

Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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“National Library Week Celebration”

It's not your grandmother's library. Libraries are no longer just buildings full of books. They are a primary community resource for computer use, multimedia lending and even literary events. The week of April 9-14th is an opportunity for people to recognize the contributions of their local library as part of National Library Week. Marci Retzlaff, assistant youth services/interlibrary loan librarian at the Norfolk Public Library said events will be held at the Norfolk library to celebrate the week.

On Monday April 9 at 6:30 p.m. Melanie Wilkinson of York will talk about her series of books entitled “Just Life” based on life lessons learned from growing up and raising her siblings on a farm near Elgin. Wilkinson is a reporter and columnist for the York News-Times daily newspaper. Her columns have garnered numerous awards from the Nebraska Press Association and the Associated Press.

“Wilkinson's writing is a reflection of her own life's difficulties and triumphs, as experienced by all of us as we go through our personal journeys,” Retzlaff said. (more info on sidebar.)

The movie “Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure” will be shown at the library on April 11 at 2:30 p.m. No admittance fee will be charged. On April 11 there will also be a cookie and cupcake decorating class which is already full.

On April 13 at 10:00 a.m. there will be a workshop to learn more about using the free music download service, Freegal, and the free book downloading service, Nebraska Overdrive. Jessica Chamberlain, Northeast Nebraska Library System Director, will demonstrate the uses of e-readers including the Nook, Kindle and iPad when accessing Overdrive and encourages people to bring their devices to the workshop.

The Young Adult Book Club meets at the library at 2:30 p.m. on April 14. A scavenger hunt with prizes will be held at the library for all ages that day from 10:00 am to 4:30 p.m.

Throughout the week, people are encouraged to stop in and see what's going on at the Norfolk library. Retzlaff said that kids can make bookmarks and door prizes will be given throughout the week.

First sponsored in 1958, National Library Week is a national observance sponsored by the American Library Association and libraries across the country every April.

Norfolk Public Library usage according to the Norfolk City Council by Library Director Michael Caldararo.

In 1991 the library had 67,908 volumes. It currently has more than 126,000 volumes.

In 1992 the library circulated 200,841 items. In 2011 that number increased to 324,000. Usage of library materials has increased 60% in the last 20 years.

From 1991 to 1996 an average of 38.5 people entered the library each hour. Since 2006 an average of 50 people enter the library hourly.

From 2010 to 2011 the Norfolk Public Library has held 282 programs with a total attendance of 9,095 people.

More than 30,000 Internet sessions were logged at the library from 2009-2010.

Interview with Melanie Wilkinson:

How long have you been writing?

As long as I can remember, I've been writing. When other little kids were playing house – for whatever reason, I was playing “newspaper.” I've always loved writing and am fortunate to have the opportunity to have writing as my profession. I worked for the Neligh News and Leader for a number of years, starting when I was 22, and then we moved to York. I started working at the York News-Times in 1998, where I still am, covering crime, government, etc. I also have a weekly column.

What made you decide to write a book(s)?

My family went through a number of things, losing my father just before I turned 16. He had an accident on our farm, leaving behind my mother and seven children. Then, tragically, just a few years later, my 15-year-old sister, Nancy, and her friend were killed in a car accident. And then just nine months after Nancy's death, my mother died suddenly from an asthma attack. I had to quit college and move home, as I had minor siblings. My now-husband, Jerry, and I got married and were able to get custody of my younger sisters, ages 9, 11 and 12, whom we raised. Amazingly, they all grew up – and are normal, wonderful people today, with families of their own. My brothers are still on the family farm and too, have families. We survived. That said, people had always told me I should write a book.

It wasn't until a few years ago that I received a phone call from an elderly man who said he read my column every week. It was about a month before Christmas and he said he was “sick of cutting out my columns and sending them to his children. Would you just write a book so I could easily give them your stories for Christmas?” That's what spawned the idea – to write a book that is a collection of short stories about not just my past, but life as it is today. The intention of the book was to have people reflect on their own lives – the good, the bad, the funny and the sad. And to take a look at the people in their lives – past and present – and realize we all have triumphs and tragedies. That's why I called it “Just Life.” The response was great – and led to the second book, with the same title, but Part 2.

Who seem to be your primary readers and what responses have you had from them?

The range of readers has been interesting. I've heard from many people who have experienced death in their families – and are looking for a way to survive their grief. Hopefully, my story is one that we can survive anything – with faith and patience and the realization that we're never alone.

But there have also been people who say they love the funny stories – about characters in my life that remind them of the same in theirs. I guess readers have ranged from elderly men to teenagers, to women of all ages.

How long does it take you to write a book?

Seeing how my books are collections of my column and other original pieces, it took me about a year for each.

How long of process was it from writing the book to having it in hand?

Approximately three months.

Do you have plans for writing other books?

Just Life Part 3 is pretty much completed and I'd like to have it published by October. I'm also in the process of my first re-print of Part 1, as I'm nearly sold out.

Who are other authors that you admire?

There are many, but I have to say that I have been most influenced by Laura Ingalls Wilder. As a child, I read her collection of books over and over and over and I loved how she told such fascinating stories about just normal people, normal experiences in her own life. As an adult, I read them now and again and realize I have almost memorized some of her passages. I love that this girl, living such a simple life, could grow up and in the twilight of her life turn those experiences into such a wonderful collection that touched thousands of people.

Anything else you want to tell us about yourself?

Just that I grew up west of Norfolk, in the Elgin/Neligh/Clearwater area – the daughter of a dairy farmer and a farm wife. And that I wake up every day, thanking God that not only did my family get through those trying times, we've had wonderful moments of laughter and craziness before and since.