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Books: Michener's Brian Peterson explores life's pain and pleasures



Brian H. Peterson

By Stephanie Weaver; Correspondent

What are the necessary ingredients of a creative life? Local curator and art critic, Brian H. Peterson, asks just that question in his new book, "The Smile at the Heart of Things," which was released on Jan. 1.

"I wanted to write a different kind of book other than scholarly books," Peterson said, "I was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and it rocked my world. I felt this sense of 'what am I waiting for' about things that I wanted to do and how I should do them. I started writing down words and things that got me excited and were meaningful to me. Those words — nourishment, honesty,

beauty, depth and hunger — became the core aspects of my book. Each section is a meditation on that particular quality."

For many years, Peterson has led two lives. He worked as a museum curator at the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown by day, and pursued his passion of photography by night.

“I think it’s a fairly common phenomenon people feel, this need for a creative life,” Peterson said, “And there’s this conflict to keep body and soul together. Your jobs, and other necessary aspects of your life, can distract you from your creativity and beauty and wonderfulness of your job.”

“The Smile at the Heart of Things” is much more than advice on how one should lead a creative life. It is essentially a book about life; including all aspects of it, from the celebration to the sadness.

“If you develop an attitude about life challenges, including death, of not being afraid and letting it work its way through your system, there is an opening up of your life,” Peterson commented. “Your whole relationship with life can be different. You’ll be more grateful and appreciate the simple things. There is hope inside that loss and beauty on the other side.”

“I wanted to try and explore a different kind of writing,” Peterson said. “I wanted to practice the art of story-telling. The book is a collection of both old and new essays. There is one about my dog that a lot of people seem to relate to.”

Ultimately, “The Smile at the Heart of Things” paints a truthful picture of life from all angles. Peterson never shies away from the pain and despair, and finds hope and meaning in even the most difficult of times.

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