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Author captures nature as catalyst for joy and comfort

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GOULDSBORO — In her newly published book “More Than Meets the Eye,” Margie Patlak invites you to take time as she has over a lifetime to explore and experience Maine’s diverse natural environments. That can mean marveling at iridescent green mosses — even more intense after recent heavy rains — cushioning the Maine woods. Or pausing to watch an Autumn meadowhawk dragonfly feast on a fly during its migratory journey south.



Patlak, a notable science writer and memoirist who divides her time between Corea and Philadelphia, has been mesmerized by nature’s wonders since childhood summers spent in Hancock County. That awe was planted early. She was only 5 when her late biophysicist father placed a still-pulsing heart from a dogfish shark that he had cut open in his research at the Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory in Salsbury Cove.

In her book “More Than Meets the Eye,” Corea resident and science writer Margie Patlak writes about how coastal Maine and its fragile flora and fauna have has given her a more profound understanding of her own lifecycle and helped her cope with the loss of loved ones.

“It was still drumming its pulsating rhythm onto my palm, blood squirting out with each beat...,” she writes. “Most children at that age might have been horrified at the bloody spectacle filling my palm, and I was alarmed to some degree. But there was also something puzzling, precious and thrilling about holding this heart with a life of its own, at least for the few seconds until it sputtered to a stop.”

The author, who has degrees in botany and environmental science, also was fortunate to have a mother who planted a love of words in her daughter. Patlak pursued both her love of science and writing and has honed her craft for years writing about the environment, technology and neuroscience for The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Philadelphia Inquirer, Discover magazine and other publications.

“More Than Meets the Eye: Exploring Nature and Loss on the Coast of Maine” (Down East Books, 2021, \$19.95), though, also is about how her relationship with nature grew and enabled her to weather her mother’s death, her brother’s swift, simultaneous deterioration from Lou Gehrig’s disease (ALS) and her father’s death a decade later. Witnessing a striped monarch caterpillar’s transformation into a “chartreuse pendant dabbled with gold” and other slices of animals and plants’ lifecycles has given her a more profound understanding of her own.

“The monarchs that visited my garden and the three generations it takes for the butterflies to make their way from Mexico to Maine revealed the limits of an individual life and what is passed on from generation to generation,” Patlak writes in an email. “The dramatic tides taught me how fleeting time is and the ephemeral nature of raising a child. And knowledge about the clouds and weather made me appreciate the forces greater than ourselves that take away all illusions of control.”

Patlak will speak about her book and work at 3 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 23, at the Dorcas Library in Prospect Harbor and at 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 30, at the Blue Hill Public Library.



Bio



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In addition to editing the Arts & Leisure section, Letitia edits special sections including Out & About, Overview, Health Quarterly, Your Maine Home, House & Garden and Get Ready for Winter. She comes from Chicago, Ill, but has deep family ties to the Cranberry Isles.

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