we learn about the people we vote for. Many of the political ads filling our screens now are AI-generated and paid for by committees most of us couldn't name. Politics has started to feel less like a conversation about ideas and more like a contest of dollars, advertising, and false narratives. I'd love to see that change, but I don't expect Washington to fix it for us. The fix starts with how we choose to pay attention.

I have to believe there are still plenty of good, honest people in public office. Public opinion says otherwise, because the loudest voices, and the most expensive ones, tend to be the least honest. If we want better candidates, we have to let them be heard.



So here is what I'd like to see, and what I'm trying to do myself:

Learn about candidates directly. Go to town halls, ask questions, and listen to the answers. Treat polished, PAC-funded ads with suspicion, and don't let a social media feed pick your candidate for you. Word of mouth from people you trust beats a thirty-second spot.

Judge by issues, not team. Ask what a policy actually does, who it helps and what it costs, not who proposed it. If you'd oppose an idea from one party, ask whether you'd oppose it from the other.

Aim for balance—opportunity without a handout. Fair taxes. A cost of living people can manage. Affordable Healthcare and a salary that allows you to live without fear or worry. These aren't red or blue goals. They're the things most of us want for our families.

Put the country first. That means all of its people, not just the wealthy, regardless of status, income, orientation, or party. A strong country does not look the same from the inside. It's one where everyone has a stake.

I want my son to grow up in a country that takes care of him, gives him real opportunities, and lets him live his own dream. Not a handout, but a fair shot and a life he can afford. I hope that come November, whatever the outcome, we end up with leaders focused on putting the country first and putting all its people first.

We can get there with less division and more inclusion, without it becoming a slogan for either side. Let's not let any wave, red or blue, drown us. It's time for all of us to wake up, work together, and make a difference in this country and this world.

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Our focus is to highlight a Maine author. If you are a Maine author, or know of one who would like to be showcased here, reach out to us at john@genthnerhousepublishing.com.

Katie Coppens is a mom and a middle school science teacher. Both roles influence her writing. Katie's goal is to write books that encourage kids to see the interconnectedness of concepts and be curious about the world around them. I recently had the joy of meeting Katie, and getting to know her, then I had the pure fun of reading one of her books. The series is a delight!

When did you first know that you wanted to write, and when did you discover that you were good at it?

As a teacher, I model lessons with my own writing. I really enjoyed seeing how my writing could bring out emotions and reactions from students, such as laughter or empathy.

If you could sit down with one other writer, living or dead, who would you choose, and what would you ask them?

Mary Oliver. Her poetry adds such depth and emotion to little moments, and I enjoy connecting writing to nature.

How would you describe your writing style/genre?

My genres are all over the place! I write kids science-themed books, poetry, personal essays, and I won a crime fiction writing contest. I also write for Edutopia and have a column on teaching tips for the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA). I follow my interests and whatever topic, plot, and/or characters I can't stop thinking about.

What was your first published work? Tell us a little about it.

When I was on maternity leave with my second child, I wrote an essay about the need for parental leave called "Dear Congress, I think you've forgotten." This was published on a parent website and had 6,000 shares within 24 hours. Being vulnerable about the challenges of having a baby as a working parent and it being so well received helped my confidence as a writer.

Have you ever taken a trip to research a story? Tell us about it.

I'm working on a Young Adult coming-of-age crime story set at the old Maine State Prison, so I spent a day in Thomaston, ME exploring and writing.

What do you do when you get writer's block?

I pivot to another project. It works well for me to be writing two different genres at the same time, especially if one is nonfiction and one is fiction.

Do you use a pseudonym? If so, why? If not, why not?

No. I like talking with people about my work and want them to know who I am.



Do you ever base your characters on real people? If so, what are the pitfalls you've run into doing so?

A mix of traits of people, but more often I see in a coffee shop and make observations of others. This works especially well when they are with someone else and I can see how they interact.

Do you reward yourself for writing, or punish yourself for failing to do so? How?

I love writing, and I refuse to have the thing I love cause me stress. Writing feels freeing to me. It can be frustrating when I get a rejection on a project, but that's a different beast.

KATIE (Continued on page 7)

It's Only Fair

By Walter Boomsma

One of my fall diversions is taking in some fairs here and there. My digestion usually suffers a bit. (Why do agricultural fairs with displays of award-winning produce only serve stuff that's supposed to be bad for you?) My boots take a beating and often come home with bits of agricultural residue. Occasionally my back gets a little stiff from sitting on bleachers watching ox and horse pulls. But the rest of me enjoys it and finds the celebratory nature of fairs exciting.

The 4H exhibits are also fun. You're often greeted by a couple of young people who are extremely pleasant and have a vocabulary that consists of more than the monosyllabic language most often used by adolescents. You'll find the various exhibits reflect club pride, teamwork, and very often a high level of creativity.

Once, at the Skowhegan fair, I found a simple paper plate bearing a message to the judges. "My Dad found my sample cupcakes and ate them all. He said they were very good." I gather the judges couldn't accept Dad's testimonial because there was no ribbon attached, but I accept this young lady's ability to come up with a rather unique fair exhibit.

Speaking of food, "fair food" is a unique category that includes diverse dishes featuring innovation and portability. The ice cream cone was allegedly first created at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. There seems to be no limit to what you can deep-fry on a stick. There are often locally themed products. Here in New England, you won't have much difficulty finding Maple Cotton Candy, ice cream, and candy. You might consider yourself a gourmet if you can describe the difference between a doughboy and a funnel cake. Both are optionally sprinkled with maple sugar...

Fairs offer a true variety of enjoyable activities. I enjoy a walk through the amusement section but enjoy people watching far more than the rides or games of chance. This year I saw a worried mom standing in front of a "ride" that offered various obstacles for children to pass through. When I asked Mom if she was okay, she said that her five-year-old son was on his seventh trip through with no signs of stopping.

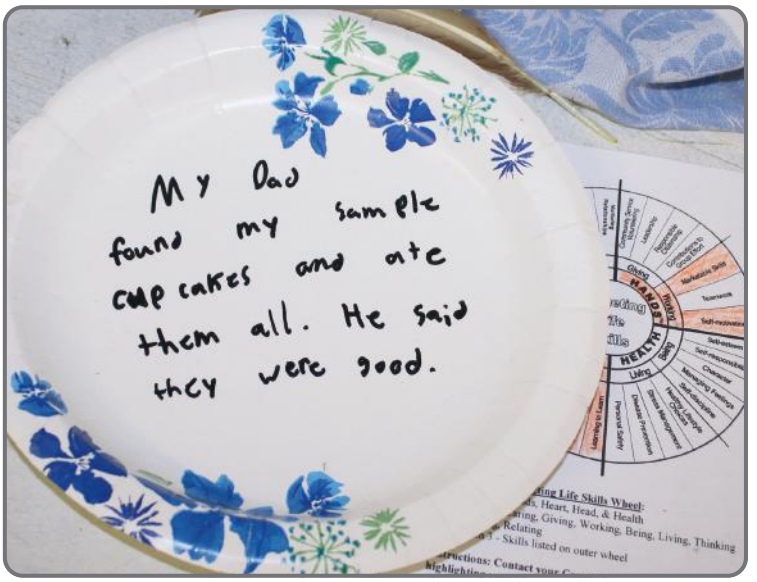


PHOTO: Evidence submitted to the judges, Skowhegan Fair.



PHOTO: Julia, early in her teamster career.

Back in the livestock section of the fairgrounds, there's Julia. I've been "following" her at fairs every year since she was a toddler, when I first watched her steer a pair of oxen that towered over her in the pulling ring. She showed no fear, just a few creative techniques of her own. Her style hasn't changed much, and she still loves being a "teamster." To see what she looks like today, you'll have to wait for my upcoming book, Cows, Corn, and Calm. In the meantime, if you want to understand what fairs are really about, skip the funnel cake line for a few minutes and go watch someone like Julia work.

By the end of the season, my boots need a good scraping, my back needs a rest, and my digestion needs a vegetable. But I'm already looking forward to next year. Apparently I'm a lot like that five-year-old on his seventh trip through the obstacle ride: no signs of stopping.



Walter Boomsma is an educator, writer, and the author of Small People—Big Brains. With a background in teaching and public speaking, he blends practical wisdom with a deep appreciation for lifelong learning. His work often explores themes of personal growth, communication, and community engagement, encouraging readers to think differently and discover meaning in everyday experiences. Through his writing and outreach, Walter strives to spark conversations that lead to understanding, empathy, and positive change.

PISCATAQUIS
COUNTY ICE ARENA
www.thepcia.com

Each month we will highlight a short story, poem or serial written by a Maine author. If you are a Maine writer, or know of one who would like to be showcased here, reach out to us at john@theguilfordregister.com

The Acadia Files is a fun introduction to the wonders of science, using real-world scenarios to make scientific inquiry relatable and understandable. The following is Chapter Five of The Acadia Files: Winter Science.

Acadia, Isabel and Joshua trudge through a fresh layer of snow, pulling their sleds behind them. Walking down her road, Acadia notices how the bright sunlight illuminates the powdery snow.

"I think this could be the last snow of the year," Acadia says.

Isabel looks down at the ground. "Yep, it'll be spring soon, and all of this will be gone."

"Then we'd better get in some good sledding today!" Joshua yells as he grabs the rope of his snow tube and starts to run up the hill.

"Slow down! It's not a race," Acadia calls after him.

He turns back. "Let's make it a race. Let's see which sled can go the farthest."

"Sounds fun," Isabel says, running to catch up with Joshua.

"Wait for me!" Acadia shouts.

At the top of the hill, the sunlight feels even stronger as it reflects off the bright, white snow. The wind is mild and refreshing, not bitterly cold like it was a few weeks before. The three stand atop the hill in descending order of height: Isabel, Acadia, and Joshua. Isabel is holding a plastic rectangular sled, Acadia a large round saucer sled, and Joshua an inflatable snow tube.

"Do we just count to three and go for it?" Isabel asks.

"Hold on. Instead of just racing, can we make a plan?" Acadia says.

"What do you mean?" Joshua asks.

Isabel smiles. "I know that look in your eye, Acadia. Are you thinking about science class yesterday?"

"Yep," answers Acadia. "Yesterday we learned about energy and friction. To give the sled more speed, it helps to have less friction. That beautiful, fresh, powdery snow is going to create a lot of friction."

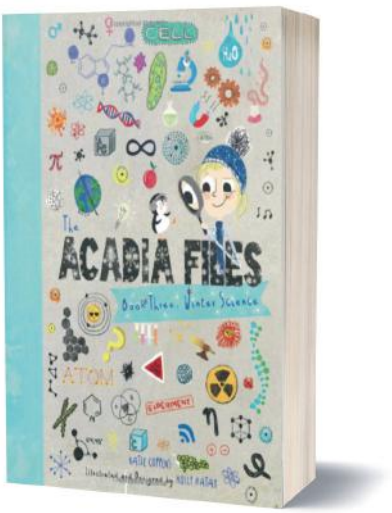
"Is friction like drag?" Joshua asks. "Drag was what slowed down our paper airplanes, right?"

Isabel replies, "Yes. You want your sled to have as much energy as possible. Friction takes speed away from the sled. Less speed means the sled won't go as far. More speed means more fun."

Acadia notices some footprints leading toward a nearby spot on the hilltop. She follows the footprints until they stop, and all that remains is the track of a sled heading downhill. "I have my strategy. I'm going to follow these sled tracks. Whoever sledded earlier has packed down the snow here, and the compacted snow will make less friction. Less friction means more speed, and like Isabel said, more speed means more fun."

"How about if we each get to have our own strategy?" Joshua asks. "I'm going to give my sled a running start."

"Good idea. That will give your sled more kinetic energy to start with," Isabel explains.



"What's that?" Joshua asks.

"Anything in motion has kinetic energy," Isabel answers. "We like kinetic energy. Sleds stop when they run out of kinetic energy."

"So my sled will have extra energy from my running, but because I'm in the fluffy snow, I'll also have more friction. It's a tradeoff. But I'm a superfast runner, so I'm not worried," Joshua says in a joking voice while giving Acadia an intimidating look.

Acadia smiles at Joshua and shakes her head. "Not gonna happen."

"Hey, don't count me out," Isabel says, as she walks along the top of the hill. "My strategy is that I'm going to find the steepest part of the hill to go down." Isabel finds her spot and sits on her sled.

"Sounds like we all have a plan. Everyone ready?" Acadia asks. The other two nod, indicating yes. "Let's see whose strategy is best. Ready, set, go!"

Joshua steps a few feet back, then runs holding his snow tube. He jumps face-first onto the tube, landing with a bounce. The snow tube starts off fast, but a large plume of powdery snow comes up in his face. His speed quickly decreases as the tube plows down the hill, flattening the snow as it journeys downward.

Isabel's plastic sled also travels quickly at first but is slowed down by the fluffy snow. Her sled displaces the snow by squishing it down and pushing it out toward the sides.

Unlike the other sleds, which push snow out of their way, Acadia's sled squishes the snow down on the already established tracks as it travels. Acadia sits crisscross on her saucer sled and glides so fast that her hair blows back. She clings to the saucer's handles and can't help but shriek with excitement as she gains speed. Her sled goes beyond the tracks and slows down in powdery snow just a few feet farther than Joshua and at least twenty feet past Isabel.

Acadia jumps up. "I won!"

ACADIA (Continued on page 7)

The Adventures of Piscataquis County's Hiking Mountains

By John McNamara

Tucked into the heart of Maine's North Woods, Piscataquis County holds some of the wildest, most rewarding hiking terrain in New England. In this place, trailheads outnumber traffic lights, moose sightings are more common than cell service, and the mountains themselves seem to hold centuries of stories. For anyone chasing adventure on foot, Piscataquis County is the perfect stomping ground. And with leaf peeping season in full swing, the weather is perfect for some mountain adventures.

No conversation about hiking in this county can start anywhere but Katahdin. Rising 5,269 feet above Baxter State Park, Katahdin is Maine's tallest peak and the storied northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail. Thru-hikers who have walked more than 2,000 miles from Georgia end their journey here, touching the famous wooden sign atop Baxter Peak in a moment that has become legendary in hiking culture. But Katahdin isn't just for AT veterans. Day hikers tackle routes like the Hunt Trail, Abol Trail, or the notorious Knife Edge, a narrow, exposed ridge with sheer drop-offs on both sides that tests nerve as much as endurance. The mountain demands respect. Weather can shift in minutes, and rangers routinely turn back hikers who aren't prepared. Those who summit, though, are rewarded with views stretching across the entirety of the Maine wilderness, an unbroken sea of forest and lake that makes clear why the Wabanaki people considered this mountain sacred ground.

South of Katahdin lies the 100 Mile Wilderness, widely regarded as the most remote and challenging stretch of the entire Appalachian Trail. Running through Piscataquis County between Monson and Abol Bridge, this section offers no road crossings, resupply points, or easy exits. It is a true test of self-sufficiency, winding hikers through dense spruce forests, past pristine ponds, and over a string of smaller peaks that build toward Katahdin's grand finale. Even those not attempting a full thru-hike can sample pieces of this wilderness through shorter access points, catching a glimpse of what has drawn adventurers to this corridor for generations. The trail here intersects with pieces of the Thoreau-Wabanaki Trail. This route traces the waterways and portages Henry David Thoreau once traveled on his famous Maine Woods journeys, layering literary history onto the hike's physical challenge.

Not every mountain adventure in Piscataquis County requires a multi-day commitment. Borestone Mountain, located in a wildlife sanctuary near Monson, offers one of the region's most popular day hikes. The trail climbs steadily past two ponds before reaching a rocky summit with panoramic views of the surrounding lake country. Because the sanctuary is staffed and maintained, families and first-time hikers find it more approachable than the county's backcountry giants, while still delivering the kind of dramatic overlook that makes the climb worthwhile.

Adventure in this county isn't limited to summits. Gulf Hagas, often called "the Grand Canyon of Maine," is a slate gorge carved by the Pleasant River and lined with a series of dramatic waterfalls, including Screw Auger Falls, Buttermilk Falls, and Billings Falls. The rim trail loops hikers along the canyon's edge,



offering views down into churning water and sheer rock walls that feel far more dramatic than anything else in New England. This hike pairs naturally with the county's broader waterfall circuit, a loosely connected string of cascades scattered through the woods that reward hikers willing to seek them out, often with far fewer crowds than more famous falls elsewhere in the state.

Hiking here is inseparable from the wildlife that shares these mountains. Piscataquis County is prime moose territory, and quiet early morning trails often deliver sightings that stop hikers in their tracks. The region is also a haven for birders, with boreal species like the black-backed woodpecker and gray jay turning up along higher-elevation trails, especially around Katahdin's lower slopes and the ponds near Borestone. Many hikers find that the county rewards a slower pace, one that leaves room to notice a loon calling across a pond or a family of otters working a stream, rather than rushing summit to summit.

What sets Piscataquis County apart isn't just the elevation gain or the mileage. It's the sense of scale and solitude that has largely disappeared from more developed hiking regions. Towns like Monson and Greenville serve as gateway communities, small but welcoming outposts where hikers restock supplies, swap trail stories, and prepare for whatever the mountains ask of them next. Local historical societies and community groups have worked to preserve the character of these places even as outdoor tourism grows, ensuring that the adventure remains tied to the land and its long history rather than becoming just another checklist destination.

For hikers willing to put in the effort, Piscataquis County offers something increasingly rare: genuine wilderness, dramatic terrain, and mountains that still feel like they belong to the wild rather than to the trail map. Whether it's the exposed edge of Katahdin's Knife Edge, the quiet climb up Borestone, or the roar of water through Gulf Hagas, the Piscataquis County mountains deliver the kind of adventure that stays with a person long after the boots come off.

KATIE (Continued from page 3)

How long on average does it take you to write a book?

I've been working on one book for ten years (the YA crime novel), but other shorter projects were done in a few months.

Why did you choose to write in your particular field or genre? If you write more than one, how do you balance them?

My teacher voice and parent voice are strong in my writing. Some of the pieces I'm most proud of are my personal essays. I write about parenting and grief. My mom was in hospice when I was in the third trimester of my first pregnancy and she died when my daughter was two weeks old. Losing my mom as I became a mom taught me a lot about life and love.

What was one of the most surprising things you've learned in writing your books?

When you think a manuscript is done, set it aside for a few months, then revise and edit. What you thought was done will get so much better!

What advice do you wish you'd had before releasing your first story?

I probably should have let my husband read my essay on parental leave first. What I wrote was real and needed to be said, but I probably should have double checked with him before putting so much about our life out there to the world. I never imagined it would get so much attention. Of course, if I'd edited it down and taken away the raw bits, it probably would not have resonated so much with people.

What's the funniest or creepiest thing you've come across while researching for one of your stories?

The concept of Filicide. My crime fiction story that won a content was called "Filicide: An Eight Letter Word."

What qualities do you and your characters share? How much are you like them, or how different are they from you?

I don't give up. I am kind to myself as a writer and I'm supportive of other writers.

Do you have any strange writing habits or superstitions?

When my kids were little, I put on big headphones to write. They now know my routine and to give me some space and not to interrupt for things like asking if they can have a snack.

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ACADIA (Continued from page 5)

Isabel runs toward Acadia. "Awesome ride! Friction really does make a difference."

Joshua adds, "Each time we go, it'll get even better because the snow will be more packed down. I bet if I do a running start onto Acadia's track, I'll go superfast."

"Let's see what happens if we do a running start onto my track on the steepest part of the hill," Isabel suggests.

"Then we can see how our strategies work when they're all combined."

"Sounds good to me," Acadia says as she grabs her sled.

"Let's race up the hill!" Joshua yells, looking back at Acadia and Isabel.

"Why is everything a race with him?" Acadia asks Isabel as they both start to run.

The three huff and puff and smile on their journey back up the hill, enjoying every moment of this beautiful winter day.

Later in the day, Acadia sees a big cardboard box in her family's recycling bin and comes up with an experiment to test friction. She tests the speed of a marble on four different surfaces: cardboard, felt, sandpaper, and glitter.

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PISCATAQUIS FORWARD

INNOVATION • GROWTH • COMMUNITY

PRESENTS

PISCATAQUIS BRIGHT

LIGHTING UP THE COUNTY

This holiday season, Piscataquis County lights up. Piscataquis Forward invites homes and businesses across the county — from Milo to Greenville and everywhere in between — to deck their halls (and porches, and storefronts) in holiday lights—to make **PISCATAQUIS BRIGHT**—for a chance to win top honors in our countywide celebration of the season.

Last year's **Spectacle of Lights** sparked something special in one town—this year, we're taking it countywide. Whether you go all-out with a full light show or keep it simple with a warmly lit doorway, every entry adds to the glow. Like last year, voting will be by the entire community. An online portal to see where to find the lights, and a voting form, will be available for anyone to vote for their favorite display, with prizes awarded for top Home, top Business, and bragging rights for the town with the most votes.

Grab your lights, gather the family, and help make **PISCATAQUIS BRIGHT** this holiday season. Registration is open to all homes and businesses in Piscataquis County from November 15-30. Online Voting is open from December 3-31. Winners will be announced by January 5

WWW.PISCATAQUISFORWARD.ORG/BRIGHT