

—Slug:.....COMM-0861.arts.seven_new_books
—Contributor.....Joyce Marcel
—Contributor email.....joyrand@sover.net
—For section.....The Arts
—Format.....News - byline and dateline
—Dateline.....
—Article Number:.....43446



Notes from editor (not for publication):

Lovely work, Joyce.

—Line 221: I'm assuming Peter means affected in terms of families torn apart by housing prisoners across a country.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 A spring bloom of new books

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Six Windham County authors release a shelf of titles,
3 from management to memoir

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 It's spring, and Windham County is blooming with seven
6 new books by six local authors. Some are fiction. Some are
7 nonfiction. Some are self-published. Some are published by
8 major publishers. Some are published with a hybrid model that
9 falls somewhere in between.

10 Putting all of them together, it makes for a bountiful crop:

- 11 • Cheryl Wilfong, of Putney, who has self-published 22
12 books, has just put out a new historical novel, *Long Haul*.
- 13 • Peter Gould, of Brattleboro, has two books coming out,
14 the just-published young adult novel *Red Nose Girl* and the soon-
15 to-arrive adult novel *Part for the Hole*.
- 16 • Anna Monders, of Brattleboro, has just released her
17 first book, *Tested*, a young adult science fiction novel, and has a
18 picture book also soon to come out.
- 19 • James Grout, the founding director of Brattleboro's
20 High 5 Adventure Learning Center, has just published *When in
21 Doubt ... Give Them Your Heart: Stories About Connecting,
22 Empowering and Leading by Example*.
- 23 • Meanwhile, Grout's colleague at High 5, Ryan
24 McCormick, the organization's education program manager, has
25 just published *Edge of Leadership: Guiding Educators and
26 Students on a Journey of Meaningful Connection, Empowering
27 Skill and Collective Leadership*.
- 28 • And Deborah Lee Luskin, who just a few months ago
29 put out *Reviving Artemis*, about her experiences in the woods
30 while learning to hunt, has re-released her 2010 novel *Into the
31 Wilderness*, described by the *Rutland Herald* as "a fiercely
32 intelligent love story."

33 The need to write

34 In 2026, people read their phones. They read their social
35 media. They read short-form pieces. But Americans are reading
36 fewer books than ever before, and various recent studies and
37 surveys have shown that between 40% and 50% of American
38 adults have read no books in a given year.

39 People aren't reading books for pleasure anymore. So
40 why are so many people here writing them?

41 "I've recently realized that we each need an audience for
42 our creativity," Wilfong said. "My grandmother painted ceramics
43 and sold \$82 worth one year. She was disappointed. My mother

44 quit oil painting because she was only giving her painting away. I
45 embrace giving my creations — my books — away.”

46 In other words, she continued, “writing books is a
47 money sink.”

48 “I have never made money, never even come close to
49 breaking even,” Wilfong said. “I would rather have an audience
50 than earn money.”

51 Wilfong said she self-publishes for three reasons. The first
52 is that she knows how to do it. The second is that she’s 78 and
53 doesn’t have time to find an literary agent. The third is that when
54 she does talk to agents, she finds they are interested in fantasy,
55 vampires, and dystopia, “and that’s not me.”

56 “Young agents are not interested in grey-haired writers,”
57 she said.

58 Monders, who moved here in 2022 and works at Brooks
59 Memorial Library as an accounts clerk, laughed when she said it
60 took “14 years of pigheaded perseverance with no guarantee of
61 success” before she found an agent and a publisher in Aladdin,
62 an imprint of the Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing
63 Division.

64 “It’s like, I need[ed] to write this book,” Monders said.
65 “And so I did.”

66 Gould, a beloved clown, actor, and director who has
67 already published five books — some self-published, some
68 released by “the Big Five” publishers, historically the dominant
69 traditional book publishing firms in the U.S. and worldwide
70 markets.

71 He simply loves the process of writing.

72 “It’s having an idea and writing and rewriting and
73 rewriting and rewriting and then having a book and getting it out
74 there in the world,” Gould said. “It’s almost reward enough. That’s
75 why I’m doing it.”

76 Luskin said books have been her best friend since she
77 was a child.

78 "I started writing at an early age, and it was a way to find
79 out what I thought," she said. "I wanted to be like Jo March and
80 Jane Eyre and David Copperfield. I thought, 'Oh, I could be the
81 hero of my own life.'"

82 Luskin said she writes because she has thoughts and
83 opinions — "and also, I write to figure out what I think."

84 "Having two books published within six months has
85 changed me a little bit," she said. "I feel more secure as a writer
86 with two books. It's like I feel more secure as a grandmother with
87 two grandkids.

88 "My DNA, my influences, have another generation. And
89 my grandchild might, if she has children, she'll tell them about
90 me," Luskin said. "And maybe my memory will be a blessing."

91 What's the score?

92 Monders' colleagues at Brooks Memorial Library are so
93 proud of her achievement that at a recent launch party the library
94 gave away 25 copies.

95 She said the idea for a novel based on fighting the social
96 inequities of the world she describes in *Tested* came out of that
97 world.

98 A 2018 article in *MIT Technology Review*, "[Forecasts of](#)
99 [Genetic Fate Just Got a Lot More Accurate](#)," "talked about doing
100 genetic testing on babies and giving them a report card of what
101 their genetic potential was for all these different things, like
102 health and social capacity and intelligence," recalled Monders,
103 who has a scientific background.

104 The article described how "we could track kids
105 according to their genetic potential."

106 "And, of course, my head starts doing, 'Well, what if?
107 What if we live in a world where this testing is common? What if
108 our options are in life are strongly limited or directed by the
109 results of that genetic testing?' So that was the kernel." Monders
110 said.

111 At the same time, she was living in an area hit hard by
112 wildfire smoke from southern Oregon, describing “how horrific it
113 felt to not be able to go outside and breathe for six weeks in a
114 row in the summer or longer,” Monders said. “And so,
115 environmental catastrophe was in my head. It felt very
116 apocalyptic.”

117 In *Tested*, Monders creates a society that has gone
118 through some sort of environmental collapse and decides to
119 funnel its resources into people with the best genetic potential.

120 The rest of the population, with low genetic scores, are
121 second- and third-grade “Fectives,” or untouchables.

122 “The genetic report card, the GRC in the story, is that all-
123 important number that determines your path,” she said. “I’m
124 imagining that the number of Mikayla, my heroine, is a 94, which
125 is an elite score.”

126 When Mikayla rebels and begins questioning her society,
127 the book takes off.

128 “In most books like this, the heroine is in the underdog
129 class,” Monders said. “Mikayla is in the elite class and has to face
130 and integrate into her understanding what’s actually going on for
131 everybody else. She is really shaken from what she discovers, and
132 so she has to figure out how she feels about that and what she’s
133 going to do about that feeling.”

134 Giving your heart

135 For 23 years as the executive director of Brattleboro’s
136 High 5 Adventure Learning Center — which has the core
137 philosophy of “Connect. Empower. Lead. Be the Example” — Jim
138 Grout has been training leaders, be they famous sports figures or
139 the superintendents of public schools.

140 *When in Doubt ... Give Them Your Heart* is the
141 summation of his experiences and his career. It is full of short
142 stories about connecting, empowering, and leading by example.

143 “That’s pretty much our mantra at High 5,” Grout said.

144 “I tried to use the stories as a jumping off point, as a
145 primer for people,” he continued. “Each chapter has reflection
146 questions. So what can the reader learn as a teacher, as a coach,
147 as a leader of any kind, and how would it have real value for
148 them as opposed to just some historical compilation of youth
149 stories?”

150 In one of his stories he tells how Patrice Bergeron,
151 recently retired hockey legend and team captain of the Boston
152 Bruins, first came to find his voice during a High 5 leadership
153 weekend.

154 The entire team came to Brattleboro for the leadership
155 course just before the start of the 2010-11 NHL season and
156 ended up winning the Stanley Cup.

157 “Yes, we helped win championships,” Grout writes. “But
158 more importantly, we helped build teams of good people, who
159 led each other — and themselves — to something greater. Team
160 building does indeed work.”

161 Grout’s book is getting positive reviews from people who
162 want to evolve their leadership skills.

163 “I’m getting some great feedback from even retired
164 people who said, ‘Jesus, I wish I had this back in the day when I
165 was managing this,’” he said. “But the most encouraging news so
166 far is that people have found real value in its pages. And when I
167 usually sign the book, I put my name and I say, ‘I hope you find
168 value in these pages and make good things happen in the
169 world.’”

170 Grout left his leadership position at High 5 in 2022 when
171 he was diagnosed with leukemia. After a stem cell transplant, he
172 started writing the book, using the energy that the drug
173 prednisone provided.

174 He’s now 3½ years past the transplant and doing well.

175 “I guess things happen for a reason, but being given the
176 opportunity to write the book was very, very gratifying,” Grout
177 said. “I wanted to capture something from the history of High 5,
178 but not a past history as much as a living history. Why are we

179 doing what we're doing for 25 years, and how can we continue
180 to do it for 25 more?"

181 Grout will lead a discussion/presentation of the book on
182 Thursday, May 7, at 6:30 p.m. at the Village Square Books in
183 Bellows Falls.

184 **Leaning how to lead**

185 *Edge of Leadership*, written by High 5's Ryan
186 McCormick, offers an exploration of leadership for "students
187 rooted in connection, experiential learning, and real-world
188 application," according to a press release.

189 The book is designed for educators, facilitators, youth
190 development professionals, and "emerging leaders seeking to
191 foster authentic growth in themselves and others."

192 It emphasizes that transformation happens through
193 everyday interactions — small, often overlooked moments where
194 connection, trust, and courage take root.

195 "The work of leadership is deeply tied to supporting
196 young people in vulnerable, formative moments and helping
197 them navigate challenges with confidence and connection," said
198 McCormick, who manages the Edge of Leadership program at
199 High 5 and has spent decades developing leadership experiences
200 for young people and educators.

201 "People sometimes hesitate to call themselves leaders,
202 often associating leadership with authority, specific titles, or
203 certain personality traits," he continued. "This approach invites us
204 to redefine leadership on our own terms."

205 McCormick pointed out that "quiet support, active
206 listening, thoughtful decision-making, or leading by example can
207 all be just as influential as more traditional forms of leadership."

208 **Not clowning around**

209 *Red Nose Girl* is hot off the presses for Peter Gould, who
210 has spent a long career honing how to tell a story.

211 Gould claims, for example, that he took his abilities as a
212 clown from a handshake from one of the greatest.

213 “When I shook Charlie Chaplin’s hand, I was infected by
214 the Spirit, and it sat dormant in me for a while, but not that long,”
215 Gould said.

216 *Red Nose Girl* tells the story of two young Vermonters in
217 the 10th grade. Lettie is white, while her best friend, Trevor, is
218 Black and gay. The book tells Lettie’s story of how a school
219 project leads them to confront the for-profit prison system in
220 Vermont and, actually, everywhere.

221 The book makes the case that young people need to be
222 listened to, Gould said, because they are some of the Vermonters
223 most affected by the punitive carceral system. The state
224 Department of Corrections contracts with the for-profit CoreCivic
225 to house prisoners in Mississippi, further straining family units
226 already in upheaval.

227 The adult novel Gould expects hot off the presses any
228 day now, *Part for the Hole*, is about a mild-mannered high school
229 teacher who decides to rescue at gunpoint the National
230 Endowment for the Arts, all by himself. The book has been called
231 “Sublime” and “Surrealistic.”

232 Gould will do a reading of “Part for the Hole” at Brooks
233 Memorial Library at a time to be posted soon.

234 **Love in the Vermont woods**

235 Luskin’s reissued book, *Into the Wilderness*, is a love
236 story set in a Vermont county much like Windham. It tells the
237 story of New Yorker Rose Mayer, 64 and widowed for the second
238 time, who doesn’t know what she’s going to do for the rest of her
239 life.

240 Her only son wants her to join him in Vermont for the
241 summer and then live as a housekeeper in his house in New
242 Jersey.

243 “And she does come to Vermont, and she meets Percy
244 Mendell, who is the county extension agent, who spent all his life

245 visiting farms, helping out, getting dinners, helping families,
246 keeping up with births and deaths, rolling up his sleeves and
247 helping out when he needs to," Luskin said.

248 The novel is set in 1964, a year before every town in
249 Vermont stopped sending a representative to the Vermont House,
250 a system that let a town of 63 people wield the same voting
251 power as Burlington, with 30,000 people. A lot of Vermont
252 politics and political history is enmeshed with this love story.

253 Luskin is now writing her third book as she publicizes
254 *Revising Artemis* and *Into the Wilderness*. Between writing books,
255 writing a column on Substack, attending conferences, and
256 speaking to groups, she has achieved perhaps her deepest goal:
257 "a writer's life."

258 **Healing power**

259 Wilfong's historical novel, *Long Haul*, is based on family
260 stories and is centered on the influenza pandemic of 1918-19.

261 When it strikes rural Indiana, George, her ancestor, a
262 Hoosier farmer, develops a "long haul" kind of illness. The book
263 is about his relationships with his wife, children, and
264 grandchildren — especially his Christian Science daughter, who
265 doesn't believe in sickness, death, or masking.

266 "I wanted to write about my father and his nine siblings,"
267 she said. "I imagined the kindly influence their grandfather had
268 on Dad's oldest brother."

269 But then, her writing plans "got hijacked by the
270 grandfather — my great-grandfather. His obituary, on the front
271 page of the small-town newspaper, says that he died of
272 complications from the Spanish flu."

273 As she was writing, Covid had just started, "and there
274 was my story," Wilfong said.

275 Although she has already self-published 22 books, none
276 of them were fiction.

277 "After writing memoir, essays, a gardening blog, and
278 three Dharma books, fiction was a completely different kettle of
279 fish," she said. "What a steep learning curve."

280 She says she "stumbled around for a while," then took a
281 year-long First Draft Manuscript class in 2021 at the Pioneer
282 Valley Writers' Workshop, based in Northampton, Massachusetts.
283 "Six revisions and five years later: Voilà!" she said.

284 She is planning a sequel to *Long Haul*, based on the life
285 of her great-grandmother.

286 "It will take place from 1921 to 1927," Wilfong said.
287 "His widow's journey. Oh! The shame of a working middle-class
288 woman in 1921!"

289 And, Wilfong said, "if I live long enough — I'm 78 — I
290 will eventually get around to writing the book I originally wanted
291 to write, about my Dad and his nine siblings."

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

292

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

293

0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

294

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

295

###END VIDEO###

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

###BEGIN LOGLINE###

296

###END LOGLINE###