

# Pro Libris

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wondered who else might be hiding among the rows of stories and what they might be reading.

I ventured among the stacks, wondering where the proprietor of the bookshop was. Without warning, he popped out from behind a bookshelf. A mass of mustache and hair preceded his appearance.

"Need any help?" he asked quietly.

"Just browsing! Thanks," I answered with a smile. He disappeared back into the stacks just as suddenly as he had appeared.

Eric Furry opened Pro Libris in 1980, the bright blue sign hanging above the bookshop door told me. His nose was buried in a book when I approached him to purchase the paperback tucked under my arm. I wondered what his story was.

"That's a good one," he said, pointing at Neil Gaiman's "Stardust"—my choice for the day. He asked me for a couple of dollars for the book, and I left quietly. But curiosity got the better of me. Who was the man behind the bookshop? When did he fall in love with stories?

I recently went back, wondering whether he

might be willing to answer my questions.

"Do you want to hear the story about how it happened?" Mr. Furry asked me during a recent visit, a kind smile on his face.

He opened Pro Libris 35 years, 4 months and 22 days ago — well, it was 22 days when I visited him — and he rattled off the number without a problem.

"When I was a little kid I would go to the library and come home with piles of books," Mr. Furry told me. After he graduated from college with a degree in liberal studies, he went to work for B. Dalton booksellers in Oklahoma, then in Ohio and finally in Maine.

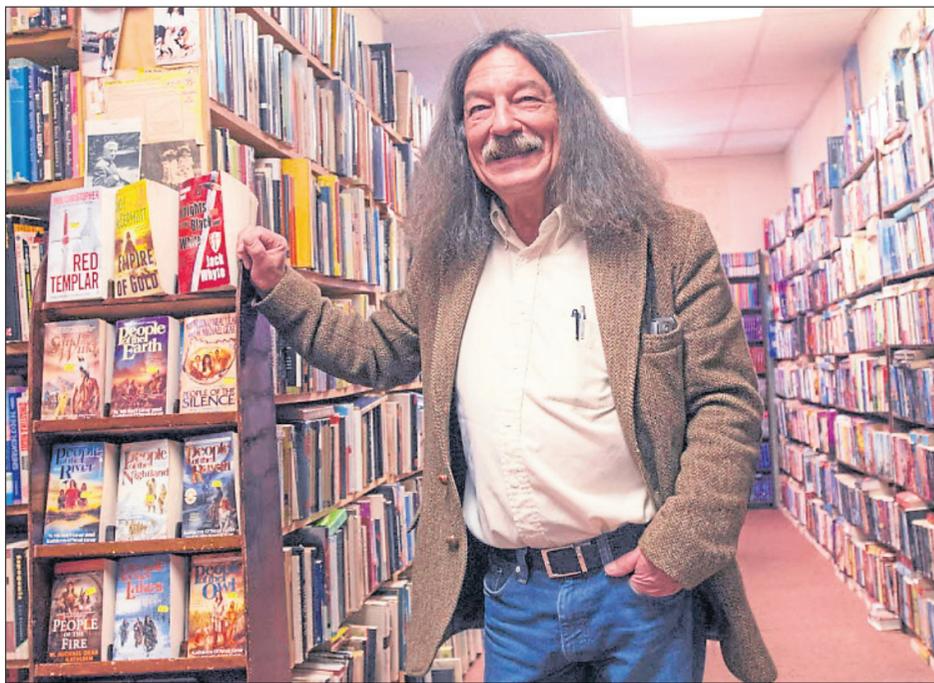
After work he would head down to Benjamin's, a now closed Bangor bar. That's where he met the man who eventually would help him start his own bookshop.

"He was a big burly guy," Mr. Furry said. He didn't look like the kind of man who should be messed with, especially in a bar.

But there was something in his hands that made Mr. Furry do a double take: He was reading Sylvia Plath.

Mr. Furry became a friend of his. Then one day he got a phone call. "He called me up and said, 'How would you like to open your own bookstore?'" Mr. Furry recalled.

He had 8,000 books he offered to sell Mr. Furry



Eric Furry, pictured in February 2014, is the proprietor of Pro Libris, 10 Third St. in Bangor.

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for a more than fair price, so he went for it.

Now, 35 years, 4 months and 22 days after he opened, he's still at it. He has made the place his home for himself and the occasional shop cat. The most recent was Keeper, which wandered in one day. He tried his best to find who she might belong to, but no one stepped forward, so she took up residence in Pro Libris.

Keeper passed away a little while ago. Mr. Furry said he misses her and still finds reminders of her every so often.

He lives next door to his bookshop and has even more books in his basement, which he searches through on occasion when customers have a request he can't find in the store.

But things have changed a lot since he first came on the scene.

"I'm making half of what I did 20 years ago, but it's OK," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "I can't compete with the Internet. That and Kindles are what have been killing me the past couple years."

But Mr. Furry doesn't let things like that bother him. He said he has no problem with people who choose to read electronic books. He is simply a proponent of reading, no mat-

ter the medium. I left Pro Libris with a new appreciation — for bookshop owners in general and for Mr. Furry.

As I walked away he seemed to melt back into the bookshop, a solitary soul nestled among stacks of stories, always ready to greet his next customer. So stop by. Maybe he'll point you to a story that will take you on a new adventure.

# Acadia

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former teachers at Bangor High School, Malcolm and Thelma Willis moved to Bar Harbor in the 1930s and opened a yarn shop, rock shop and watch shop.

Of the two, Malcolm Willis was especially interested in rocks and became an avid collector, purchasing vast quantities of minerals, some valuable and rare, others beautiful but worth little. The family is still digging through the remains of that collection today, sorting through hundreds of dusty crates and burlap sacks stored in the shop's basement.

"He got the fever bad," Roger Willis said. "There are about 10,000 pounds of semiprecious gems and stones in the basement."

A handyman, Malcolm Willis constructed a giant rock tumbler using the parts of an old Volkswagen Beetle, and he developed a custom blend of powders to polish the stones faster and smoother. Over the years, the Willis family refined this mixture, which is responsible for the high polish of their gems.

Willis jewelry — made from start to finish in the back rooms of the shop — quickly gained popularity on the island, mostly through word of mouth. The quality of the pieces became so revered that in 1955, the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce presented a tra-



Tourmaline and gold jewelry are seen recently at Willis' Rock Shop in Bar Harbor.

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ditional Willis bracelet to the first lady of the United States, Mamie Eisenhower, wife of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

As Malcolm Willis grew older, the shop and the tradition of jewelry-making was bestowed upon his sons Weston and Clayton Willis, and their wives, Jean and Geraldine, respectively. In turn, they passed the tradition on to their children.

"I grew up cutting granite," said Roger Willis. "As a teenager, I'd cut granite and agate into bookends for the shop."

Willis wasn't always sure he'd take over the shop. In fact, he went to college to become a social worker. He liked working with people and didn't think he'd like working with his hands for a living. But when his father, Weston Willis, became ill, he made the decision to buckle down and learn the fine art of jewelry-making.

Roger Willis has been

cutting stones for more than 40 years with a diamond-flecked blade. The high whine of the saw has slowly ruined his hearing, and the cold water that runs through the saw to reduce dust makes his hands ache. Sometimes he dislikes his work, but whether he knows it or not, it appears that he too has caught "rock fever."

In the back room of the shop, colorful gems litter his goldsmithing desk. Most are on their way to becoming classic pieces of Willis jewelry, but some rocks are there because he simply can't part with them.

A slice of watermelon tourmaline, its pattern resembling the shape of MDI, sits in his drawer.

"See how the pink is the land, and the green is the ocean?" Willis said.

He then held up a green rock the size of a softball, its blocky exterior a foggy green.

"This is an emerald," he said. "I can't bring myself to cut into it. It's so beautiful the way it is."

His wife shook her head at the remark, smiling. Hers is the face most customers see when they walk through the shop's front door.

"People go by and think we're just a touristy gift shop," she said. "We really are a hidden gem."

De-De Willis, daughter of Clayton Willis, also carries on the family tradition as a jewelry designer and goldsmith. And completing the jeweler team is the shops only non-family employee, Katie Dyer.

The shop's customer base still grows mostly from word of mouth, Roger Willis said, and many of their most loyal customers own summer homes on the island.

"People living on estates on the beach bring in their bags of rocks from their beach, and we'll make a custom piece for them [out of the rocks]," he said.

While the backroom of the shop is all about jewelry-making, the storefront is more diverse. Surrounding the glass jewelry cases is a variety of merchandise, small gifts that help keep the business alive. And lining the walls are shelves of rock specimens, from smoky quartz crystals to less familiar rocks such as the greenish-blue chrysocolla.

"We're a rock shop first and foremost," Willis said. "We like rocks."

Willis' Rock Shop is located at 69-73 Main Street in Bar Harbor.

# Fire

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quarters, studio space, a stipend of \$150 per week, and time for visual artists to reflect on, experiment, or develop their art while living in an artistically historic and beautiful location.

Corey said he did pretty well selling paintings during his first year of full-time painting, despite the financial recession that struck. He has had his paintings exhibited in galleries that include Maine Art Paintings and Sculpture in Kennebunk and the Landing Gallery in Rockland. He also was a participant in the 2012 Door County Plein Air Festival in Door County, Wisconsin, which is billed as one of the largest plein air events in the country.

But times have been lean in recent years. He has lived in a top-floor apartment of a three-story complex on Rockland's Main Street for the past three years. It has served as his home and studio. Three weeks ago, with money tight, he sold his 2003 Honda Element in order to pay rent.

Then two weeks ago, he was in his apartment preparing to update his blog about his art when the smoke alarm went off.

"Usually it is someone burning toast," Corey said.

He went to the front hallway, where his neighbors generally go to alert the other residents when the alarm is set off by burnt toast or some other cooking mishap, but no one else was there.

Then Corey decided to check the two back apartments on the first floor when he saw what looked like smoke in one of them. He eventually broke in the door. Thick smoke poured

out. He alerted a neighbor who called 911, and then he went upstairs knocking on each door before going back to his apartment to grab his cat Molly and get out of the building.

"I thought everything I had worked on was really in question of being destroyed," he said.

He credited the firefighters with putting out the fire quickly and saving the building.

When he was able to get back to his apartment, however, soot was everywhere. He has cleaned the paintings, and there remains only a hint of the smoke smell after two weeks. He said it was fortunate they were oil paintings on linen and canvas instead of water-based paintings, which would have been ruined. He said he probably has another week of cleaning the apartment before he can get back to painting.

Within a few days after the fire, and because of his financial situation, he decided to offer some of his collections at significantly discounted prices. One of items in the fire sale, for instance, is titled "Lobster Boat," which had been for sale for \$850 to \$900 but is now \$500.

He said his philosophy on painting is to look for color harmony that people may not notice at first. Corey states on his website that his works are created from direct observation and memory and are "inspired by light quality, color harmony and abstract shapes."

He also writes that he enjoys "the challenge of painting nontraditional views and subjects and the views that make Maine, Maine."

Anyone who is interested in buying pieces can send him a Facebook message or visit his website at <http://danielcorey.com>.

# Smiley

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and my parenting," Smiley said. "Maine relaxed me a little bit."

This is Smiley's fourth book, and first one published by Down East. The most challenging part of this one, she said, was facing her younger self.

"It's so hard to go back and look at in black and white — your thought process from eight years ago," Smiley said. "A lot of people if they could meet their younger self would want to argue with them."

As she was collecting columns for the book, Smiley said she resisted the urge to edit herself and thereby change the narrative that they created. That would defeat the purpose of the book.

And Smiley is first to admit that Maine has changed her in many ways.

"In Florida, I was very caught up in the 6-foot privacy fence jungle," Smiley said.

But Maine was different. It was more laid back and friendlier.

Moving to Maine, Smiley didn't just face a different climate (her kids hadn't seen snow before, and the family didn't even own windbreakers), they also found an entirely different

culture — one where kids ride bikes to baseball practice, play outside and mothers don't hover.

Schools also were smaller — whereas Smiley's oldest son, Ford, was in one of 14 kindergarten classes at his school in Florida, Owen entered kindergarten in Maine in one of two classes in his new school. And so was the whole feature of Bangor,

where the Smileys moved.

"I love here how you go to The Briar Patch [bookstore] and the owner knows your name and what books your kids have read," Smiley said.

This book, with a cover that she says she loves since it shows just how she feels about Maine, is special.

"I couldn't believe it took me 31 years to get to Maine," Smiley said. "[It's] the one

place I really want to belong to, [but] I will never be a Mainer."

A book launch party and signing for "Got Here As Soon As I Could" is planned for 5-7 p.m. Wednesday, April 6, at the Bangor Historical Society.

## River Cruising EVENING

MONDAY, APRIL 4, 2016 ♦ 6:00PM  
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<b>Men's Night</b> <i>Corn hole tournament. Mens give away.</i>	<b>Taco Tuesday</b> <i>\$2 tacos &amp; \$5 margaritas</i> <b>Lip Sync Battles</b> <i>from 9-11 P.M.</i>	<b>Ladies Night</b> <i>with Margaritas, Martinis, &amp; Makeovers (door prizes including salon gift certificates &amp; designer handbags)</i>
THURSDAY	FRIDAY & SATURDAY	SUNDAY
<b>8-10 P.M. Trivia</b> <b>Family Night</b> <i>kids eat for \$2</i>	<b>Live Music</b>	<b>Watch for the return of Reggae Sunday</b>

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