A Woman's Life: The Story Of An Ordinary American And Her Extraordinary Generation

Susan Cheever
On March 25, the first Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People conversation was held at the West Tisbury library, an event sponsored by the library in collaboration with The MV Times. Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People is the brainchild of West Tisbury resident Alan Brigish. In the course of the conversation, Waters spoke of his experiences growing up as an American citizen in Brazil; feeling like an immigrant upon returning to the States; Waters’ fascination with printing presses; his experiences as town moderator of West Tisbury; and his latest project, putting Martha’s Vineyard in a time capsule.
Without further ado, here are eight ordinary people with extraordinary stories:

1. A photographer saves his friend from slavery. A man named Ben Randall, an Australian photographer, went to Vietnam many years ago and photographed 100 people. In 2011, a friend Randall met while there was reported missing. Randall heard the news and returned to Asia, hoping to investigate her disappearance.

2. A woman stops a school shooting with only words. Antoinette Tuff, a school clerk at an elementary school in Georgia, saw a gunman barge into the school and took action. She was not armed and had no prior training. However, she had a back story, and she knew the gunman did, too. She remained calm and merely talked to the man carrying an AK-47 assault rifle. A portrait of a young woman, whose destiny remains unchanged by the historical convulsions around her, is a curiously uplifting read.

Sophia’s experience of the execution encapsulates what, for me, *The Old Wives’ Tale* is really about: ordinary people caught up in the complexities and contradictions of a historical moment they cannot comprehend, governed by inexorable forces beyond their control and from which they cannot escape. *The Old Wives’ Tale* is about the coming of modernity, a process endlessly renewing itself, captivating and then overtaking each generation in its course. Woolf, though I hardly dare say it, is wrong: it is precisely the “true and enduring aspects of life that are Bennett’s theme. But no life is a mere statistic, and the story of Linda Green has the trajectory and the power of a novel. At the age of five, pretty Linda was her parents’ princess, at sixteen she was a cheerleader, but by the time she was twenty she and her high-school-sweetheart husband were moving down an uncharted road marked the 1960s.

Turning the idea of celebrity biography inside out, Susan Cheever explores the heart and mind of her generation with this powerful true story of the life of an ordinary woman whose experiences as a wife, mother, lover, teacher, and friend are a fascinating prism for readers of any generation. At forty-five, Linda Green is a statistical norm: a working mother of two children who lives with her second husband in a Boston suburb.