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My Personal Pilgrimage to Camp Etna: A Spiritualist Center Since 1876

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THE GATES TO CAMP ETNA.

Imagine a community of mediums and healers living in adorable wooden cottages in the woods. Each cottage is like a gingerbread house, painted and decorated according to individual vision. One cottage is purple with periwinkle trim and has stars nailed to the clapboard. Another is white with pink trim and decorated with fluttering pink butterflies. Another has a rainbow painted across its side. Everywhere there is sunflower imagery.

Now imagine those cottages laid out among dirt crossroads with names like Sunset Circle, Bishop Street, and Temple Street. In the old Maine tradition cottages had names so that visitors could easily find them. That tradition is continued here with names like Peaceful Solitude, Phoenix Rising, or The Wigwam.



A MEDIUM'S COTTAGE AT CAMP ETNA, ETNA, MAINE

Allow yourself to experience a sense of genuine well-being and love in a place where all are welcome to share their spiritual gifts and simply be. Imagine all of this and you will have conjured up Camp Etna. Only Camp Etna is a real place. To enter you must pass under an iron archway painted purple and bearing the camp's name.



A MEDIUM'S COTTAGE AT CAMP ETNA.



had never known the camp existed, not until I had already sold my house on Peaks Island and was leaving Maine. When I expressed this to the spiritualists I met over the weekend, I'd receive the same reply: "People find us when they need to, and when the time is right."

Camp Etna is invisible to you until you need to be there.

I needed badly to be there. After raising my three kids on Peaks Island, renovating an old house from the 1880s and turning it into a family home, teaching Creative Writing at the University of Southern Maine since 1998, I was leaving Maine. And not by choice. But because there was one sentence missing in my divorce decree from ten years ago. That sentence read that my ex-husband would remove his name from the deed of the house. We agreed I'd assume all the family debt and the mortgage and stay in the house and he would leave the marriage debt free. Ten years later he remarried and decided to sell my house out from under me by court order. In late April I received a letter in the mail that the house was to be sold as quickly as possible, otherwise I would pay a \$100 fine every day it was not on the market. Within a few months the house was gone. It was a bitter way to leave. I was being kicked out. Perhaps I'd come to Camp Etna to lick my wounds? But no, that was not it. I'd come seeking purpose and a road sign to point me in the right direction.

I'd heard about Camp Etna earlier that spring from a friend and had a vague lingering notion that I'd like to go there. I didn't act on it though. Not until I was cleaning out my house and came across my trusty old Maine Road Atlas. I opened the atlas to a random page and there before me was the route to Etna, Maine. The road had been revealed to me. I knew I had to find the time to go.



Interstate 95 becomes a lonely road north of Augusta. The pines and firs get smaller, more tenacious, and bear the scars of heavy winters. Once you leave the interstate, the roads that lead to Etna, Maine are dotted by farms spread out few and far between. There are no malls, no big supermarket plazas, no conveniences, just small family-owned gas stations with shops that boast the best whoopie pies in Maine, and as a matter of fact, in the entire world. This is a very different Maine from the Maine that had grown up around me in the southern part of the state. That Maine could very well be New Jersey or Massachusetts for all its congestion.



THE FOREST IN ETNA, MAINE.

I pull in under the iron archway to Camp Etna and feel as though I've gone back in time. Nothing much seemed to have changed since the camp was first established in 1876.

I walk over to the inn, a long wooden clapboard building, and picked up a brochure. I read: "Spiritualists came every summer to camp out in tents and to hear the top mediums and inspirational speakers of the day. Eventually the campers built platforms for their tents, then cottages were built on the platforms. After a fire devastated the camp in the 1920's, new cottages were built, many of which are still used today."



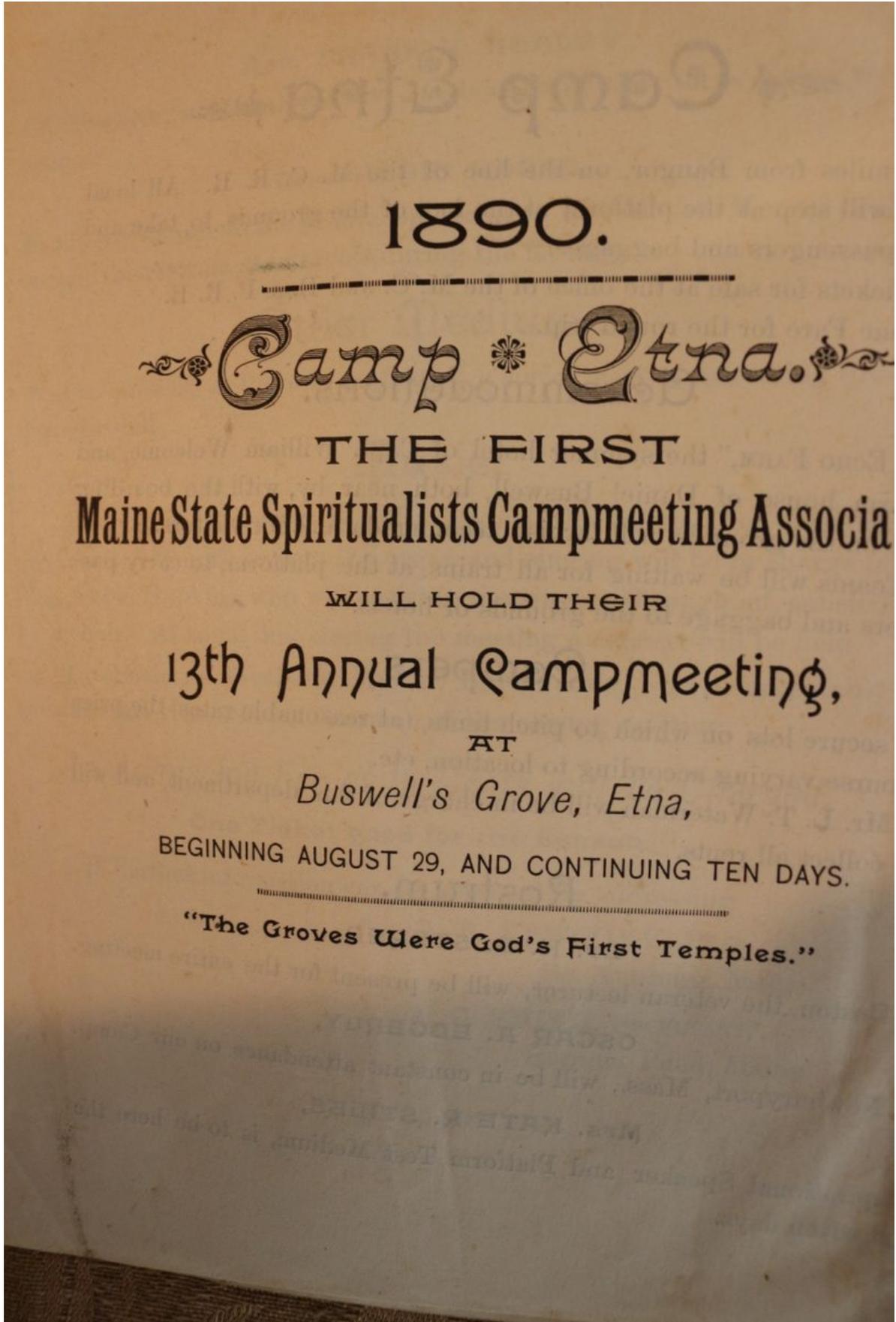


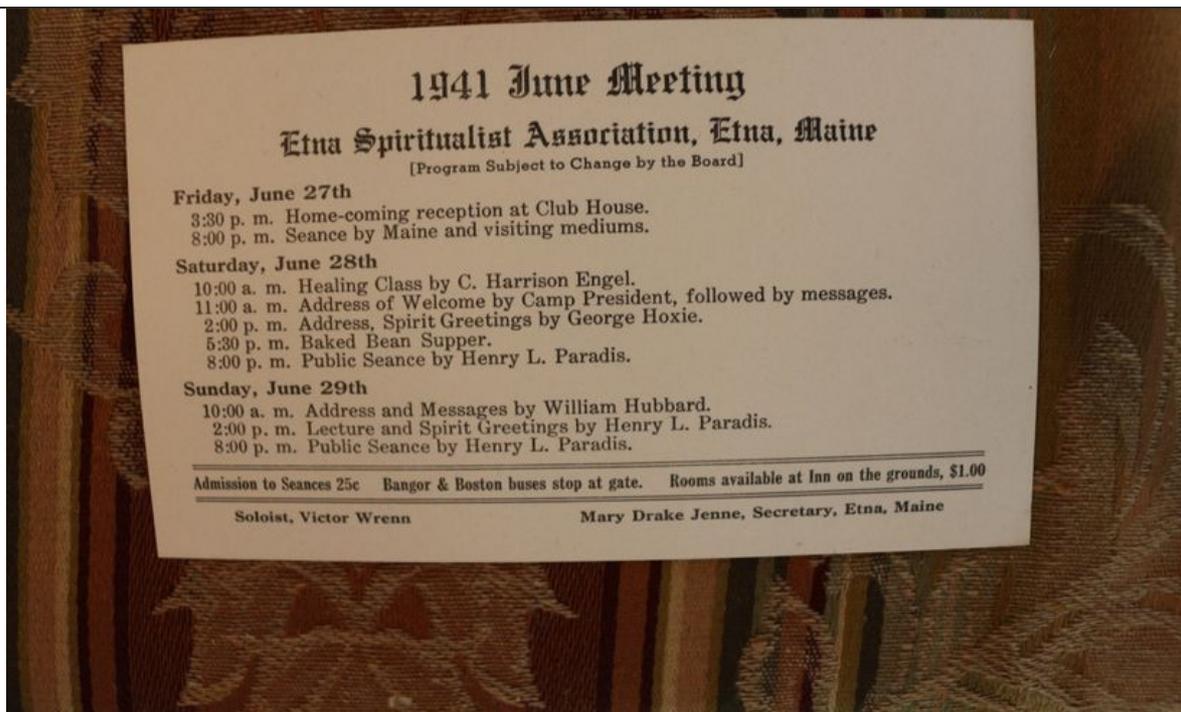
COTTAGES IN THE WOODS.

The daily camp schedule has changed little since 1876. Now Church Service takes place on Sundays at 10:30, but up until the 1960s Church Service was held every day. Seance circles occur on Mondays and Table Tippings are on Saturdays. There are mediumship readings,



a variety of topics from Trance Channeling to meet your Guides and teachers to “Creating a Sacred Energy Bag.” Community potlucks take place every Saturday evening and once a month after Church Service.





A CAMP ETNA SCHEDULE FROM 1941.

I amble across the central green to the Reverend Gladys Laliberte Temple, a triangular shaped wooden building poking up out of the ground. The Temple is painted white with purple trim and has Tiffany style stained glass windows. I think of the Emily Dickinson poem, “Because I Could Not Stop for Death, He Kindly Stopped for Me.”

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground –

The Roof was scarcely visible –

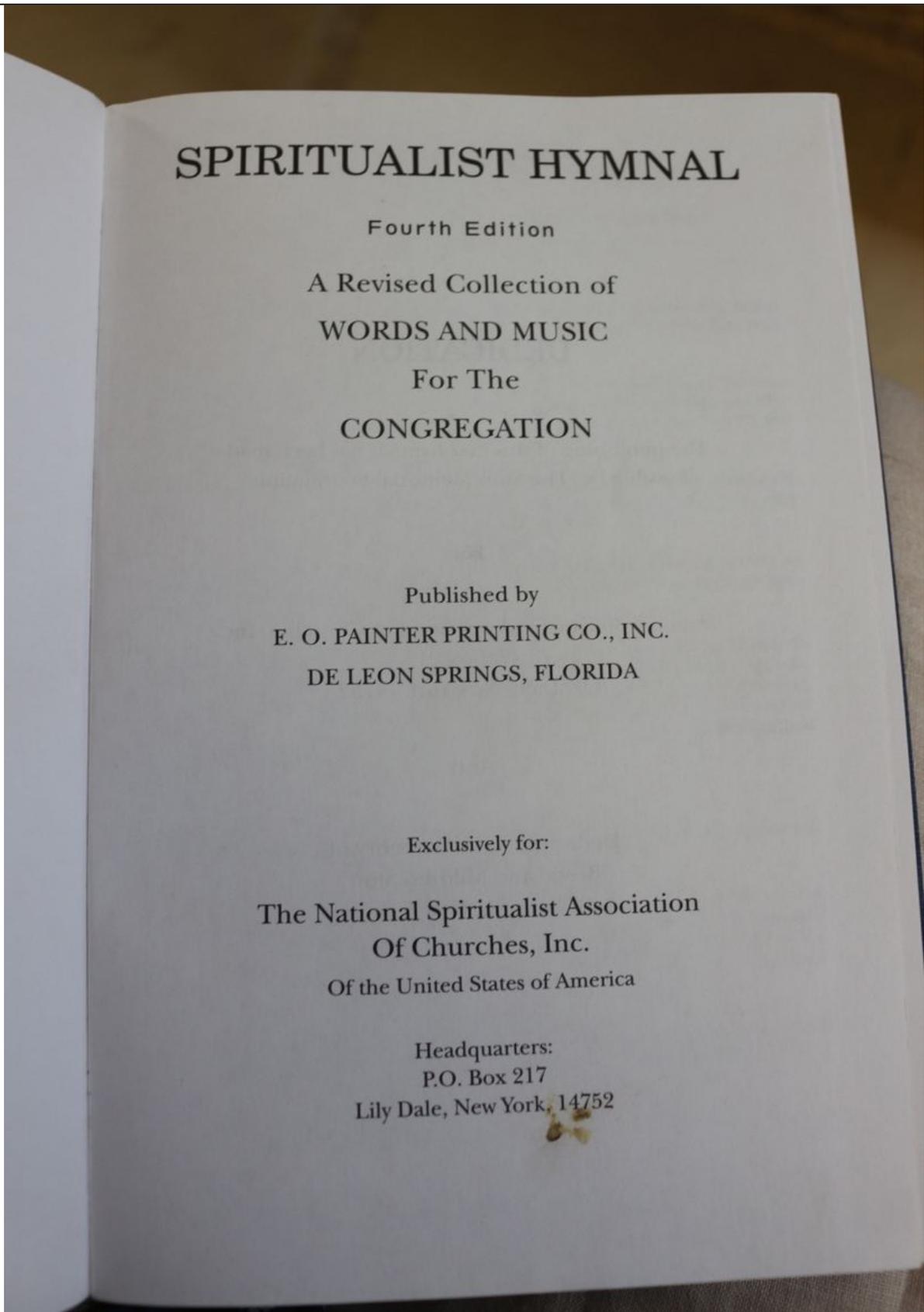
The Cornice – in the Ground –



THE GLADYS LALABERTE TEMPLE

I walk inside and pick up a navy blue hardcover Spiritualist Hymnal and open it up to the cover page:

*Definitions adopted by the National Spiritualist Association of Church, Inc
of October 1914, 1919, 1930, and 1931.*



THE SPIRITUALIST HYMNAL

Spiritualism is the Science, Philosophy, and Religion of continuous life, based upon the demonstrated fact of communication by means of Mediumship with those who live in the Spirit World.



between this and the Spirit world by means of Mediumship, and who endeavors to mould his or her character and conduct in accordance with the highest teachings derived from such communication.

A Medium is one whose organism is sensitive to vibrations from the Spirit world and through whose instrumentality intelligences in that world are able to convey messages and produce the phenomenon of Spirituality.

A Spiritualist healer is one who, whether through his own inherent powers or through his Mediumship, is able to impart vital, curative forces to pathological conditions.

The Phenomenon of Spiritualism consists of Prophecy, Clairvoyance, Gift of Tongues, Laying on of Hands, Healing, Vision, Trance, Revelation, Levitation, Raps, Automatic and Independent Writing and Painting, Photography, Materialization, Psychometry, Voice, and any Manifestation proving the continuity of life as demonstrated through the physical and spiritual senses and faculties of Humanity.

Spiritualism is a Science because it investigates, analyzes, and classifies facts and manifestations demonstrated by the Spirit side of life.

Spiritualism is a Philosophy because it studies the laws of nature both on the seen and unseen sides of life and bases its conclusions upon present observed facts. It accepts statements of observed facts of past ages and conclusions drawn therefrom, when sustained by reason and by results of observed facts of the present day. Spiritualism is a Religion because it strives to understand and to comply with the Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Laws of Nature, which are the laws of God.

A bell tolls, signaling that a class was about to begin. I'd arrived in time for a workshop on mediumship followed by a trance channeling with a spirit entity called Lucerne facilitated by Reverend Dr. Louis Gates.

Reverend Dr. Gates is a Spiritualist Minister, Medium and Healer from the Southern Spiritualist Camp in Cassadaga, Florida. He is also Pastor of Colby Memorial Temple. He is a clairvoyant since childhood.

Some of the people in the class are practicing mediums and healers. Others, like me, are seeking knowledge. This is a practical hands-on tutorial. I sit fascinated, listening to practical advice, such as: "Open the space counter clockwise and close the space clockwise" and "the more you use a space for healing, the more the space will take on the energy."



wood will hold our energy. It is not a good idea to sit on someone else's chair because it holds their energy. Dr. Gates talks about how when he was first training as a medium he would meditate inside a closet because the smaller the space the easier it is to hold onto the vibration. Energy dissipates in larger spaces. Mediums are taught that they are protectors of the space they work in and it is their responsibility to protect the people entering the space. They need to pray and cleanse the space.

“You must ask your guides questions,” Dr. Gates explains. “The guides are here to help us, but many people don’t use them. The guide has to work with your body. If you are exhausted after a trance, you are using too much energy. The guide brings energy with them. You are supposed to feel refreshed after your trance.”

He continues, “All your guides are an aspect of your higher self. You’ve always been. This is just an experience you’re having. We give ourselves images to communicate and understand. Those images and symbols come from the place where we grew up and our culture. That’s why books that give general interpretations for symbols are useless. Symbols are personal and mean something specific to you. When you trance you need to get good information. Who is your protector? Who is with you? When you leave your body, your protector will go with you. It’s difficult to surrender and give up control. You have to train the vibration to use it. You need to work with the voice box. You need a spotter to encourage the guide to speak. If you don’t have a spotter, use a recorder and a timer. Create your own recording with your own voice and music to use during meditation.”

Dr. Gates explains, “The endocrine system secretes at a high rate when you are in a trance. It will need an hour to come down. Don’t eat anything with sugar after a trance because your body won’t be able to process it.”

A woman in the room blurts out, “Not even a whoopie pie? They’ve got amazing whoopie pies down the road.”

Everyone laughs.

Dr. Gates guides us through two meditation exercises in which we are guided to leave our bodies. “Once they get you out,” Dr. Gates says, “Spirit has control. Let go and surrender.”

I try and all I can hear are the words: Trust, trust, trust. But I do not leave my body. The mediums in the room are able to do this without any problem and share their experiences.

I’m not ready to trust yet and the first meditation is not very successful for me. I have much more success with the second exercise. Dr. Gates tells me that I am still getting accustomed to the new space.



what they do, tell them. Meditation is interactive. They show you things you need to fix.

Allow them to show you and understand why. Your higher consciousness is always still attached to the other side. There is a chance to learn in every reincarnation.”

We are advised to set up a consistent time every day for meditation—a time to be in trance and to speak with our guides and spirits.

“We all pick our life lessons and we help others with theirs,” Dr. Gates tells us. “We pick our family, our name, our birth place. We decide what we are going to do. Where you are raised is brought into your vibration. Our life challenges come to us through the people we meet in our lifetime. Let things go. Don’t let things stop you in one place.”

This is exactly the message I need to hear. With a huge surge of relief, I feel I am able to let go of all the emotion around having my house sold out from under me. The greed of my ex-husband and his wife are no longer important. Their actions have opened up a new door for me.

“If you give someone something negative, you must give them the tools to fix it,” Dr. Gates instructs the mediums in the room who work with mediumship on a daily basis. “You must tell them how to change it. That’s what you are here to do. You can’t just reinforce what is broken.”

“Are there people who are so grounded in ego and narcissism that they cannot be changed?” I ask.

“Everything has a reaction,” Dr. Gates says. “The events of 911 changed things. Hitler changed things. After 911 people came together and helped each other. They reached a higher vibration. Learn to look at disasters from a different perspective. They are meant to push us towards change and a higher good. Focus on the good that comes out of these events. If it’s not supposed to happen, it won’t happen.”

Spiritualism teaches a strong sense of inner responsibility. We are responsible for our choices and our life path. We have free will; yet the basic roadmap of our lives is preordained. Where had I heard that before? Suddenly I remember. These are the basic teachings of Lithuanian paganism. My own name, Laima, embodies this lesson! Laima is the goddess of fate and fortune in the pre-Christian Baltic religion. At birth Laima weaves your fate, but it is up to you how to discern you will walk the road of your fate—either in a blind rush, seeing and sensing nothing, or carefully and methodically, drawing into you all the lessons of life.



with together. Some people may have a group of 1,000 and some may have a group of 200.

“Like Facebook friends,” a woman in the group jokes.

“There are people here in the same place as you who you will never meet because you are not meant to meet them. There are people here at camp today who you will not notice because they are not in your soul group. You will only meet the ones in life who you need to meet. They may simply be there to move you into the next place where you need to be.”

Maybe the real purpose of my selling my house was to move me to the next place I need to be? I never would have taken this step on my own because I felt I needed to hold onto the house for my children. My ex-husband and his wife were only counting the equity they’d gain from a renovated house on trendy Peaks Island. But my life, and my children’s lives, have been fundamentally changed by their actions. However, it is up to me to hold onto the energy of whether that change is for something good or to allow myself to bask in negativity. This is the type of seeing Spiritualism facilitates. Without this vision, I realize, I could be lost in a sea of bitterness and regret.

We break for lunch. Volunteers are cooking hamburgers and hotdogs on the inn porch. It is Medium’s Day, so volunteer mediums are fund raising for Camp Etna by giving fifteen minute readings for \$20. I manage to get a reading and hamburger in half an hour.

I learn about my guides and I receive messages from those who’ve departed from my life. I’m given insights and sign posts moving me in a new direction.



The bell tolls and it is time to return for the trance channeling with Dr. Gates and Lucerne.

Dr. Gates asks one of the volunteers to lock the door behind him as he leaves. He asks that no one touch him or grab him while he is in trance. He explains that he will meditate, then leave his body, allowing Lucerne to enter. Lucerne is a being, perhaps an angel, who lives in



group of 47 souls with him who have lived on earth. They help Lucerne understand things about the earth dimension and help him communicate with us in English. I suspect that some of these beings were English because they have names like Topper and Tobias.

Dr. Gates quiets down and begins to nod off. He looks like someone who is falling into a comfortable midday nap. Suddenly his head pops up and he begins to speak in an English accent. Dr. Gates is from Florida and speaks with a southern twang. Now he is speaking a nineteenth century form of English and using phrases such as, “my good man” and “my dear.”

Much wisdom is imparted to us. I’m too stunned to speak or even take notes for a while. Finally, I shyly pull out my notebook and begin jotting down what Lucerne is saying.

“Enjoy life,” Lucerne says, “you are not here to suffer.”

“Some of us are here to be here for others and move them forwards.”

“The guides cannot make you go to a place, but they can calmly guide you there.”

“Every thought you emanate here echoes in the spirit world.”

“Common sense is something you are either born with or not. It comes from your past life experiences.” “You are here to follow your own individual path. That is why you are here.”

“You are on a journey. Some of the journeys you are on were not meant for you, but were meant for others.”

“If you want something in your life to change, tell your guides.”

“We know where you need to be but you have free will to get there.”

“If we need to change something in your path nothing will stop us.”

“We sit in contemplation until you speak to us.”

“We don’t like to go to drastic changes in people’s lives, but when the time comes we drag you.”

“We have plenty of caution tape to stop you from doing something stupid, but if you defy us and force it, we will come in and save you.”

“Look for repetitions in your life. We will get your attention.”



trip. Everyone makes it to the other side.

“Everything that happens to you is for a purpose.”

“Whatever you believe in your life you will see after death. You will travel through the universe and different dimensions. It is your choice.”

“Aliens are higher master teachers and healers.”

“Allow yourself to know that you are where you need to be.”

“We will get you where you need to be. You only have free will and choice to get where you NEED TO BE.”

“If something is supposed to happen in your life, it will work. When things block you it’s the spirit world blocking you. If you fight us, we will open the door and let you go, but later we will pick up the pieces and patch you up.”

“Allow us to work with you through meditation and dreams.”

“We need your permission.”

“We only swoop in and save you when you act crazy.”

“You die exactly the moment you are supposed to die. It has to do with how your death will affect those around you.”

“Suicides go to the other side. If you weren’t supposed to kill yourself, you wouldn’t succeed. If you are supposed to kill yourself, you will.”

“You pick your own life lessons.”

After about an hour of teachings, Lucerne delivers personal messages to each person in the group.

“Spirit is planting springtime flowers all around you,” Lucerne says to me. “This is a time of rebirth for you.”

Lucerne told me much more, which I will not share here, but the flower imagery was enough to send me a deep message. All that week and the previous week that I’d been cleaning out and packing up my house after twenty years of living there with my family, my day lilies were in full bloom. The garden surrounding my porch was drowning in day lilies. The blooms began to fade just as I was leaving. I’d carried that image of flowers with me as the image of



who I am. But now that image of flowers had changed into one of rebirth for me.

After the two hour trance channeling is complete, there is time to sit on the inn porch and chat, and then there is the Saturday evening pot luck supper.

When I ask others what I should run out and buy for the potluck, I am told, “You will be guided.” Anything I ask, I’m told, “You will be guided.” And so, I allow myself to be guided. I return to camp with a box of chocolate donuts. I figure an hour has passed since the trance and it should be okay to eat them for desert.

At the potluck I meet Reverend Janet Decker, lead pastor of the Spiritualist Church, and Diane Jackman Skolfield, medium, carpenter, healer, and founder of the Camp Etna Museum and Historical Society. Others drift in and out of our conversation as we relax on the porch.

“Maine was devastated by the Civil War,” Diane says, “entire populations were wiped out.”

Diane had just returned from a lecture on the Civil War in Bangor.

“Of a population of 122,000 in Maine, 73,000 were sent to fight in the Civil War. The archives tell us that 60,000 were in the army and 14,000 in the navy. They put farmers into the cavalry because they thought they knew how to ride horses. They didn’t. They used horses for plowing not for riding. Women followed the men into war and nursed the wounded and cooked. Maine lost almost all of its workers, farmers, men—or breed stock as they politely put it back then.”

Spiritualism grew as a religion after the Civil War, and especially in Maine, because so many people had lost their loved ones. There was a real need to connect, to understand, to know what had happened to them, where they were. Much healing needed to be done. So many had not returned home.

“Did you know that in the 19th century one third of America’s population indicated their religion as Spiritualist?” Diane asked.

I did not know.

“Until things slowed down here after World War II, Camp Etna would have thousands of visitors each summer,” Diane says. “There was a hotel, an inn, and 131 cottages. In April 1922 there was a fire and 83 cottages burned. The Temple had to be rebuilt.”

Diane walks over to the museum, which is set up in the corner of the inn. She returns and hands me a postcard. The caption reads: “Autos at Camp Etna, September 3, 1916.” The area known as the green is crowded with Model T’s parked closely together.



AUTOS AT CAMP ETNA MAINE ON SUNDAY SEPT 3RD. 1916.

Autos at Camp Etna, September 3, 1916

AUTOS AT CAMP ETNA ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3RD, 1916

“At that time Camp Etna had 300 acres. There was a train stop just for Camp Etna. People would get off down at the lake and were brought up here in carriages.”



THE TRAIN TRACKS NEAR THE LAKE BEHIND CAMP ETNA ARE STILL THERE, THOUGH UNUSED.



exactly where she needed to be. She asked if she could volunteer her work renovating the inn and the cottages. She was directed down to the cottage of the camp president at the time, who was also a volunteer carpenter. They began working on rebuilding the inn's porch and a year later they were married. That was in 2009.

“I started the museum after I came here and began renovating cottages. I found so much memorabilia, notebooks, letters, I felt they had to be preserved. Then the great-niece of Mary Drake Jenne, who had been camp secretary for 40 years, approached me and said she wanted to donate all the records her great aunt had saved. It was a gold mine.”



DIANE JACKMAN SKOLFIELD HOLDING UP THE BOOK SHE WROTE ABOUT HER SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES. DIANE STARTED THE CAMP ETNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM.



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Reverend Janet Decker leans in and says, “Susan B. Anthony was at Camp Etna. Many of the suffragettes were Spiritualists. Women’s rights were discussed here and protests were planned.”



Come to Camp Etna, we have a message for you.



SPIRITUALIST SUFFRAGETTES AT CAMP ETNA, EARLY 20TH CENTURY PHOTOGRAPH.

Janet completed her Ph.D in Metaphysics at the International University of Metaphysics. The Metaphysical Church came out of the Spiritualist Church in the 1960s. She came to Maine because the Spiritualist religion is strong here.



Jesus was a great prophet and we read the Bible as a spiritual roadmap. The Bible has something different to teach everyone. But we don't believe that Jesus will save you. You must save yourself."

"In my father's house there are many mansions," another woman says, quoting the New Testament. "I think that means there are many dimensions in the universe."

A woman hands me a leaflet with the "Declaration of Principles of the Spiritualist Church."

- 1. We believe in Infinite Intelligence.*
- 2. We believe that the phenomenon of nature, both physical and spiritual are the expression of infinite intelligence.*
- 3. We affirm that a correct understanding of such expression and living in accordance therewith constitutes true religion.*
- 4. We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the individual continue after the change called death.*
- 5. We affirm that communication with the so-called dead is a fact, scientifically proven by the phenomenon of Spiritualism.*
- 6. We believe that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."*
- 7. We affirm the moral responsibility of individuals, and that we make our own happiness or unhappiness as we obey or disobey Nature's physical and spiritual law.*
- 8. We affirm that the doorway to reformation is never closed against any soul here or hereafter.*
- 9. We affirm that the Precepts of Prophecy and Healing are divine attributes proven through Mediumship.*

Dr. Louis Gates joins us, sitting down with a plate of salad.

"Everyone who walks on this ground is seeking something," he says. "I look at that field and I have so many memories of playing there as a kid. My mother would come here to do Spiritualist work. She and my grandmother were Spiritualists. I have it on both sides. My grandmother was a Cherokee medicine woman. My father was a Baptist Minister. As a young adult I experimented with all different religions, but ended up coming back to the one



you could be in touch with other spiritualists. Now the camps are shutting down. We need to bring in more young people.”

We’d been talking for so long we lost track of time. Once again the bell tolls. This time it’s for table tipping. The women on the porch encourage me to go. Table tipping is a practice in which people who wish to communicate with loved ones on the other side gather around a table, placing their hands gently on the table top. When the spirits choose to come, the table begins to move, turning in a circle. Then the table picks one of the participants to communicate with. That person may then ask yes or no questions. An answer of yes is indicated by the table thumping back and forth. An answer of no is indicated by the table going still. It is an old tradition that was started by Spiritualists back in the 19th century.

I walk down to the Temple. I’m joined by six other people. We’ve never met before. There is a woman from Boston and her daughter and her daughter’s friend; a young couple who run a local farm; an older woman; one of the volunteer mediums, and me. Dr. Gates explains that the souls of our loved ones who want and need to speak with us came inside the temple together with us. He explains that the table we’d be using—a small white coffee table with four legs—is highly charged because it has been used for table tipping for many years. He explains that in the 19th century the tables had only three legs, symbolizing the Holy Trinity.

We break up into two groups so that we can comfortably stand around the table. I join the first group. We all lightly lay our hands on the table. For a moment there is silence. Then the table suddenly jerks down onto one leg. And then the table starts to move in a counter-clockwise direction. There are nervous giggles. We follow the table’s movements, trying to keep our hands on the tabletop as it spins swiftly. The table stops in front of the older woman and dips down. A spirit is there for her. She asks her questions and the table gives the spirit’s responses.

And so the evening goes. The young farmers ask questions about decisions regarding their farm. Will we be successful if we grow meat? What about potatoes?

At one point, Dr. Gates says, “There is an elderly gentleman here holding a tray of tools. He says you have work to do on the farm.”

Tears stream down the young farmer’s face. “Grandpa,” he whispers.

“There is a tall man here speaking a foreign language,” Dr. Gates says.

I ask in Lithuanian if this spirit is here for me.



answers.

Two of the women receive visitations from dogs they'd recently lost. Many spirits are present. Then suddenly the spirits are gone. It feels as though the air has been sucked out of the room. A ringing silence remains.

Dr. Gates breaks the silence by telling us a story about a woman who as a joke asked if she would win the lottery. The table dipped back and forth indicating yes. She grumbled that she never plays the lottery and that the table was wrong. A few weeks later she picked up a piece of paper from the ground and it turned out to be a lottery ticket. On a whim she brought it to a shop and found out she'd won three million dollars.

We say good-night and disperse for the evening. Nine o'clock is quiet time at Camp Etna. I go to my room at the Ladies Auxiliary. It is a peaceful, simple room in tones of pale blue. During the night I hear loons calling on the lake and wolves howling in the distance. Here I dream as I have never dreamed before. And then morning comes.



THE LADIES AUXILIARY



MY RESTFUL ROOM AT THE LADIES AUXILIARY.

After a potluck breakfast it is time for Church Service. Service is made up of three parts: Music, Healing, and a Sermon. I pick up the hymnal and leaf through the pages. A poem resonates with me:

Learn to Forget

Forget each kindness that you do as soon as you have done it.

Forget the praise that falls to you the moment you have won it.

Forget the slander you hear before you can repeat it.

Forget each slight, each sneer whenever you may meet it.

Remember every kindness done to you, whatever its measure.

Remember praise by others won and pass it on with pleasure.

Remember each promise made and keep it to the letter.

Remember those who lend you aid and be a grateful debtor.

Remember all the happiness that comes your way in living.

Forget each wrong and distress; be hopeful and forgiving.



And you will find age and youth, true joys and hearts to love you.

I revel in the positive spirit of this religion. There is no fire and brimstone here. No damnation. No judgment. No exclusivity. Just peace and love.

Reverend Janet Decker begins the service, greeting all of us, and especially a special guest, 97-year old June Bro, the last person alive to have worked with Edgar Cayce and to receive a life reading from him. June Bro is still active with the Association for Research and Enlightenment (A.R.E.).

Janet is wearing amber today to ground her. “It is going to be an intense day,” she says from the pulpit, “with Dr. Gates here and June Bro and others from the A.R.E.”

I had no idea that June Bro would be here at Camp Etna this weekend and that she would be sharing her experiences of having a life reading with Edgar Cayce and her work with the Cayce family. As I was packing my overnight bag to come to Camp Etna I looked at the pile of books I’d been reading, trying to decide which one to pack. My hand reached out and picked up the iconic biography of the life of Edgar Cayce *There is a River* by Thomas Sugrue. Could this have been a sign?

A Spiritualist Service is made up of three parts: healing, an inspirational talk (the sermon), and messages. The messages are what makes a Spiritualist Service distinct and different from other religious traditions. Spirits and Guides speak through the Pastor, delivering messages to people in attendance.

This Sunday there is music and then healing for those who choose it. Then Dr. Louis Gates begins his sermon. He laughs and tells us that he sees many more spirits in attendance at service than those of us in human form. These are the spirits of people who attended this temple in life. They are the souls of people connected to Camp Etna.

“You’ve all picked a tough religion,” Dr. Gates says. “You have no one to blame but yourselves. We don’t tell you how to believe. We allow you to find your own purpose. We are a science. We always try to prove the continuity of life. We are connected to the spirit world. Everyone here has the gift to look inward, the gift to communicate with the spirit world. It’s up to you how far you want to take it.”

Dr. Gates talks about how many of the Spiritualist camps are no longer around. He talks about how these days people are too unfocused, too distracted by their devices. He talks about how we’ve lost the ability to communicate with people not to mention Spirits. He talks about how prayers and mantras are designed to get the ego out of the way.



we guide people. If we can affect just one person on his or her path, we've done our work.

Allow yourselves to understand that this moment you are in now will change in the next moment. Forget the past. Let it go. What you put inside your soul growth will be most important in the spirit world. It's not about what you achieve. Everyone passes in their own way. How we live and perceive is what we bring to the other side. This is one of the toughest religions to get into—you look into your own vibration and you change it. We follow natural law. When you get to the other side the judge is you.”

After a potluck brunch, we all return to the temple to hear Jane Bro speak. At 97 June is full of laughter and light. She likes to tease and joke. She makes fun of herself. When she gets lost in the middle of a story, she chalks it up to age and asks someone to remind her where she was. She is a delight.



AT AGE 97 JUNE BRO IS STILL ACTIVE IN THE A.R.E. THE TABLE USED FOR TABLE TIPPING IS NOW USED TO HOLD HER CUP OF COFFEE.

June describes her life path, how she met her husband, how her mother-in-law reviewed *There is a River* in 1943 and how her review brought fame and attention to Edgar Cayce. She



pranks he'd play on people using his psychic powers. She spoke about how lonely and isolated the Cayces were, and how they were regarded as freaks in their time.

“Edgar Cayce read the Bible every year of his life. He knew all the people in the Bible as though they were his friends. He made the Bible come to life and be real. He loved the Church, but he was also human. He wasn't perfect. I learned from him that we don't have to be perfect people to do the work.”

June Bro spent her life putting Edgar Cayce's philosophy into practice. She raised her five children in his spirit.

“Recently I dreamed I was playing tennis with Edgar,” June says, giggling in her little girl manner, “and we were just whacking that ball back and forth. He was laughing and we were having fun. I think that means that I've done a good job. I must be doing something right. Cayce gave me a worldview. Reincarnation is important. We are never stuck. God is waiting to pull us to the next thing. As a soul when we come here we can lose our way, but he will help us find our way back.”

After her talk, I bring my copy of *There is a River* to June and ask her to sign it. She is delighted that I have the book with me. People come and ask me how I knew to bring this book. They wish they'd brought their's to sign. I say that I didn't know.



THE CAMP ETNA MUSEUM



comes in and joins me. I ask her to tell me the difference between a Spiritualist medium and a Psychic.

“A psychic will pick out things in a person’s aura, feel things, see things, and give some predictions, but they do not work from a spiritual or religious base. A Spiritualist Medium has a religious foundation and will only bring forth messages from guides and loved ones on the other side. A light healer is a medium who brings healing energy for the highest and best. A good medium will only pass on positive messages. Spiritualism has a bad name because there have been frauds out there who falsify things. Also, there are Spiritists. They are mediums who do not practice Spiritualism.”



AN EXHIBIT OF DAILY ITEMS USED AT CAMP ETNA IN THE PAST.

I ask Diane to show me some highlights of the Museum. She shows me a display set up to remember three people who dedicated their lives to Camp Etna. Harrison D. Barrett, 1863-1911; Mary Vanderbilt, 1867-1919, and Mary Drake Jenne, 1864-1946.



IN HONOUR OF HARRISON D. BARRETT, MARY VANDERBILT, AND MARY DRAKE JENNE

“Mary Vanderbilt had the ability to hold a sealed envelope with a letter inside to her forehead and know its contents. She gave a lot of guidance through her readings. The Tsar of Russia sent a letter and she was able to give very good guidance. She was rewarded with a trip to Russia,” Diane says.

I pick up one of the notebooks of Mary Drake Jenne and read an entry from 1940.

Nothing touches the soul—

That which we eat is so essential—

Be careful what you eat—or what you drink—

If you want health— Be careful what you eat—

There’s no truth so great as— There is nothing unclear—

If we can think with clarity we can think with God—we were born with a hurt—



physically weary or mentally disturbed, come to Camp Etna and our Healers will make you well.”

We laugh over “mentally disturbed,” joking that perhaps we were all mentally disturbed.

She reads on: “Come and witness the rending of the thin veil that intervenes between the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible.”

ETNA CAMP MEETING

CAMP ETNA, MAINE ON ROUTES No. 2 and 100
— 17 Miles Southwest of Bangor between Bangor and Newport —

August 18th to September 1st

The finest speakers in the U. S. on the subjects of psychical research, the occult and Spiritualism will be on the Etna program with three services daily and through three Sundays. The now scientific and religious proposition of man's sixth sense and his survival after death, spiritual healing and man's spiritual development will be general subjects for lecturers.

Harrison D. Barrett Pilgrimage
MONDAY, AUGUST 19th

Harrison D. Barrett, the First President of the National Spiritualist Association of America. Born and passed on at Canaan, Maine. Hundreds of people this year will honor this great orator, citizen and beloved teacher in a Pilgrimage to Canaan.

... ETNA'S BIG CAMP PROGRAM ...

3 Times Daily for 2 weeks, 3 Sundays and including the following important speakers:

FREDERICK HARDING	MAUDE KLINE	C. HARRISON ENGEL
GEORGE B. CUTTER	HON. ARTHUR SMITH	MARY DRAKE JENNE
ISABEL BRADLEY	MARY HOBBS JONES	GEORGE HOXIE
EMILY BARROWS TAYLOR	FREDERICK NICHOLSON	EDNA KNOWLTON
	JULIA A. BARKER	

- - - All Music will be furnished by Roger A. Nye and Marion McVae - - -

Nationally known psychics and mediums that have won reputations for genuine phenomenal demonstrations will be heard.

Come and stay for a Season or a Day - Hotels and Lunch Rooms - Cottages Available

ETNA SPIRITUALIST ASSOCIATION

C. Harrison Engel, Pres. ETNA, MAINE Mary Drake Jenne, Sec.

— MAINE CENTRAL AND GREYLINE BUSES STOP AT GATES —



except Sunday.

“People knew how to have fun then,” I say.

Nowhere in the notebooks are any personal details about people recorded that came through the readings. People’s privacy was respected for posterity.



THIS DISPLAY SHOWS HOW PEOPLE IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY WOULD PACK FOR CAMP.

Diane shows me notebooks from two clubs: The Pollyanna Club and the Sunflower Success Club. The Pollyanna Club was formed in 1916 with the goal of helping club members stay positive. I copy down a poem sent to the Pollyanna Sisters by Estelle Dudley in November, 1916.

I Will

I will start anew this morning with a higher fairer creed,

I will cease to stand complaining of my ruthless neighbor’s greed,

I will cease to sit repining while my DUTIES call is clear,

I will waste no moment ere my heart shall know no fear.

I will look sometimes about me, for the things that merit praise.



I will try to find contentedness in the path I must TREAD.

I will cease to have resentment when another moves ahead.

I will not be swayed by envy where my rival's strength is shown.

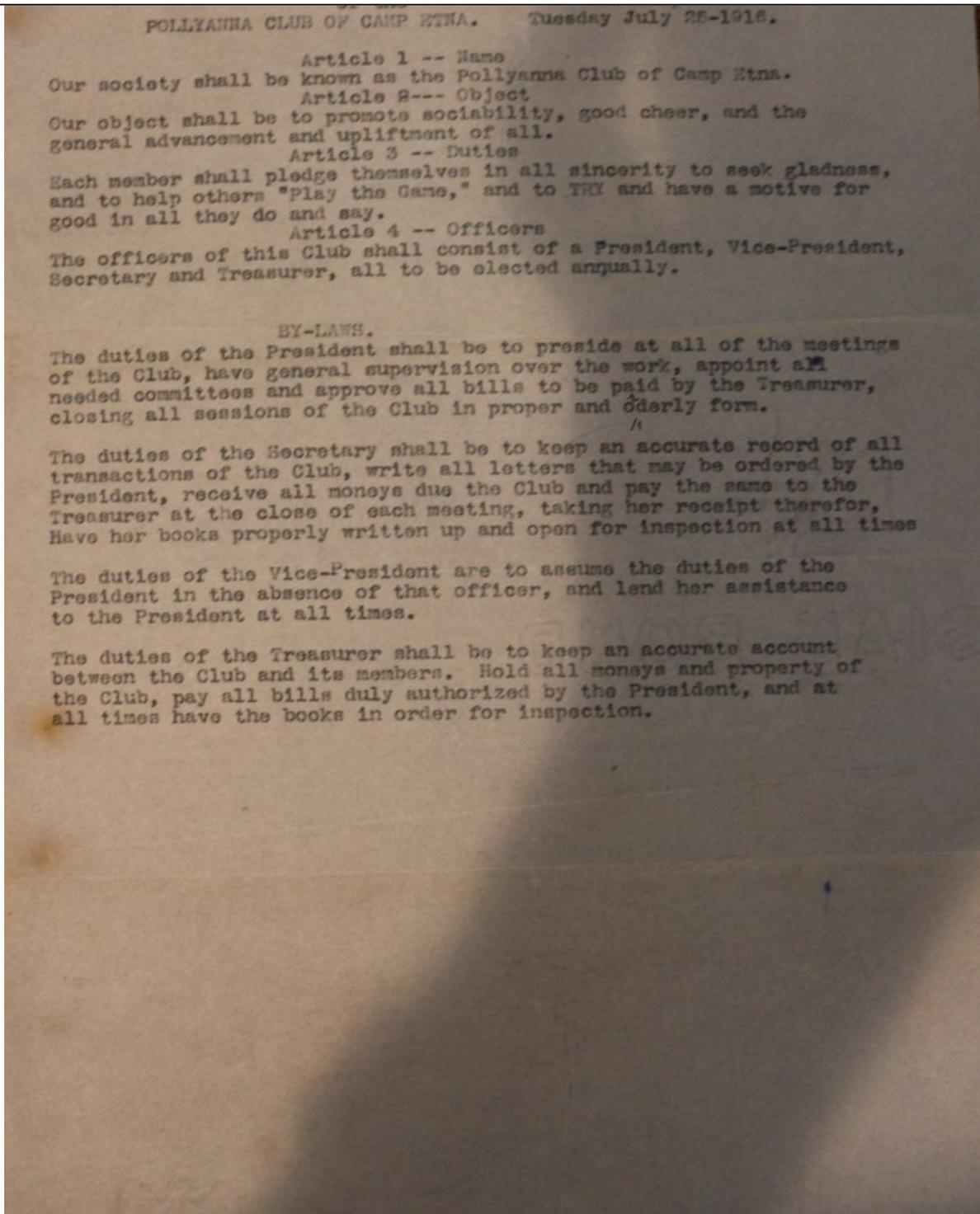
I will not deny his merit but I'll strive to prove my own.

I will try to see the beauties spread before me rain or shine.

I will cease to preach YOUR duty, and be more concerned with mine.

I think we all need to become members of the Pollyanna Club and remember these lessons! We live far more comfortable lives than people in Maine in the early twentieth century, and yet we find so much more to complain about.

“The Pollyanna Club took donations of 10 cents from people and in one season collected enough dimes to save up \$616 to build the arch at the entrance to camp,” Diane tells me.



THE RULES OF THE POLLYANNA CLUB

Ten years after the Pollyanna Club the Sunflower Success Club was formed on September 20, 1926 and organised on October 5, 1926. The requirements form membership were to “think, to talk, and to believe in SUCCESS for Camp Etna and ALL its members.”



THIS BANNER FOR THE SUN FLOWER SUCCESS CLUB WAS MADE BY CLUB MEMBERS.

Diane leaves me to read through the stack of copybooks from the Sunflower Success Club.

I copy this passage out from a meeting that took place March 29, 1927:



Coy. Then Mr. Coy related many successes that had attended him since he was with us at Camp Etna. Closing with the glad success he had in driving down in his auto from Guilford Monday and getting along all right. He expressed great confidence in the success of Camp Etna. Mrs. Jenne had success all along the line. One special success was the privilege of attending the hearing at Augusta of the Anti-Evolution Bill. Her visit with her sister in Boston and much accomplished in Portland were greatly appreciated.

The Spirit Helpers then controlled, saying most helpful and encouraging things. A strong chain of success was being formed. Camp Etna would have great success this season. The Spirit Friends had planned this first meeting of the season, many Spirit Friends being present to create spiritual conditions for the coming of their friends... Closed with prayer.

I'm astonished—though by now I shouldn't be—that the Spirit Helpers and Spirit Friends attended the meetings. Their names are added to roll call. The Spirit Friends are equal members of the Club, as are the Club's "Indian Friends" who bring peace pipes with them to meetings and who lead the group in smoking the pipe.



Meetings would open with the secretary reading each name and the group repeating the word, “success.” Then each member would share his or her successes of the week. Some examples of successes are fixing water pipes, baking bread, visiting the sick, driving over bad roads to reach Camp Etna.



A small bouquet of flowers from the garden of “Mother’s Cottage” was brought to the meeting. We are now prepared to receive more, and more, in the time of success for Camp Etna and success for each member.

Or:

Mrs. Russel had been very successful in gathering up leaves and carrying them away.

Or:

Mr. McNelley was successful in setting out his first dahlias.

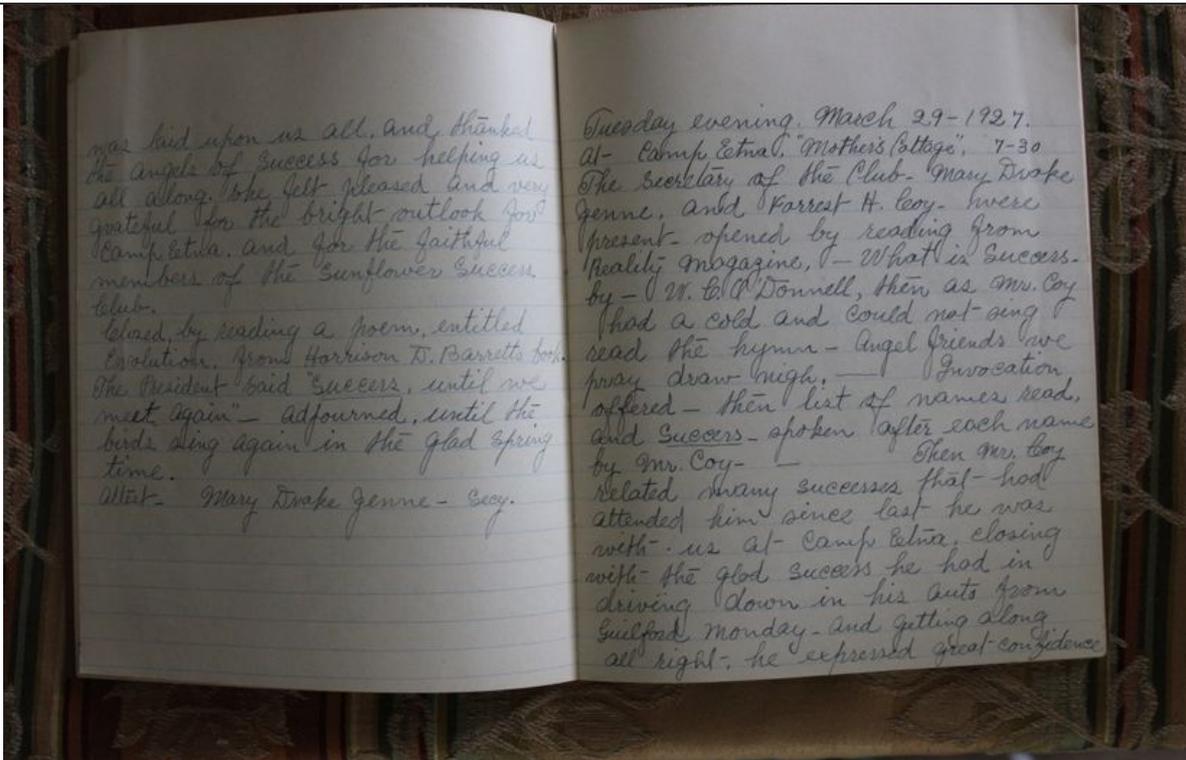
I grew up in the greater New York area, attended Rutgers and Columbia University, both achievement driven institutions. It had been drilled into me to work hard to achieve. I was never taught to acknowledge my success, but to continually strive for more. It never occurred to me that success could be something as simple as baking bread or raking up leaves. The Club’s emphasis on celebrating the mundane impresses me and forces me to reconsider some of my basic assumptions on the meaning of success.

The Spirit Friends are mentioned in each entry and are present at roll call.

Then Naomi—the message guide of Mrs. Russell—gave many sweet greetings from the Spirit Friends. They all evinced a splendid interest in the Sunflower Success Club. We are grateful to them all.

Over the years, as more Spirit Friends joined the Club, they are acknowledged.

The Secretary was instructed to place the name of Warren Forrs upon the membership list, he having expressed the desire from the spirit life to become a member: Mrs. Flora Fenton from spirit was also accepted to membership as a helper from larger life.



A NOTEBOOK FROM THE SUN FLOWER SUCCESS CLUB

We live in a time where our media bombards us daily with messages of negativity. The more we consume, the more we are told that the world is in a state of want and that we never have enough. At Camp Etna in years past, as now, the spirit of positivism and optimism is ever-present. In Spiritualism's "Ten Laws of Right" I find everything I need to know to live my life as fully as possible:

Ten Laws of Right

1. *Manifest temperance or balance in all things, with regard to the physical, mental, emotional or spiritual.*
2. *Give justice to all creatures by exercising precisely the same rules of life, conduct, thought, or speech that we would desire to receive from others.*
3. *Show gentleness or kindness in speech and actions, never carelessly wounding the feelings of others by harsh words or deeds, or by hurting or killing another living creature except for sustenance or self-defense.*
4. *Express Truth in every word, thought, and deed, remembering always to keep harsh or hurtful truths to yourself when they would carelessly hurt the feelings of another.*
5. *Exercise Charity or brotherly love in thought, speech, and deed, remembering always to keep harsh or hurtful truths to yourself when they would carelessly hurt the feelings of*



6. In Almsgiving or help be generous. Visit the sick and comfort the afflicted in every manner that your means will allow and the needs of your fellow creatures demand.

7. Exhibit Self-Sacrifice at all times to benefit others.

8. Be temperate and moderate, yet firm in defence of what we consider to be right and protect against any wrongs to ourselves or others.

9. Display Industry or Enthusiasm and Responsibility in whatever work we might engage in and devote some part of our time, when possible, to the service and benefit of others.

10. Manifest Love about and beyond everything else. Seek to cultivate in our families, friends, and among all fellow human beings the real love which cannot think, speak or do wrong to any creature. Remember that where love is, all the other principles of right are embodied and fulfilled by it.

Twilight falls and it is time for me to drive away from Camp Etna, and away from Maine. I will carry with me in my heart this place where love and all the principles of right are embodied and fulfilled. I've lived a lifetime of knowledge in these past two days. I've learned to be comfortable with the Spirit World. And I've learned to let hurt go.

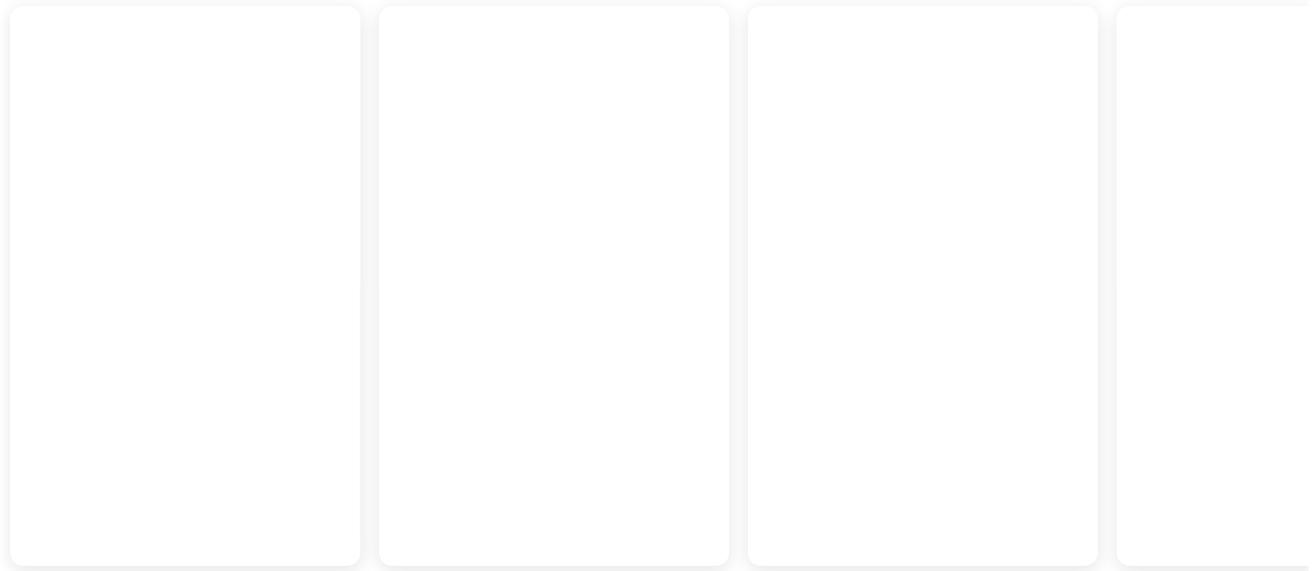
I pass under the Camp Etna arch just as the sun is dipping low on the horizon. I decide I will stop along the way and get one of the world's best whoopie pies for the road.

Laima Vince



NEW FRIENDS MADE AT CAMP ETNA!

Books by Laima Vince:





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How To Get Michelle Obama’s ‘Vote’ Necklace

Kamala Harris Secret Service Code Name Revealed

‘Cheers’ Letter Carrier John Ratzenberger Has An Idea To Help USPS

Postmaster General ‘Suspending’ Changes To U.S. Postal Service Until After Election

WHAT’S HOT

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Mike Pence’s Oblivious Boast About The Stock Market Ticks People Off

Marco Rubio Decimated For Tweet Criticizing DNC For Celebrity Host Eva Longoria

‘Astoundingly Powerful’: Michelle Obama’s DNC Speech Raises The Virtual Roof

From Sobbing To Superhero Spoofs: Late Night Hosts Review Day 1 Of The Virtual DNC

Netflix Cancels Hasan Minhaj’s ‘Patriot Act’

Twitter Users Not Impressed With Trump’s Susan B. Anthony Pardon

Donald Trump To Pardon Women’s Suffrage Leader Susan B. Anthony



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