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Duluth gets a nod on a T-shirt in the 1988 movie "The Great Outdoors."
Hughes Entertainment

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Katherine Hepburn's character in the 1940 film "Philadelphia Story" is from Duluth.



"Lady Dynamite" on Netflix includes local references by Duluth native Maria Bamford.



Actors Renee Zellweger and George Clooney appear at the Duluth Depot in 2008 to promote the movie "Leatherheads."

DID YOU SAY DULUTH?

For decades, Duluth has been a go-to name-drop on TV, in movies and in music and literature. And we love it.



NBC
The cast of "Saturday Night Live" and host Scarlett Johansson sing "Fly High, Duluth" in a sketch about a morning TV theme song gone bad.

By **Christa Lawler**
clawler@duluthnews.com

Scene: A family winds along a remote two-lane road en route to a rustic northern vacation spot — the kind of place where trees are so rampant, it's almost impossible to open the car doors.

They meet the wild-eyed lodge keepers, a crusty husband-wife duo, in the front office. She's taming her perm with a visor, and he is wearing a T-shirt that has become an iconic prop in local pop culture history.

"I've Been to Duluth," it says, black lettering on a white shirt.

The reference comes less than 5 minutes into the 1988 movie "The Great Outdoors," starring John Candy and Dan Aykroyd, and catching this on a big screen is a lasting memory for some.

"I remember seeing that in the movie theater

and everyone losing their mind," recalled Jonathan Lee, a Duluthian who now lives in Panama City, Fla., where he is a teacher. More than 20 years after it played at Cinema 8, Lee received an "I've Been to Duluth" T-shirt as a gift.

"I wear it to school, and kids ask me 'Where is Duluth?'" he said.

For decades, Duluth has been name-dropped on screen, in literature, music — or any place where a certain sort of city fits the narrative. Beyond a kitschy T-shirt, it's the hometown of an applicant for a wait staff position in the movie "Garden State," and in the Meat Puppet's song "Lake of Fire," it's where a lady got bit by a dog with a rabid tooth and went to her grave "just a little too soon." In Richard Cecil's poem "Internal Exile," a hypothetical person is sentenced to "Forty years accounting in Duluth!"

And, it's where Katherine

Hepburn's character grew up in the 1940 film "Philadelphia Story."

"Well it was years ago," she says of her divorce. "I was only a kid in Duluth."

For Lee, this Hepburn moment is among the best references — and he's got an internal library cataloging a bunch of them. You haven't heard the word "Duluth" pronounced until Hepburn says it, he said. "That's the finest pronunciation."

The Duluthiest Duluth-dropper of all

It's possible that no one has referenced Duluth more than hometown comedian Maria Bamford, who was name-dropping the Pioneer Bar on the internet in the mid-2000s.

"The Maria Bamford Show" is a web series that had shades of the more recent "Lady Dynamite": a character named Maria Bamford moves back to her hometown, Duluth,

from Los Angeles to tend to her mental health. She moves into her parents' home and navigates a cast that includes her sister and high school friends — all played by Bamford. Her Netflix Original Series, which premiered in 2017, also includes color-muted flashbacks to her hometown.

"I think 'Lady Dynamite' has referenced Duluth more than all the other references combined," said Paul Lundgren of Perfect Duluth Day.

The Bamford oeuvre has earned the seal of approval from Mayor Emily Larson. "My fave Duluth reference: all things Maria Bamford," she wrote in an email. "Funny, funny stuff."

Even beyond the show,



Paul Lundgren

Bamford has audiences curious about her hometown.

In her first appearance on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno," she opened with a shout-out to her old neighborhood.

"Hi. I'm Maria Bamford. I'm from Duluth, Minnesota," she reportedly said. Then added: "Duuuu-looth in the hooow-sse." Before "Lady Dynamite" aired, newsy website Bustle gave readers the 411 on Duluth — information ranging from population to the fact that the Duluth Public Library is shaped like an ore boat.

Bamford isn't the first to set a show here, but with two seasons of "Lady Dynamite," her run has been far more successful than "The Louie Show" starring fellow Minnesotan Louie Anderson as a therapist. Five episodes of his show aired on CBS in the mid-1990s.

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Saying goodbye to the season is in the details

It's over, another season that stretched from Halloween through mid-January. Despite the best efforts of the world of commerce to extend it from September to February, Father Time pushed the chunky guy with the white beard out the door along with the red-nosed deer, and started the prep work for lawnmower sales. Even before good Old St. Nick waved good-bye and buckled himself into the sleigh, Grandma started



DOUG LEWANDOWSKI

dragging cardboard boxes up from the basement to store the seasonal trappings.

The house will soon return to normal, whatever that is!

Putting away all the Christmas decorations takes time. It's not just disposing of the tree and carefully boxing ornaments, but also the other embellishments that add to an already well-adorned house.

If the tree came from the nearest tree lot, it needs to be eased out of the house carefully, as the needles are usually crispy. Moving it a

short distance is a challenge without cascades of little green spikes that tumble from the branches and grip the carpet like porcupine quills. Good luck getting them up with a vacuum cleaner. Might as well plunk down on the floor and extract them — one by one.

Artificial trees are much easier to manage, but pulling out each branch and storing it is tedious, unless you get a tree that collapses like an umbrella. If you go an even more expensive route after winning the lottery, a height-adjustable mechanical tree is the ticket, although as the tree

"grows," it does remind one of the "Blob" movies of the '50s.

Every year there are new formulations of strands of lights waking up the night, drooping from roofs and dormers. With the push toward more energy efficiency, LED strings in a variety of colors are a suitable replacement for the old multi-colored incandescent bulbs.

The lights are a winner with their variety, but they can't hang there through the seasons, snagging leaves and spiders. January is usually not a good time for removal of all the twinkle

with a good chance of frostbitten fingers for the effort. Waiting for a thaw to take the strings off is a good option, but I'll bet most folks will remove them when the tulips emerge in the spring.

Squirrels don't seem to be as attracted to the new cost-effective LEDs. They must be off munching on something else. I was always surprised that there weren't fluffy gray bodies spread around under the eaves, stunned or electrocuted.

One of the more
LEWANDOWSKI: Page C2

BOOK REVIEWS

Lamott keeps hope alive

By Michiela Thuman
Minneapolis Star Tribune

Title: "Almost Everything: Notes on Hope"

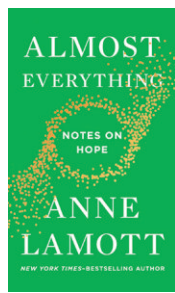
Author: Anne Lamott

Publisher: Riverhead

Pages: 189

Price: \$20

Just when you need someone to



shake you by the shoulders and say, "Snap out of it," along comes Anne Lamott, bearing the writerly equivalent of a loaf of freshly baked bread — and a sharp knife.

In these unrelentingly anxious days, where "it's all Four Horsemen now, all the time," the author of several beloved bestsellers

serves up her characteristic wisdom and wit, offering soul food for the weary and motherly advice on how we can all remain calm and keep our proverbial "stuff" together: "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you."

Weighted by the despair, the anger, the hatred of our times, how to keep hope alive?

Let her count the ways: There is still love, and goodness, too, along with the world's natural beauty, the power of stories, and our ability to embrace an inner peace. And then there's fear.

Life is nothing if not full of paradoxes, she writes. In the same way that light can both obscure and illuminate, fear too, while unpleasant on its face, can work

an unexpected magic in hard times: "Fear, against all odds, leads to community, to bravery and right action, and these give hope."

The Lamott faithful and new readers alike will find some useful therapy here, though the short book's scattered nuggets of random truths oftentimes resonate greater than the whole.

'Wild Hungers' a tale of mom's cancer, life's simple joys

By Pamela Miller
Minneapolis Star Tribune

Title: "All the Wild Hungers: A Season of Cooking and Cancer"

Author: Karen Babine

Publisher: Milkweed Editions

Pages: 168

Price: \$16 paperback

Life at its most priceless — not its

dramatic, headline-making moments, but the quiet but potent

joys of daily life, such as cooking new dishes

in the family kitchen, doting on sweet

nieces and nephews, and caring for an ailing parent — is

the subject of Minnesota writer Karen Babine's beautiful "All the Wild Hungers."

Life, yes. But death, or its inevitability, hovers over every

page, a wolf at the door of the warm, aromatic kitchen. The

book is a memoir of Babine's time caring for her mother,

Barbara Babine, who developed

a spooky form of cancer called embryonal rhabdomyosarcoma, in which the malignant cells resemble the developing skeletal muscles of an embryo.

If ever there were an ailment that reminds us of what vulnerable mammals we are, this was it.

Karen, one of three daughters of Barbara, a longtime and beloved fourth-grade teacher, along with her pastor father and her sisters, brother-in-law and

wee niece and nephew, rally around Barbara as she undergoes chemotherapy. There is

such mercilessness and cruelty in the cancer, yet such mighty love in this family.

Babine finds comfort in almost obsessive cooking.

Almost daily, she employs her collection of antique cast-iron

pots, scavenged from antique stores and flea markets, to concoct dishes that are spectacular

and soothing. Through patience and practice, she is able to dis-

cover some foods that her nauseated mother can stomach, food that gives her strength and hope.

Anyone who has experienced a family member's struggle with cancer will be stabbed by recognition throughout this book, as when Babine writes, "We don't ask, how are you doing? anymore — we ask, how is today?"

Babine is a Minnesotan to the core. She writes about the comfort food loved by Swedish-German-American families, and about going to Hackenmueller's Meats in Robbinsdale, where she, a somewhat sheepish vegetarian, is offered kind

and wise advice, and the very best ingredients, for making bone broth for her protein-deprived mother.

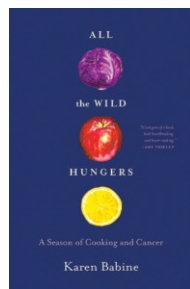
At book's end, Babine's mother is in remission, but the kind of cancer she has is not easily derailed, and so it is no surprise to google Barbara Babine and find that she died on Nov. 1 of last year at age 68 in New Hope. It hurts to

read that, because Karen's love for her mom, which runs like an artery through this book, is infectious.

There are some profound passages in this memoir. At one juncture, Babine ponders the recently discovered science of fetal microchimerism, "the phenomenon of fetal cells being found in the mother decades after birth," and writes, "Are we our own unique beings or not? Science would suggest we are not. We exist within systems, networks, the matrix of family and friends, patterns. We are not alone. We are all connected, even on a cellular level, across time, space, and logic. Perhaps it is individuality that is the myth."

In the end, the overriding hunger referred to in this lovely book's title is the hunger for life. Perhaps it is never stronger than in the shadow of death, and in the light of death's opposite, love.

Praise, sympathy and thanks to Babine, who has given us this ode, lament and meditation.



DULUTH

From Page C1

The case of the mysterious lift bridge

In an informal poll of people with ties to Duluth, a favorite large-audience local reference is a 2006 skit on Saturday Night Live about a corny morning show called "Fly High Duluth." The 6-minute bit includes footage from Duluth and Lake Superior, and actor Scarlett Johansson provides the earnest vocals — "Fly High Duluuuuuth."

After it aired, the News Tribune reported some responses from a "Saturday Night Live" message board, which ranged from:

"Fly High Duluth" was hilarious — especially being a former resident" from username Googuse; and Duluthbeerguy's "So what the heck is with the Duluth slamming."

As part of the media blitz behind "Leatherheads," a 2008 movie based on the Duluth Eskimos football team, George Clooney and Renee Zellweger made a stop at the Duluth Depot.

That's one of the reasons why it's among Duluth fan Crystal Pelkey's favorite Duluth references in pop culture.

"I met George Clooney," Pelkey said. "It was a milestone in my life."

It's a more subtle, insiders-only nod that also gets a lot of props. In a reboot of "The Gilmore Girls" that aired on Netflix, Sookie makes a wedding cake for Luke and Lorelei that includes, among its fondant decorations, an Aerial Lift Bridge and a

sign for Duluth.

Even Reddit users haven't solved the mystery of why.

'We tend to be more interesting than others'

Duluth-centric website Perfect Duluth Day has been collecting Duluth references for more than a decade. Lundgren, the site's president, said he thinks it started when a user created a video montage of Duluth mentions in movies.

The video, which is still on the site, starts with Patty Duke on her way to Glensheen mansion, where she will be terrorized by her mother-in-law ("You'll Like My Mother"). It includes roadtrippers cruising past a Duluth sign ("Tommy Boy") and Charles Durning eyeing the Aerial Lift Bridge from a hospital bed. He darn-near growls "No men left up here. No man in his right mind is going to stay up here in this Christless country ... except us" in the 1988 Duluth-made movie "Far North."

The posts are tagged "References to Duluth in Film/TV or other Media," and there are about 40 instances, Lundgren said.

Among the posts: In November, Scott Simon dropped Duluth as a host for the 2016 Winter Olympics on NPR's "Saturday Sports." In October, an episode of "Supernatural" was set in Duluth. A St. Scholastica alum was on "Jeopardy!" last year, and a sex worker from Minnesota, on HBO's "The Deuce," is heckled about Duluth.

Not to mention, satirical news site The Onion regularly drops a Duluth dateline on its stories.

Lee said it seems Duluth is the answer when a writer needs a location reference that



It's only 44 miles to Duluth in this image from the movie "Tommy Boy."

everyone has heard of, but no one knows where it is.

"It sort of hits that Venn Diagram center," he said. "We're big enough to be real, but small enough to be 'Whoa. Somebody said our name.'"

If you're from Hibbing, Lundgren said, these references would be few and far between. If you're from Minneapolis, they happen all the time, so you aren't going to care.

"We're a cold northern city; we get picked on for that a little bit," he said. "Among cities in the 80-90,000 population range, we tend to be more interesting than others."

Ed seems to like us

As far as we know, Ed Sheeran doesn't have a physical tie to Duluth, but he spends a lot of time walking around with our name on his chest — or, rather, Duluth-based Duluth Pack.

The local company, known for its handcrafted canvas and leather bags, delivered a sweatshirt to Sheeran before his 2016 concert at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul.

This is standard practice with Duluth Pack, which has offered goods to Blake Shelton, Maroon 5, Stevie Nicks and more.

"Within the first two

months that he had the sweatshirt, he was publicly seen wearing it over 20 times," said Andrea Johnson, the company's marketing manager, who literally handed the swag to Sheeran.

The sweatshirt — which features the Duluth Pack logo — was already a bestseller.

It has done even better since then.

"The best thing was the social media interaction where people were like 'I just got my logo sweatshirt from Duluth Pack,'" Johnson said.

This practice doesn't stop with Sheeran. Johnson said they have plans to make more deliveries to Xcel Energy Center.

Be prepared, Instagrammers, for the next Duluth Pack-celebrity connection.

Beauty and the beer

Matt Dressel experienced his first Duluth-style fan-frenzy soon after he moved to Duluth from California.

He went to the theater to see Pixar's "Inside Out," an

animated movie about a family that has just moved from Minnesota to San Francisco.

"I'm sitting in the theater, and they make a passing reference that they lived in Minnesota," recalled Dressel, who is now in charge of programming at Zinema 2. "The crowd went nuts."

Since then, he has seen it happen more often — especially during premieres of locally-made movies.

"Everybody likes a reference to their hometown — as long as it's a positive one," said Dressel, whose own hometown in Michigan is represented in "Tickled," a documentary about the world of competitive endurance tickling.

"In Duluth, people are really proud of their city. What we have, our landmarks, our businesses, any chance we have to share that is regarded as being good. People really latch on to that and want to share it."

Pelkey said it has to

LEWANDOWSKI

From Page C1

challenging aspects of ending the Christmas season is preserving family heirlooms. Fragile glass ornaments, passed down from Great Aunt Martha or Grandma Rose, require special care. Covered individually in bubble wrap and placed carefully in a box overflowing with styrofoam peanuts, they will be there for future children's "ohs" and "ahs."

Then there's the construction-paper remnants of the elementary grades. In addition to paper ornaments that look like candy canes and wise men, kindergarten school pictures endure. The little scholars' images are immortalized, pasted painstakingly on cotton balls and strands of knitting yarn, custom made for hanging on a tree. The fuzzy angels soon run out of favor as kids blow by third grade.

Another Christmas holiday season has passed. Don't worry, the Easter Bunny is just around the corner. How are you at coloring eggs?

Doug Lewandowski is a retired counselor, educator and licensed psychologist. Write to him at lewandowskidoug@gmail.com.



Crystal Pelkey

Duluth references in pop culture.

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Health

Read about nutrition from local experts in Tuesday's DNT

