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'Peregrine Island' follows the story of three generations of women through alternating points of view, with imagery inspired by Saxton's experience living by the Long Island Sound on Shippan Point in Connecticut.

Great Barrington journalist garners critical praise for her debut novel, 'Peregrine Island'

By Julie Ruth

Years before journalist Diane Saxton and her family moved to Egremont, they lived on Shippan Point, a peninsula off the Connecticut coast, where they were surrounded by the Long Island Sound.

Saxton, a staff writer for *Vanity Fair*, *Greenwich Review* and *Holiday Magazine*, lived on the Sound for 16 years, "and I grew to respect it in almost a spiritual way," she said.

"Every day was different: when I looked out into the waves, the sky above it; when I felt the wind, its breath; when I tasted its salt, it was hypnotizing... I was afraid of it, yet I was awed by its beauty and its continuous movement. It was alive; it breathed."

Saxton's descriptive language of the Sound fills her debut novel, "Peregrine Island," and is one of many reasons the novel has been generating critical praise since it was published this past August. "The brine of the island is almost like another character in the book, and it permeates the fabric of the story," as *BookTrib.com* put it.

The Sound is the closest thing to a real-life character in "Peregrine Island," said Saxton, who has created a complex plot which is both a fast-paced mystery story, and a literary novel that explores the

secrets in three generations of the dysfunctional Peregrine family, who live together on a remote, privately-owned island on Long Island Sound.

The story is told through the voices of three Peregrine females in alternate chapters, allowing the reader to hear the story from three distinct points of view: Winter, the staid matriarch; Elsie, her "wild child" daughter; and Peda, her dreamy, precocious grandchild.

The Peregrine women relate distantly to each other, if at all, until one summer day, when so-called "art experts" from the Getty Museum suddenly arrive on the island. They want to appraise a beloved family heirloom painting, which they think could be worth millions. The appraisal begins, and to everyone's surprise, they find documents and additional canvases of paintings hidden within its frame, which triggers an investigation by detectives.

As the mystery behind the painting unfolds, multiple family secrets are revealed, with plot twists and drama "reminiscent of the best of Daphne DuMaurier," according to one editorial review.

"With a roster of carefully crafted characters and a deftly woven plot," said the *Midwest Book Review*, "Peregrine Island" is a riveting read from beginning to end, and clearly showcases author Diane Saxton as a consummately skilled novelist."

Saxton's detailed description of the appraisal process and vivid passages about the art world are drawn from her own experience and fascination with art and museums.

The art mystery at the heart of "Peregrine Island" was inspired by a painting she especially admires: a watercolor by 19th century French artist Luigi Loir. "I love the artist and I just love the feel of the painting," Saxton said. "It connotes another era, and I love going back in time."

The Bookstore in Lenox and The Lenox Library Association will sponsor a reading and discussion with Saxton about "Peregrine Island" on Tuesday, Oct. 18 at 5:30 p.m. at the Lenox Library, 18 Main Street, followed by an informal wine and cheese reception.

Saxton has been a resident of the Berkshires since 1989, when she moved with her husband Neil and three young children from their home on Shippan Point. She missed the Sound terribly at first, but quickly discovered that the panoramic view from her Egremont home changes daily, just like the Sound.

"Early morning sunrises are the best," Saxton said. "Spiritual in a way that no other time of day can mimic: spectacular colors that morph from pastels to the deep primary colors of a mature day. That azure sky against the mountains, that ball of yellow sun against the dark green



Stephen G. Donaldson

Diane Saxton

trees — and in the winter against the pure white of the snow. More than any other time of day."

Saxton is currently at work on a historical novel inspired by her interviews with Amnesty International US founder Hannah Grunwald and other people with intriguing lives from the Greatest Generation. She has preserved their stories in a 1,000 page biographical anthology which serves as the basis for her next novel.

"Peregrine Island" (She Writes Press) is available for purchase at The Bookstore, 11 Housatonic Street, in Lenox, and The Bookloft, 332 Stockbridge Road in Great Barrington along with Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble.com and other sites online. For more information about Saxton and her work, visit www.dianebsaxton.com.