

Cultural discussions in Barry's Bay



By Sarah Vance

Patrons to the Madawaska Valley Public Library ushered in a new phase to the 'Telling Tales' series with a discussion about cultural artifacts, on Saturday, Jan. 23.

It was a full house at the intimate rural library in Barry's Bay. Librarian and CEO Karen Filipkowski facilitated the event which saw patrons considering how artifacts play a role and add a dimension to story telling.

Participants drew upon their cultural experiences as they made connections to excerpts from the film *My Life*, a Cannes Film Festival winner by producer Zacharia Kunuk, as well as from the book *Me Artsy*, edited by Drew Hayden Taylor.

Traditions such as quilting and beadwork were emphasized during the discussion which saw patrons considering artifacts from Indigenous, Polish and Irish traditions – appropriate given the proximity of the Algonquin settlement of Pikwakanagan, the Irish-founded town of Killaloe, and Wilno, site of Canada's first Polish settlement.

'If you look closely at artifacts like quilts, you can see changes to the composition of a culture,' said one guest, who went on to describe how the focus of quilts have evolved through time. 'Tanks can be found in quilts made during times of war and cityscapes became the subject of early industrialization.'

'Quilting has been said to crystallize a mood,' said Frances Mawson, a member of the library board who offered insights to the discussion. 'It involves repurposing good bits of clothing which may have become 'not-so-good'...when even the fabric itself tells tales of another journey.'

Filipkowski shared several artifacts with patrons, including some which were deeply personal, like neck-ties worn by a now-deceased family member. Patrons considered how these objects can be incorporated into narratives and offered as memorials during a time of loss.

'The library board and the South of 60 Train Station have co-planned the Telling Tales series to take place over several months,' said Iwona Mooney, chair of the library board. 'We have exhibitions, workshops and discussions planned until April. All in all, it is a very exciting time.'

Down the Opeongo Line, at the South of 60 Railway Station Gallery, the first of these exhibits launched its grand opening, as a juried show featuring the mixed media of Renfrew County artists.

With new events planned each month, including two installations at the Railway Station and a three-part discussion series at the

Madawaska Valley public library, the "Telling Tales" series has something for everyone.

A range of children's activities have been planned for the March Break and Family Day weekend, which will involve book making and snow sculpting.

For those who are seeking hands-on projects, a four-part workshop series over the next three months will provide opportunities to make handmade paper with Valerie Bridgman and fiber sculptures with Ann Dunlap.

The Telling Tales juried exhibit can be viewed until the beginning of March, while discussion circles will continue at the library.

To learn more about these and other exciting downtown Barry's Bay projects, visit the South of 60 Arts Centre website at www.southof60.com.