LOST ON MARCY

A sister finally finds peace

BY ANNIE STOLTIE

FORTY-THREE YEARS AGO Buddy Atkinson, a 20-year-old from western Massachusetts, called home to say he'd arrived safely in the Adirondacks. He parked his dad's aging Lincoln Continental at the Adirondak Loj, signed the Van Hoevenberg trailhead register, and then he was gone.

It's a 7.5-mile trek to Marcy's 5,343-foot summit. In summer the mountain is congested with hikers; in winter it's still a bucket-list destination, but crowds thin as the peak turns white. That's when frigid blasts of wind disorient even the most experienced mountaineer. Snow dumps and drifts in epic piles, swallowing trail markers and covering snowshoe tracks. And almost every year, rangers bring hypothermic hikers down the mountain.

Last November three men were unprepared for the temperatures that froze their clothing and gear; they called 911 and were rescued about four hours later. Last February a woman, separated from her hiking group, sent a distress signal from her personal locator beacon just after noon; she was rescued before dinnertime. Two years ago a woman called 911 when she and her two young boys got lost in a whiteout; they were rescued the following day. In 2012, after a snowstorm split a man from his hiking party, he dug a snow shelter and dialed 911; his rescuers reached him the next morning.

Buddy Atkinson, lost in an era before cell phones and other technology, wasn't so lucky. His remains were discovered just above Panther Gorge three and a half years after he vanished.

People climb Marcy, the loftiest peak in New York State, for the challenge, the bragging rights and the views. For Atkinson, Marcy was a place of serenity and escape.

His sister, Pat Atkinson-Sirois, says that when her brother set off all those years ago, he was mourning the recent loss of his mother, working an unsatisfying job in his hometown and dreaming of attending college out West. She says, "If I have to take some solace in this whole thing, it's that he lost his life in a place he absolutely loved."

Pat was an 18-year-old college freshman when her brother disappeared. On school breaks she'd join her dad to scour the mountain and its surroundings, searching for Buddy.

Today, Pat is 62, living near Chicopee, where she and Buddy grew up. "I'm still working through it," she says. "After Buddy was found, I just couldn't bring myself to go back [to the Adirondacks] ... or I just tucked it away and thought, Someday."

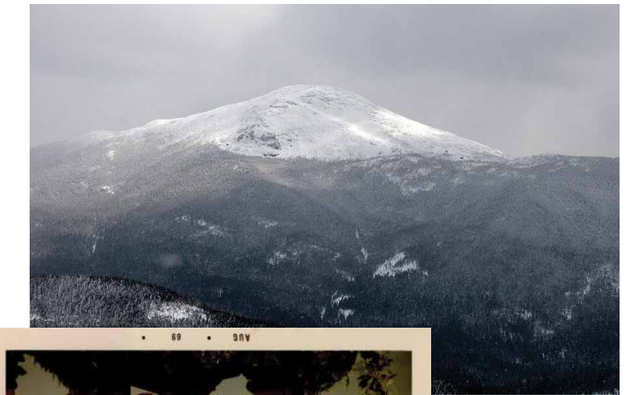
Last August, four decades after the search for Buddy ended, Pat returned. She brought a stone from a local quarry on which she'd engraved her brother's name. En route to Marcy Dam, she and her husband, Al, hid the memorial near the trailhead where Buddy had last signed in, "as a way to honor him, as a reminder that he died there."

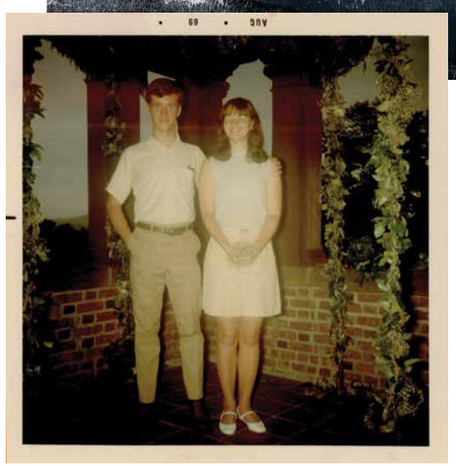
After their hike, they parked their car along Adirondack Loj Road's shoulder so Pat could "see that vista one more time"—Mount Marcy's ancient dome crowning the High Peaks, pushing into the clouds.

"We just sat there the longest time," she says. "It was breathtaking, so beautifully peaceful. At the same time, I thought of Buddy being all by himself up there, how he must have felt so alone. I felt such deep sadness."

And then a hawk circled up, against the late-summer sky and a landscape that had brought Pat and her family so much pain. "It was as though my brother were saying, 'I'm OK, I'm OK, I'm OK ... my soul is still here.' I thought, I'll take that as a sign—I'll go with it."

Buddy's "is a tough story to tell," says Pat. But "if all it does is have somebody remember my brother, that's what I want." ▲





Clockwise from left: **Pat Atkinson-Sirois places a memorial to her brother, Buddy, along the trail to Mount Marcy, where he disappeared in March 1973. Buddy and Pat in 1969. Almost every winter, hikers are rescued from Marcy, New York's highest peak.**

MOUNT MARCY PHOTOGRAPH BY CARL HEILMAN II. SNAPSHOTS COURTESY OF PAT ATKINSON-SIROIS

BOOKS AND BEYOND

The places that bring us together

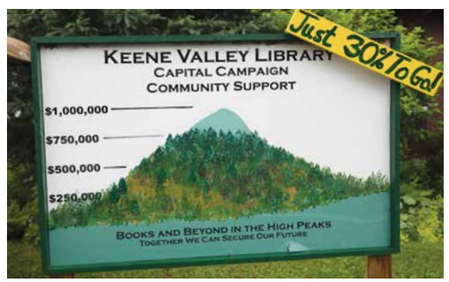
BY ANNIE STOLTIE

Library director Karen Glass at the Keene Valley Library, which serves as a community hub for the High Peaks hamlet.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISA J. GODFREY

WHERE I GREW UP, in a well-populated town just beyond the Blue Line, our public library was a towering, columned institution where you tiptoed and whispered. So in all my years of living in the Adirondacks and frequenting our teeny hamlet libraries, their lack of, well, quiet, still feels a little naughty, like spitting watermelon seeds or clapping between the movements of a symphony. But it's just this laid-back atmosphere, as well as the books that line the walls, that makes me love and appreciate these local hangouts.

Upper Jay's Wells Memorial Library hosts art exhibitions, concerts, craft workshops, theater rehearsals, baby showers and birthday parties. Old Forge Library has a dizzying schedule of authors' events, quilting clubs, story strolls, babysitting clinics, writing seminars, seniors' bingo, open mic nights and readers' theater. In Keene Valley kids gather at the library for Minecraft and chess tournaments, Lego-building, movie nights, sleepovers and storytelling. Adults come for readings and lectures and, a couple of years back, even a wedding.



Unlike most calendars of events in the Adirondacks, the ones for these places—and libraries across the park—are packed year-round, even ramping up in the deepest, darkest of winter. Our libraries offer tangible things like books, of course, but also the face-to-face interaction that rural communities and a world connected by the abbreviated communication on little screens sometimes lacks.

At 11 each morning in the Keene Valley Library, director Karen Glass, her staff and anyone else who wants to join in, drop everything for a cup of tea and conversation. Glass describes the library as a place that goes beyond serving as a resource, fulfilling the role of community center. She says, "There's no requirement to belong here, everyone's welcome. A library is the ultimate expression of democracy."

Keene Valley Library is in the final stretch of a million-dollar capital campaign for infrastructure upgrades to the 132-year-old building, but also to add a Community Media & Education Center, an expanded kids' space, and a Craft Center & Makerspace with a 3-D printer. "My fantasy," says Glass, "is to walk down the street and, when people say, 'Where can I build this or make a quilt or record a song?' tell them, 'At the library.'"

Old Forge Library's director, Izzie Worthen, describes her library, where she's been at the helm for 41 years, as "a community facility. Kids, dogs—it's a happening place, but that's what we want libraries to be."

That's nothing new. "All these little libraries were founded by people who wanted a place where they could go to get books and see friends," says Worthen. "It was important for people to have them in their lives. That's why it's important for them to continue to be strong. Libraries adapt and serve their people in that way."

Adirondackers might need them now more than ever before. Most social hubs like general stores have shuttered. Many post offices have closed or offer choppy, unpredictable hours. But libraries endure. And the faces behind the front desk—or floating around, greeting everyone who comes through the door, helping folks find books or log on to computers or determine the next chess move or simply listening—become an invaluable part of our lives.

Through the years I've witnessed Upper Jay librarian Karen Rappaport chat with people about books, but also health ailments, pets, weather, grandkids, neighbors and the height of the Ausable River that practically flows in the library's backyard. Recently, when I brought my stack of books to Rappaport for checkout, we joked that because of her kind, patient "sessions" with library-goers, a better title for her might be "bookologist." She laughed and then, as she made her way through my pile, I proceeded to tell her all of my problems. ▲

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

When home is six million acres

BY ANNIE STOLTIE

ILLUSTRATION BY BRUCIE ROSCH

YESTERDAY I HIT a turkey in McCollums. I slowed my car as a half-dozen of them jogged across the highway. They passed, I accelerated, then, too late, a straggler appeared from a roadside curtain of pines, sprinting to catch up. I feel awful about it.

In the last year, I've circumnavigated the Adirondack Park, criss-crossed it, zipped from east to west, north to south and back again. And again. Between the classes I teach at a college beyond the Blue Line, my research for a regional guidebook, assignments for this magazine, and family fun, I've been on the road a lot, a lamentable load on my carbon footprint, but a bonus in exploring the place I've spent almost 20 years covering for *Adirondack Life*. The magazine's readers and contributors share plenty about their hamlet happenings, but armchair editing just gives you a screenshot. Roadside observation at least gets you deeper, filling the frames.

In Hopkinton, sun-colored anti-wind-power signs line Route 11B, where Amish buggies trot past a new Dollar General. In Lake Placid, on a narrow residential road—a detour from congested Main Street—a woman in an SUV gives me the finger. Near Batchellerville, the sliced-off bow of *Maria*, repurposed into a balcony, protrudes from a camp overlooking the Sacandaga reservoir. At a Tupper Lake beer garden, cornhole draws exuberant players in Paul Smith's College T-shirts. In Hope, a bedspread-size Confederate flag hangs from a porch. After a wrong turn between Owls Head and Mountain View—no signs, no cell signal—back roads become forest tunnels that eventually loop a half-hour in the wrong direction. At a Long Lake pulloff, a limp chipmunk dangles from the beak of a raven. From Mount Defiance, in Ticonderoga, the fortification and bateaux below give a bird's-eye history lesson. Later, at Ti's Carillon battlefield, my kids and I stand where 259 years ago, thousands of men died. My daughter scoops up a toad that pees on her palm; my son and his wooden pistol from the fort's gift shop disappear behind General Montcalm's overgrown abatis, its contour snaking near a monument to the Black Watch.

All of this is the Adirondacks, but behind the steering wheel I see little commonality, except for the Stewart's Shops and ADK bumper stickers. St. Regis Falls is nothing like Bolton Landing—same goes for Thendara and New Russia. As the crow flies, Forestport, in the western Adirondacks, and Franconia, in western New Hampshire, are equidistant from my home in Jay.

The Adirondack Park has its Blue Line to designate things like land use, zoning and, in the case of *Adirondack Life*, what will make it onto these pages. But who, beyond environmentalists, rangers, contractors and magazine editors, obsesses over a phantom boundary? And why should we care about the millions of acres within it?

In my writing classes I coax my students to explore identity by describing the place they call home. It's an exercise that inevitably leads to a discussion about home as a concept; "It's a feeling," they tell me. "You know when it's there."

What I do know is the relief that comes with those Entering the Adirondack Park signs; that when I'm away and asked where I live, I say, "The Adirondacks"; that if I had a choice, I don't know where else I'd go. And stay.

The creature I hit was an Adirondack turkey. I'd still feel bad if it had happened anyplace else, but I killed it on my homeland, which makes it even worse.