

The Monocacy MONOCLE

Keeping An Eye On Local News

Sugarloaf Forever

By Dominique Agnew
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Tina Thieme Brown's house is totally Sugarloaf. Walk out her back door and behold – Sugarloaf Mountain. In her house one can see Sugarloaf Mountain from all the rooms. Her art studio has views of the mountain, as well. What an amazing house? No, what an amazing



Tina Brown

artist. The main focus of Tina's work is usually Sugarloaf Mountain – different views and especially its plant life – and her artwork is on display throughout her house. So, if you can't see the actual mountain, the real thing, you can enjoy renditions of Sugarloaf Mountain on her walls as oil paintings, watercolors, or ink drawings.

Tina's childhood was far removed from Sugarloaf Mountain, however. She grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, the second child in a family

of eight. She remembers being outside all the time, immersed in nature. By day, she played outside. By night, she remembers sleeping in the sunroom with all of the windows open, listening to the nighttime sounds of the outdoors. Her father loved to camp and this contributed to her love of nature. "For Jackie and Armand Thieme: They sent me out to play, and I fell in love with the flowers and the trees." This is the dedication she put in the second book on Sugarloaf Mountain she has illustrated, *An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodlands Flowers and Trees*, written by Melanie

Choukas-Bradley.

Interestingly, Tina didn't begin her career with plans to become a botanical artist although she has been an artist for twenty-five years. After receiving her Master's degree in Fine Arts, she decided to pursue a second Master's degree in Liberal Arts. Her initial focus had been landscape settings, and she knew she wanted to use art to promote environmental awareness. With this in mind, she felt that the interdisciplinary studies of science,

literature, and history of the Liberal Arts Master's would help her to convey her message. It was while she was on a field trip for her degree in the late '80s in Costa Rica that the seed was sown, so to speak. Her professor happened to say that while it was important to learn about the environment in Costa Rica, it couldn't be as helpful "until people understand what's in their own backyards."

This idea took root in Tina's mind. At this time, she and her husband and two sons were living in Washington, D.C. She spent the next ten years commuting every day to Sugarloaf until she finally convinced her husband to move to Barnesville five years ago (now he gets the commute). While her botanical prints are incredibly detailed and precise, her oil paintings and watercolors are, for her, "a garden rêverie – a getting lost in the beauty of the plants."

Tina met Melanie Choukas-Bradley at a Natural Audubon Society wildflower identification class. They have since collaborated on many projects focusing on Sugarloaf, two of which are books: *Sugarloaf: The Mountain's History, Geology, and Natural Lore* and the aforementioned *Illustrated Guide*. The first book is just what the title conveys, an overview of the history of the mountain. The beautiful cover shows a view of the mountain as painted by Tina from the Comus area. *The Illustrated Guide* "tells the story of the mountain through the plants," and appeals to people of all ages from children learning how to properly identify plants and trees to scientists. It includes countless drawings of plants and the details that define them.

To meet Tina Thieme Brown and view her extraordinary artwork, visit her during the Autumn Studio Tour, October 15, 16, and 17. On display will be oil paintings, watercolors, pencil drawings, and prints of local flora and fauna. Some

of her artwork, as well as the two books, will be available for purchase. She will also be leading a hike on Sugarloaf Mountain November 13. On these hikes, she encourages attendees to bring along sketchbooks to make "plant portraits to capture the posture of the plant." The interactive component of sitting for a spell and drawing nature helps one "develop a whole new relationship – it opens doors to the plant community," Tina explains. If a person even "keeps a journal for himself, it can give a new vocabulary." For the truly enthused, Tina will be teaching botanical drawing at the U.S. Botanic Garden this winter.

It comes as no surprise that Tina Brown is active on behalf of the Ag Reserve to preserve Sugarloaf and its outlying areas. She speaks eloquently about the beauty of the Monocacy area through her words, and especially, through her art.



A Lady Slipper,
by Tina Thieme Brown