

F E R G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ www.ferguselectric.coop

FHS grad publishes first novel

Story and photos by
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Contributing Writer

A lot of people say, “I can write a book.”

Eighteen-year-old Tessa Gatz of Lewistown really meant it.

One night at home last fall, after watching an episode of *Friends* on Netflix, inspiration struck.

“I can’t really explain it,” she said. “I just thought I’d give it a try.”

After sitting in front of a blank screen for a few minutes, an idea came to mind, as did a title: *The Fire in the Dark: The Truth Will Always Come Out*.

Two hundred and sixty-seven pages later, the novel was complete — a fiery teen romance built on action and suspense.

The book is narrated by Jacy, a 16-year-old high-school student who suddenly finds herself in a tangled mess of deception, unsure of who to trust. When her brother John returns home after being overseas for several months, nothing is as it seems. She can tell John is hiding something, but what?

And what happened to Uncle Larry? For months, he was squatting with Jacy and her family, spending most of his time on the couch. Suddenly — and with no explanation — he gets up, dresses up in a three-piece suit and takes off, his slicked-back hair making him look like a gangster.

Jacy’s world is flipped upside down, and it gets even more complicated once love interests Luke and Thomas get thrown into the mix.

At first, Jacy thinks Luke is just one



Tessa Gatz reads a chapter from her novel during her book signing at Six 18 Coffee in Lewistown, the same place she did most of her writing.

of the cool guys at her school — a harmless, handsome ladies’ man — but, no, it turns out Luke is just as mysterious as her older brother. He’s also dangerous...or is he?

Tessa takes her reader for a ride: one chapter Jacy is at the fair with her friends, and by the next chapter she’s in Russia. From one place to the next, there are new characters and new developments — and nothing is as it seems. Everyone is playing a game, including Jacy, who has to deceive

others along the way to stay safe and get the answers she seeks.

Book signing and beyond

Shortly after receiving her Fergus High School diploma, Tessa received boxes of her published work. She celebrated by holding a book signing party at Six 18 Coffee, the location she wrote most of the novel.

“I’d come here and write before school most mornings, and often come back to write more in the afternoon,” said Tessa. “When the story started picking up, I’d start writing at night, too, sometimes staying up past 1 or 2 in the morning.”

The coffeehouse was packed that June evening, as people of all ages — fans, family and friends — gathered to congratulate the young fiction writer.

“I’m really impressed Tessa did this and was so self-driven,” said Tessa’s father, Bryan. “It’s also great to see the community respond the way it has. We are blessed to live somewhere so supportive of the youth.”

Tessa’s mother, Tricia, expressed pride in her daughter’s creativity and talent.

“We had no idea she was such a writer,” Tricia said, “and neither did she (laughs). It’s been an exciting journey for all of us.”

Many community members are also taking this journey.

“I found *The Fire in the Dark* very intriguing,” said Jeri Lynn Haugen, a family friend. “It’s one of those books you start and can’t put down...and it totally leaves you hanging.”

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Power outages and thunderstorms

Summer is a busy time for our line crews. In addition to the work they do on a normal basis, lightning and high winds cause numerous temporary and longer power outages. Sometimes high winds break off trees, which fall into power lines, breaking wires and occasionally poles. Our line crews worked lots of overtime in July and August, restoring outages caused by these afternoon and evening thunderstorms. My hat's off to our linemen, and I applaud them for their dedication and safe work in restoring these power outages.

Transmission line north of Lewistown

In early August, Rocky Mountain Contractors came back to finish the clean-up work on the seven miles of rebuild 50 kilovolt power line north of the Carter's Pond substation. This big project is now complete, and I believe it will provide 50-plus years of improved service for our members north of Lewistown on the Carter's Pond, Hilger, Winifred and Roy substations.

Mapping system

Over the last 15 years, Fergus Electric Cooperative has gradually moved from the old paper maps to a basic electronic mapping system, and now we are moving to an improved

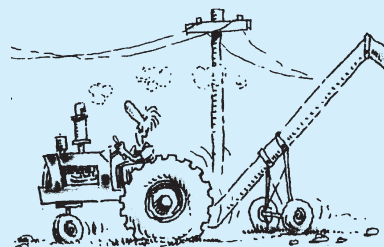
(really cool system, if you are an engineering geek!) electronic mapping system that ties our billing accounts to our mapping system. The software used currently in the office for our billing accounts automatically updates the information on the map used by our engineers and linemen in the field, such as account name, contact information, meter number, transformer number, etc. In the past, updating the maps with these changes required manual work by someone in the office. The timing of these improvements is very good as we start to upgrade our old metering system. Over the next two to three years all our meters will be replaced and National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC), our software provider, will be able to automatically make these changes to our electronic maps.

Our engineers and line crews have iPads with the co-op's service area map downloaded on them that they take with them into the field and use to locate where members live, and where the power lines run throughout our 14-county service territory. Having the maps of our service area available is extremely helpful for new employees who do not know our service area like the more "seasoned" employees do!

Outage management system

As we move forward with the new metering system, combined with the improved mapping system, we are planning to implement an Outage Management System, so our line crews will be able to look at the system maps on their iPads and the device will automatically show what areas are out of power. This will be an awesome system once it is in place and all the bugs are worked out. We know from talking to other co-ops that have implemented the Outage Management System that we will have trials and tribulations, but with patience and perseverance, we will end up having an Outage Management System that will work well for our co-op!

Look up and around when operating equipment



Those who live on a farm/ranch know that it is not only hard work, but it can be dangerous, too. Each year farmers and ranchers are injured when large agriculture and farming equipment comes in contact with overhead power lines or poles. Likewise, in winter and spring, snow removal near or under power lines can be hazardous.

Remember the following safety tips before operating equipment:

- Never try to raise or move a power line to clear a path.
- Make sure to have a cellphone or other means of communication in the cab with you.
- Make sure you, your family and employees know the location of overhead power lines and use routes to avoid the lines when moving equipment.
- Inspect farm equipment for transport height and determine clearance with any power lines that the equipment must pass.
- Avoid moving large equipment alone. Use a spotter to make sure contact is not made with a line when moving large equipment or high loads.
- Always lower portable augers or elevators to their lowest level possible — under 14 feet — before moving or transporting; use care when raising them.

What to do if equipment or vehicles come in contact with power lines:

- If your equipment does contact a power line, stay in the cab and call for help. If the power line is energized and you step outside, your body becomes the path and

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In celebration of Labor Day, Fergus Electric Cooperative's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will close September 2.

First Novel

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Friends of Tessa also found themselves compelled by the book. According to Tessa, one reader was so into the story they got mad at her when a character took a different turn than they anticipated.

“They wouldn’t talk to me for a couple days,” Tessa said, laughing.

Tessa said it meant a lot to her to have support from her peers, adults and even her English teacher, who encouraged her to keep going with the project.

In addition to encouragement, Tessa was also assisted with illustration, as her friend Megan Honeycutt — a fan of the novel — created the cover image.

“I thought her cover captured the heart of the book,” Tessa said.

The writing process

Much of *The Fire in the Dark* came to Tessa right away, and she just rolled with it. When a major plot point came around, Tessa didn’t spend too much time analyzing; she relied on instinct.

“It was all kind of a coin toss,” she said. “With the exception of grammatical edits, most of the chapters stayed pretty much the same as the first draft.”

Tessa said she’s pleased with the final result and is already working on a sequel, *The Fire in the Dark: The Second Tier*.

“The plan is for this to be a trilogy,” she said.

Advice for writers

Writing a novel is not an easy feat, but it’s also not something Tessa said someone should stress out about too much. Overanalyzing can be counterproductive.

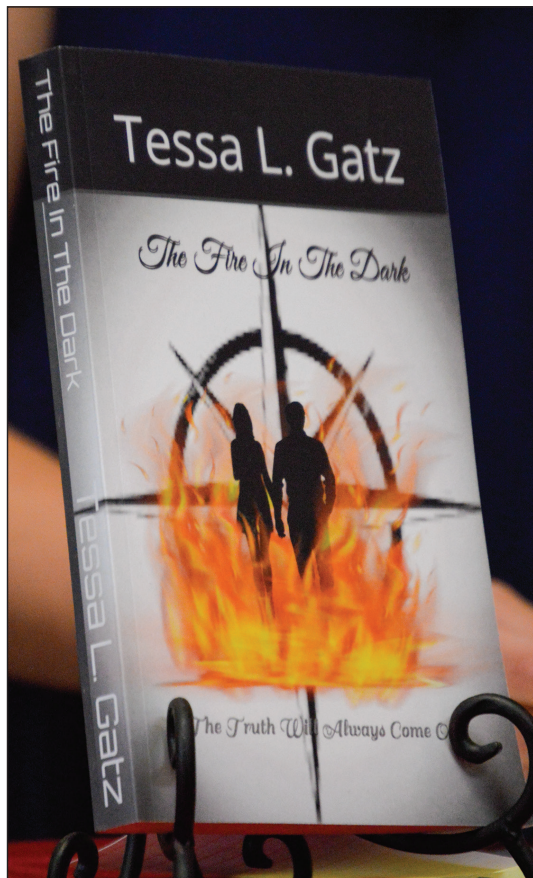
“It’s all really simple,” she said. “Just write. It’s all about sitting down, doing the work and having the discipline to do it.”

Tessa is already nine chapters into the sequel, and she also has another novel idea in the works about a musician in Mexico. She’ll be busy helping her parents out on their ranch and working as a dental assistant at Kolstad Family Dentistry, but she’ll make time to write.

“If you want to do something, do it,” she said. “Don’t make excuses.”



Above: Tessa hands her book to a friend during the book signing this summer. Family members, friends and others have supported and encouraged Tessa on being an accomplished young author.



Left: Much of The Fire in the Dark: The Truth Will Always Come Out came to author Tessa Gatz right away.

Tessa’s parents, Bryan and Tricia Gatz have been members of Fergus Electric Cooperative since 2006. It is a real pleasure to highlight and support the accomplishments of our young professionals whose parents and families are members of Fergus Electric Cooperative.

Tessa’s current ambition to write a trilogy is inspiring. We wish her much success as a novelist and look forward to reading her second book. To purchase your own copy of Tessa’s novel, search Tessa L. Gatz on Amazon.com

Remembering Joe Pirrie

By Scott Sweeney, General Manager

Joe Pirrie

Fergus Electric Cooperative mourns the loss of former board director and dear friend, Joe Pirrie, who died July 20, 2019. The cooperative is very appreciative of Joe's many years of dedicated service to Fergus Electric from November 15, 1969, to June 10, 2010. Joe generously devoted 41 years to helping Fergus Electric grow and thrive as a director of the co-op.

A couple of stories about Joe

To tell Joe's complete co-op story, we need to go back in time as Joe's interest and concern for the co-op actually began 18 years before he became a director on Fergus Electric's board. Back in 1951, when Joe was 27 years old, he was enthusiastic about getting power to the area and helped sign up new co-op members in the Hedgesville area north of Shawmut, so Fergus Electric could extend power out from the Harlowton substation east, and then north to Hedgesville. Joe couldn't remember exactly how much the minimum was back in 1951, but he thought it was about \$4 per month, and he said it was hard to get people to agree to commit to paying \$4 per month! Nonetheless, thanks to Joe and others campaigning on the co-op's behalf, in the fall of 1951, Fergus Electric Cooperative built the power line to Hedgesville!

Joe was a strong advocate for the line crews. A hardworking well driller and rancher, he understood the difficult jobs that our linemen had to do — restoring power outages in snowstorms and below-zero weather, and getting called



in the middle of the night or during a holiday. Joe had a sincere appreciation for the work they did.

When it came to Joe driving on winter roads, he was fearless! He very rarely missed a monthly board meeting even though, living in Hedgesville, he had to drive roundtrip through Judith Gap, which is probably the worst winter road in central Montana!

Joe and his wife Barbara had been married 70 years when she passed on September 6, 2018. Together they were quite a team — always pulling for a better Fergus Electric!

I believe that Joe knows how much we appreciate all he did for the co-op, but just in case, we want to say thanks Joe for all your excellent work on behalf of the co-op, and thanks for being a good friend!

jump clear of fallen lines with both feet together — hitting the ground at the same time — and without touching the vehicle.

- Take care not to fall back toward the vehicle, poles or power lines.
- With your feet together, continue to hop or shuffle to safety.
- Once away from the equipment or vehicle, do not go back until Fergus Electric Cooperative personnel give permission to do so.

Look up

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electrocution may be the result.

- Warn others who may be nearby to stay away and wait until Fergus Electric Cooperative's line personnel arrive to make sure power to the line is turned off.

What to do if fire or other danger forces you out of the equipment:

- If the equipment or vehicle is on fire, the proper action would be to

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Third: If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.

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