From blog to book, Salem native traces ‘Mister Rogers’

Tim Lybarger co-authors book he’ll be signing at Bryan-Bennett Library Feb. 22

BY DENNIS ROSENBERGER
FOR THE SENTINEL

SALEM — Salem native Tim Lybarger has spent the last 10 years creating an online archive of all things related to Fred Rogers and the “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” television show, and last year he published a book featuring photos and stories about the beloved children’s television personality.

Lybarger will be at the Bryan-Bennett Library in Salem on Saturday, Feb. 22, for a book signing for “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood: A Visual History” from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

He said that his involvement with the book grew out of the work that he has done on The Neighborhood Archive, a website he created to document anything and everything associated with the classic kids show.

According to Lybarger, the book was already in the works at Clarkson Potter, an imprint of Penguin Random House, when the initial author assigned to the project reached out to him.

“With the movie that just came out last fall, featuring Tom Hanks, the folks at Clarkson Potter had the idea to do such a book and they proposed it to one of the other authors, Melissa Wagner, and as she was starting to research stuff she came across what I have been doing.

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online for the last 10 years or so," said Lybarber. "So she contacted me and asked me if I would be interested in being a part of the writing team." The two of us started working on the "Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" during the summer of 2019, according to Lybarber.

He explained how the Neighborhood Archive started.

"Several years ago, I was looking for some information on the movie "Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," and there was nothing online that was comprehensive. I thought it was kind of shame," Lybarber said. "I started it out as a blog just to see if there was anything there, and to get a feel of what kind of response there might be, and it just so happened that it took off, and people started hearing from people right away."

After the blog got a lot of traffic, Lybarber said he had established a website, which he then set up to be a more organized version of the blog.

"So that's where the Neighborhood Archive site came into play," he said. It didn't take long before Lybarber was contacted by people associated with Rogers.

"Riggle in Pittsburgh, at Fred Rogers Productions, kind of caught wind of what I was doing that fall, and then contacted me, and started working together, unofficially, and they provided me with information to document," he said.

The site features information about almost anything that has ever happened associated with Fred Rogers and "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," according to Lybarber.

"The tag line on the website is 'A collection of all things 'Mr. Rogers,'" he said. "I'll do the best I can to provide really detailed documentation of every episode of the show."

He said the site would eventually be expanded to include books and more.

"In 'Sinfeld,' for example, he popped up in the background as a player in one episode," said Lybarber.

As for the book, Lybarber said he received an email message from the friend of Fred Rogers, with the subject line "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" coming out last year and a documentary "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" released in 2018, it just seemed like the right time for the project, and the authors actually got cooperation from Sony Pictures, the studio that released "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood." According to Lybarber, it was to get access to information that was used in "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood: A Visual History.

"The last section of the book is dedicated to the creation of the film," Lybarber said. "We were contacted by, who provided us with some photographs and information as they recreated the old show for the movie."

And that cooperation with the filmmakers led to another interesting development for the book, he added.

"Our forward was actually written by Tom Hanks," said Lybarber.

"Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood: A Visual History" features an array of photographs from throughout the television show's run, according to Lybarber.

"This is also a good amount of text, too, because we have a lot of individual interviews with different people who were actually involved with the show "Mr. Rogers Neighborhood," he explained. "But the majority of the book includes really vibrant photographs that you might not have seen before."

The photographs in the book came from several different sources.

"A lot of them came from The Fred Rogers Center in Latrobe, Pa.," Lybarber explained. "And a few photos we were able to get from various photographers."

He noted that it should appeal to anyone, like himself, who watched the show when they were younger.

"People who grew up with the show will be just amazed at the nostalgia that comes up in them as they look through this," said Lybarber.

As a Salem native, Lybarber said he was pleased to be coming back to town to share his work with the community during the book signing on Feb. 22.

"I used to work at Bryant-Bennett Library when I was in high school," he said. "So to go back and do a book signing at the library where I worked more than 20 years ago, it's just a cool and surreal experience." And Bryant-Bennett Library director Kim Keller is looking forward to hosting the book signing with Lybarber.

"Tim grew up in this area," said Keller. "People here went to school with him and we're looking forward to welcoming him home during the book signing."

Lybarber attended Selma College, and graduated from Salem Community High School in 1994. He is the son of Bob and the late Susan. He currently works as a school counselor in Mahomet, Illinois.

Lybarber notes that his love for "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" is based on the message that Fred Rogers put into all of his work.

"On the surface, it just sounds kind of crazy that I'm in my early 40s and I'm spending all this time documenting something that had such a profound impact on me," he said."

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multiple ways to respond, whether online, by phone or by mail.

According to the Census Bureau website, you will ask for information such as the number of people living in the household, and the date of April 1 of this year. Respondents will also be asked for the race, gender, and age of each member of the household, among other questions.

However, Smith said, census information must be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone, even with law enforcement.

Smith said that the other never ask for sensitive items such as a person's Social Security number, bank account information or a credit card number.