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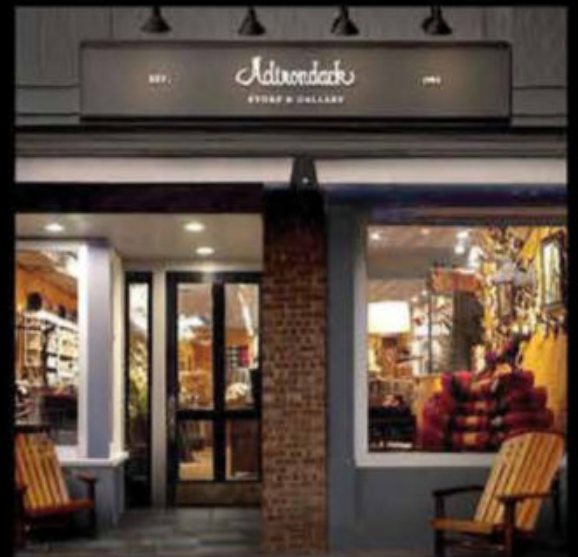
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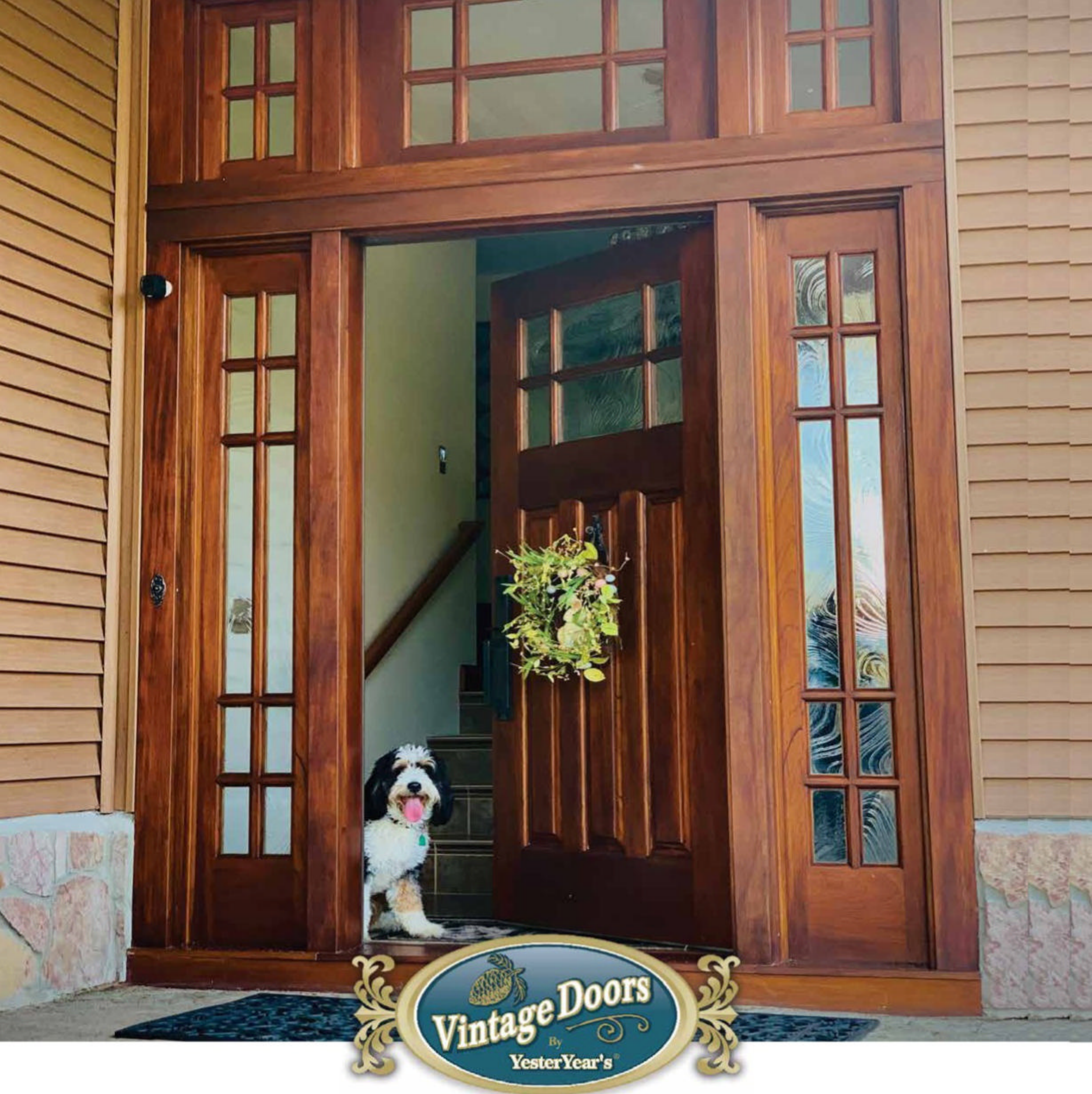
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The Wild Center's mission is to ignite an enduring passion for the Adirondacks, where people and nature can thrive together and offer an example for the world.

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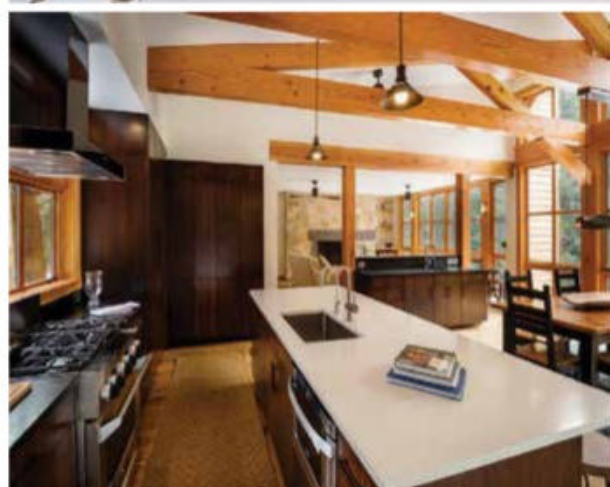
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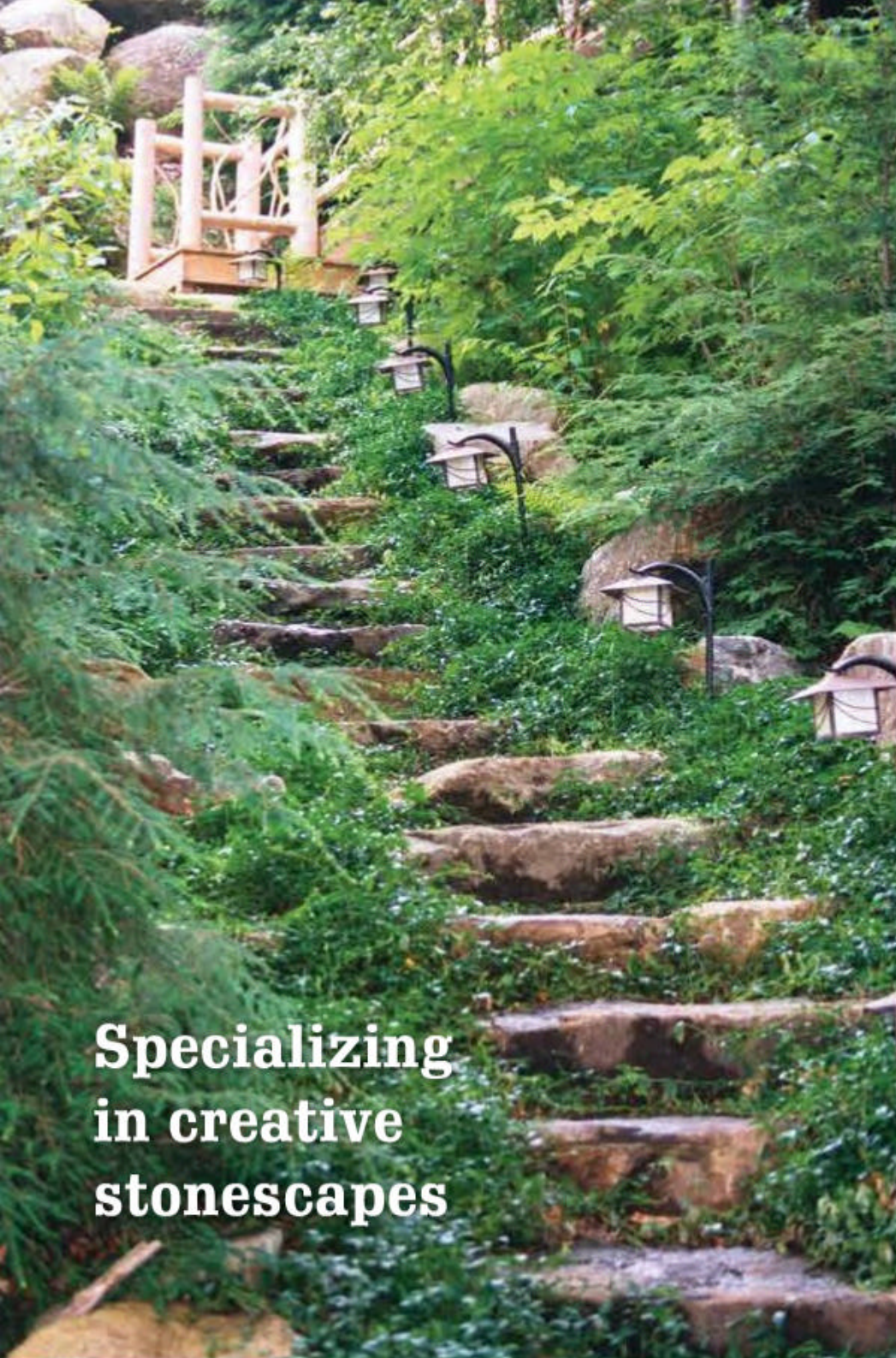
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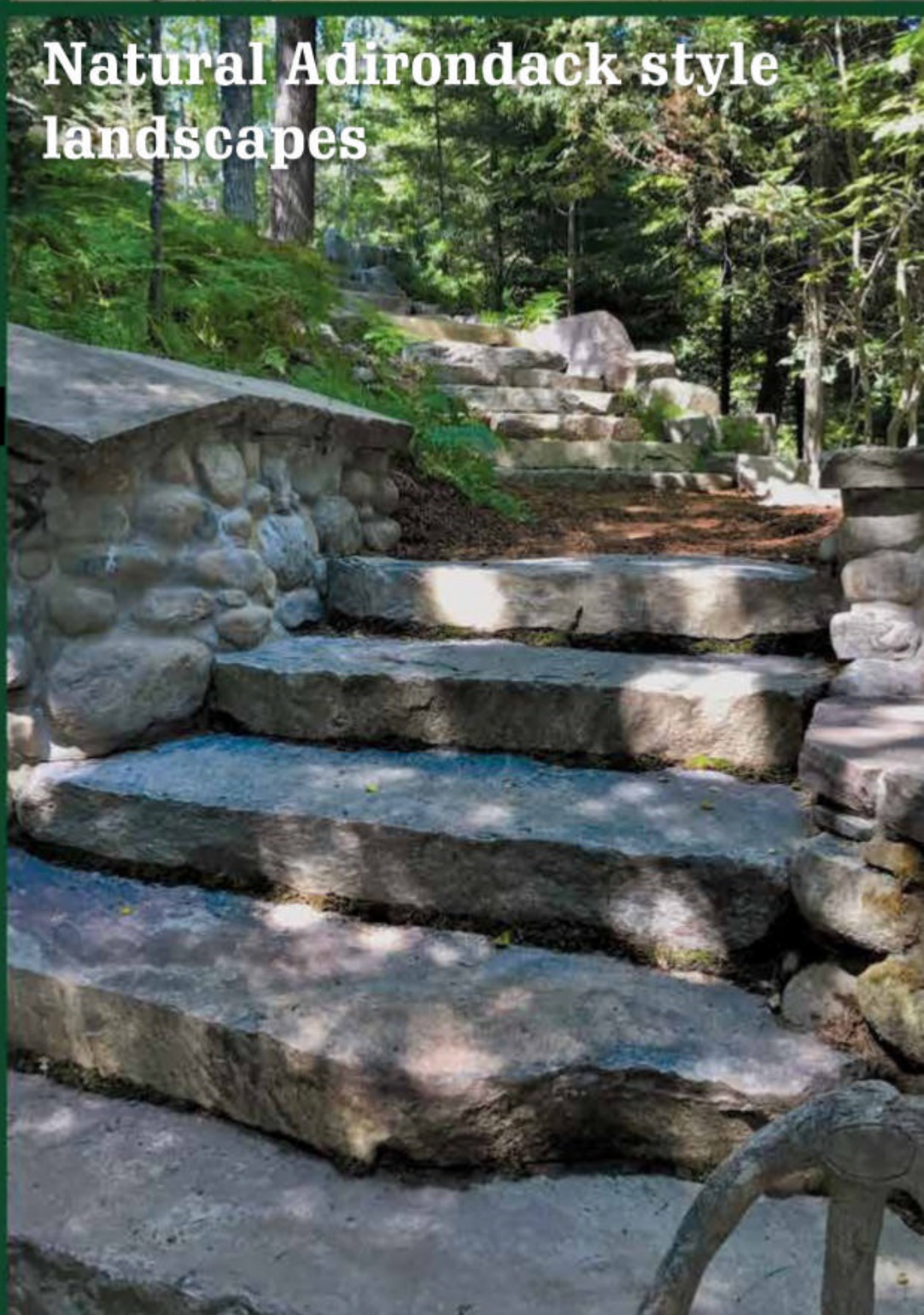
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MAGNETIC DRAW

Niki Kourofsky's piece on her warm childhood memories of visiting the "scarred landscape" of Lyon Mountain ("To the Mountain," December 2020) brought back memories. Over the years I have treated my family and friends to a trip to see the big iron ore pile where the abandoned workshops, in spectacular decay, still sit. As for my older memories, I played Pee-wee and Babe Ruth league baseball against the Lyon Mountain teams—"the Miners"—that carried near mythical status (we believed they played up there in the winter). The infield was made of groomed, dark gray ore sand, and they had real steel dugouts. The Toloskis, Kowalowskis, Yasmments, Petrashunes and the Benjamin boys would laugh off most competition that came to play in the shadow of the pile. As the mine left town, the school closed, to be replaced by a prison that also closed, and the town got frailer in appearance and smaller. Yet still powerful is the draw to the pile above the town, the ghostly ruins, the dangerous tailing ponds. For more than 100 years, rich, high-grade ore came out of that mountain, and rich lives were lived on its slopes. Lyon Mountain still retains a magnetic force.

Michael Coffey
Bolton Landing, NY

A REAL WINDFALL

"Wild, Wild Weather" (*Northern Lights*, December) caught my eye. There was much more to the "Great Windfall of 1845" than you led readers to believe. This event started with a tornado in Niagara County, followed by a seiche observed on both the Canadian and American sides of Lake Ontario. Next came one or more tornadoes from the vicinity of Watertown to Lake Champlain, passing north of Cranberry Lake, Tupper Lake and the Saranac Lakes.

More than 4,000 acres of timber was flattened in the town of Fowler, and another 6,000 acres was blown down in the town of Edwards. The next area of



blowdown was the section near Cranberry Lake and Newton Falls that continues past Sevey's Corners and Childwold in the town of Colton. In fact, a settlement called "Windfall" grew up on the windfall near Cranberry.

Mark Friden, Clifton Town Historian
Cranberry Lake, NY

RENAISSANCE WOMEN


In "Hunting with Helena" (October 2020), it was exciting to see this lovely young person doing something so traditional and important. Brava to her! I also wanted to mention Yvonne Albinowski's sensational photographs that illustrate the article. The image on page 34 is like a Renaissance painting.

Dorian Gossy
Jay, NY

Adirondack Life welcomes the views of readers. All letters are subject to editing, must be signed and should be addressed to Box 410, Jay, NY 12941.
Email: letters@adirondacklife.com

Correction: Two photographs in "The Call of the Wild" (December 2020) were incorrectly captioned: the images show a tributary of the Raquette River near Buttermilk Falls, on page 29, and Whitney Lake, in the West Canada Lakes Wilderness, on page 32.





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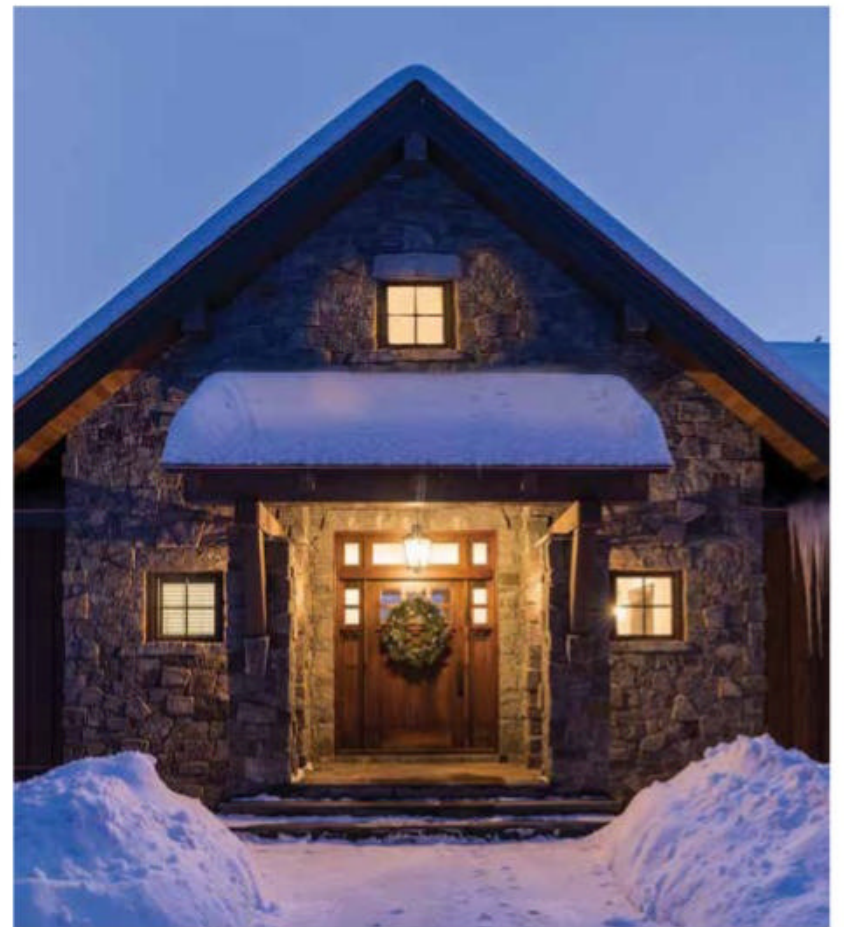
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Short Carries



The Wave Goodbye

After three decades at *Adirondack Life*, Elizabeth “Betsy” Folwell retires

Folwell, above on Owls Head in 2003, was hired as an editor at *Adirondack Life* in 1989; in 2005 she joined the magazine’s publishing team.

Coming to *Adirondack Life* in 1989 was inevitable: my previous jobs had been at the Adirondack Museum and Adirondack Lakes Center for the Arts (ALCA), both in Blue Mountain Lake. At an ALCA career day focusing on employment in the arts, I met photographer Nancie Battaglia and *Adirondack Life* editor Christopher Shaw. At the end of the day, as high-school students piled into buses, Shaw asked, “You’re not planning to do this for the rest of your life, are you?”

It turned out the assistant editor position at *Adirondack Life* was open and I started as possibly the least prepared editor ever to join a publication. I was still hyphenating adverbs, and until a fellow magazine staffer photocopied the full page of editors’ marks from *Merriam-Webster*, I had no clue how to intelligently scribble over virgin copy. That tool is basic, of course, and it took years for me to see where

a story lurked amid a forest of words and how to encourage writers to uncover the materials that made for solid, surprising reads. I was aware that many subscribers knew far more than I did about the Adirondacks. Every day I appreciated their forbearance and lived in fear they would find the flaws and factual errors that would blow our (and by extension, my) credibility.

In those decades, the magazine went from six issues a year to seven, then eight. And the time-consuming processes of pasting up stories with hot wax and sending slides to Utica for color separations morphed into desktop publishing, giving us more control over our schedule and the finished product. I moved through the ranks, from assistant, to senior editor, to editor.

Readers want a magazine that speaks to them, one that reflects and enlarges what they know, a reliable voice that takes them places they want to go—even if it’s historically or geographically impossible. They are eager for more depth and detail, even tales that unearth uncomfortable truths. They want to see vividly all the lakes, mountains and wild creatures found here. The magazine came to function like a magic window that brought the Adirondacks home every day.

I learned new skills and went to new places to hunt down the stories I felt deserved a little daylight. From my office in Jay, it was easy to call, for instance, NL Industries in Newcomb, to request a ride on the last ore train from the Tahawus mine. And I could invite myself into remarkable homes and unusual landholdings like Boreas Ponds before the public was allowed.

Along the way, I met so many writers far more talented than I was, men and women who embraced deep research even back in the pre-Internet days, people who had the sweep of experience and insight to make a topic become a piece that inspired an a-ha moment or a broader way of seeing a place, an incident, an individual. I met photographers who woke before dawn to capture a scene, who climbed trees and mountains, who waded in mucky wetlands,

Photograph by Nancie Battaglia

who earned the trust of skeptical and shy persons for the portrait that is truly worth a thousand words. I can't thank them enough.

As part of my job I traveled to schools, clubs, lake associations and special events to speak about *Adirondack Life*. I learned something in every conversation and found numerous leads for new stories to assign to others or pursue myself.

In October 2005 I joined the magazine's publishing team with Joni Manning, controller, and Lisa Lincoln, circulation director. This approach meant decision making akin to Quaker consensus rather than unilateral verdict.

As I continued to meet our readers, many times someone would introduce him- or herself by saying, "I'm a member of *Adirondack Life*," and then go on with useful criticism, article ideas or praise. What an eye-opener to hear them say "member" rather than "subscriber." That illustrated the depth of commitment and a glimpse of the importance of this magazine in their lives. It was connectivity, this flipping of pages, long before we could just pick up some device.

I learned other things too, like how to read by listening because of my blindness, which came without warning or pain in 2001. The independence I fiercely projected gave way to accepting help and requesting patience as some simple tasks just took longer. I never gave up on the visual world, though I had to appreciate it philosophically rather than directly. The person most responsible for helping me interpret and navigate the landscape is Tom Warrington, my husband and BFF.

I joined the magazine in time to work on the 20th anniversary issue and stayed on through the 50th anniversary last year. Now it's time for the wave goodbye, as former *Adirondack Life* editor Jeff Kelly once called it.

But I won't stop writing. As E. B. White put it in *One Man's Meat*, "Writing is not an occupation nor is it a profession.... It is more of an affliction, or just punishment. It is something that raises up on you like a welt."

With gratitude—and welts ... —Betsy



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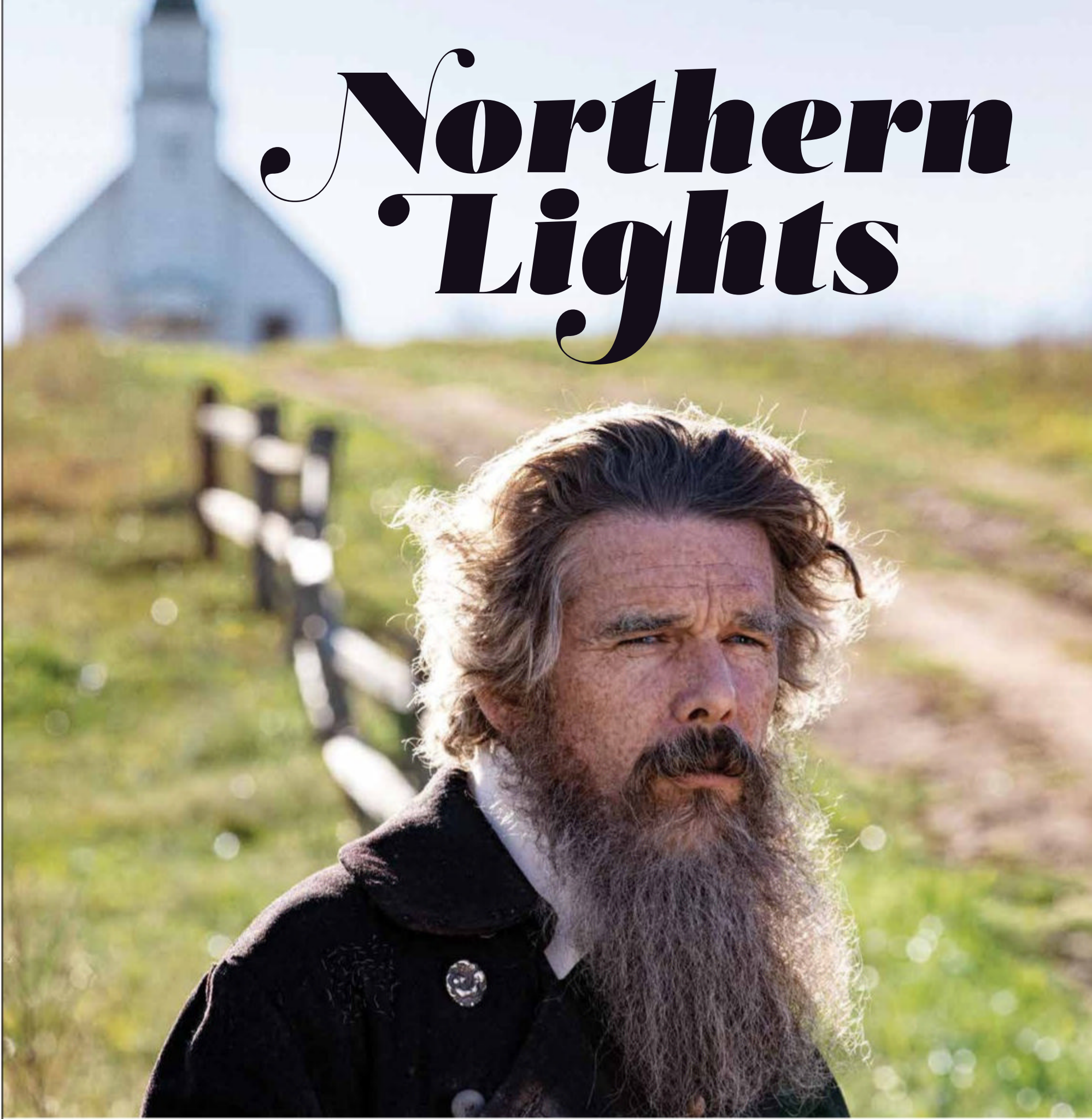
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Northern Lights



Ethan Hawke photograph by Kevin Lynch, courtesy of Showtime

Actor Ethan Hawke plays the role of John Brown in the Showtime series *The Good Lord Bird*.

Character Study

The Showtime series *The Good Lord Bird*, starring Ethan Hawke as John Brown, has brought renewed interest in the story of the fiery abolitionist who lived for a time, and is buried, in North Elba. Hawke's wild-eyed portrayal of Brown—best known for his ill-fated raid on Harpers Ferry—is based on the 2013 National Book Award-winning James McBride novel of the same name. In an interview on NPR's *Fresh Air*, Hawke spoke of visiting John Brown Farm “to pick up the scent, as it were. I went to his house and I walked those woods.” The actor, who also co-created the series, said Brown's story speaks to the current moment of America's reckoning with racism.



We're Honored

Adirondack Life received 12 awards from the International Regional Magazine Association's annual conference, which took place virtually October 20–22. The awards recognized work from 2019 through March 2020. Read the winning stories at www.adirondacklife.com.

"ISLAND GETAWAY"

Luke Cyphers (Gold—Travel Feature)

"KINDERVOLK"

Lisa Bramen (Gold—Profile)

"THE GREAT ADIRONDACK LIFE CHALLENGE"

Mark Mahorsky (Gold—Art Direction of a Single Story)

WRITER OF THE YEAR

Niki Kourofsky (Silver)

"A BLUE LINING"

Bill McKibben (Silver—Nature & Environment Feature)

"SAVED BY A MIRACLE"

Luke Cyphers (Silver—General Feature)

"WINTER TAILS" (FEBRUARY 2019)

(Silver—Cover)

"BEN & HELEN"

Zohar Gitlis (Bronze—Art and Culture Feature)

"ROUTES REVIVAL"

Phil Brown (Bronze—Recreation)

"OPEN ALL NIGHT"

Editorial Staff (Bronze—Reader Service)

"CAMP SWEET CAMP"

Carrie Marie Burr (Bronze—Photo Series)

"REBEL LOVE"

Kristin van Ogtrop (Bronze—Essay)

"KATE SMITH TODAY"

Luke Cyphers (Award of Merit—Public Issues)

Home Wee Home

Do you own a tiny house in the Adirondack Park? Email a couple of interior and exterior photos, plus a few lines about the joys and challenges of living small, to aledit@adirondacklife.com, and we'll consider it for a future issue.



Get Otter Here

Uplifting animal videos are the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* of our times, and the Wild Center recently served up a hearty helping. In October, five months after taking in two abandoned otter pups, rehabilitators from the Tupper Lake natural history museum released them into the Shingle Shanty Preserve in the western Adirondacks, where they'll have plenty of room to scamper and swim. Watch their moving-day video, along with earlier "pupdates" of their rehab, at www.wildcenter.org/pupdates.



FIRST TRACKS

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As a member of the Lake Placid Ski Club Board of Directors, Bryant helped develop a plan to expand skiing opportunities and turn winter sports into a tourist draw.

In November Bryant was inducted into the Lake Placid Hall of Fame. Bryant's sons Thaire and Raymond wrote in their nomination letter, "As the first person so many people met who wanted to learn to ski or acquire the newest ski fashion, our father was the quiet, unassuming gentleman who met their needs."



Thaire Bryant, kneeling bottom left, and arctic explorer Jacques Suzanne, third from left, at Thaire's Ski Shop, circa 1930s.



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The Long View

Looking back at my
Saranac Lake childhood

BY ADAM FEDERMAN

The author with his mother, Dorothy, on Baker Mountain, and with his family on Ampersand Mountain, in the mid-1980s.

Saranac Lake, with a population of just over 5,000 people, is the largest village in the Adirondack Park. This still surprises me even though I've known it for at least half my life. The park, a mix of public and private land, is big, famously so. It's bigger than Yosemite, the Everglades, Grand Canyon and Yellowstone combined. If the park were a state it would be about the size of Vermont, where the largest city is home to more than 40,000 people. So a town of 5,000 in the middle of millions of acres of wild forest, even if it is the biggest, is still, well, small.

That's how I've always imagined it. Not only small, but also remote. It's nearly an hour drive just to get to the Northway, the closest major interstate. The Amtrak station in Westport is a 40-minute drive (service currently suspended north of Albany due to COVID). Montreal is two and a half hours away. There's a Trailways bus that departs from Fusion Market on Lake Flower Avenue to points south, including New York City, but it's a long and exhausting ride. One thing we can count on is winter: just about every year, Saranac Lake is the coldest spot in the nation, appearing on morning newscasts across the country.

When I was born in Saranac Lake, in 1979, the population was closer to 7,000. Things have changed since then, but not much. There are half a dozen or so new houses on the road I grew up on and where my parents still live. In

Photographs courtesy of the author

recent years a pair of loons has taken up residence on nearby Moody Pond. The trail up Mount Baker, more or less in our backyard, is significantly wider than it was 20 years ago. Like much of the Adirondacks, it has been “discovered.”

The trees in our front yard are perhaps more precise markers of change. A tulip tree given to my parents when my brother was born in 1975 is now at least 60 feet tall and flowered for the first time several years ago. Three birch

Once, there was a bear at our bus stop. But there were other, less tangible, dangers. There were limits to what a small town could offer and as I got older, Saranac Lake was a place I wanted to escape from.

trees planted when my grandfather died in 1998—he had come to live with us during his final years—are now mature and arched slightly from the prevailing winds. There are also a couple of hemlocks, crabapple trees and a Japanese maple that we’ve planted over the years. The lawn has become a forest.

My grandfather’s wife, Eve, was a first-generation Saranac Laker. Her father had come to Saranac Lake in the early 1900s, like so many others, after being diagnosed with tuberculosis. The Weinstocks—Eve was one of seven sisters—ran a small general store out of the first floor of the three-story apartment building where they lived near Lake Flower. For the Weinstocks, Saranac Lake was a kind of refuge both from the pogroms they had fled in Eastern Europe and from a disease for which there was no cure.

It was a good place to grow up, then and now. We had extraordinary freedom and in summer spent countless hours riding our bikes around the neighborhood or tromping through the woods unencumbered, it seemed, by anything other than the falling darkness. In winter we skied at Mount Pisgah, a two-run

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MY HOMETOWN

hill with a T-bar that is probably one of the last of its kind in the country. There were always reminders that we lived at the edge of a vast and untamed wilderness. Once, there was a bear at our bus stop.

But there were other, less tangible, dangers. There were limits, I suppose, to what a small town could offer, and as I got older, Saranac Lake was a place I wanted to escape from. Even if it is sometimes referred to as the "little city of the Adirondacks," I was after the real thing. (This may have been in part because I was the youngest of three and watched longingly as my brother and sister went off to college far from home.) I remember refusing to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance in high school and drawing the ire of my homeroom teacher—he told me it would come back to haunt me—and being sent to the principal's office. I had to defend myself and explain that you can choose not to say the pledge and that no one can make you stand for something you don't believe in. Back then the school mascot was still the Saranac Lake "Redskins" and few seemed to question why it would be offensive. Football was king. (The name was changed to "Red Storm" in 2001.) At a certain point, and no doubt unfairly, I began to equate small-town life with small-mindedness. In the end I did leave high school half a semester early in order to enroll in an outdoor education program at a two-year school in Colorado. The campus was in Leadville, an old mining town with 2,600 people.

I now live less than two hours away from Saranac Lake, on the other side of Lake Champlain, with a view of the Adirondacks that I find truly awesome: the rugged, wild beauty of the region revealed in a way that's hard to see when you're in the middle of it. Sometimes you have to get away to appreciate where you're from. ▲

Adam Federman is a reporting fellow with Type Investigations and the author of *Fasting and Feasting: The Life of Visionary Food Writer Patience Gray*. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Nation*, and *Slate* and *Politico* magazines.

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Living in Jane Austen's World

The love lives of black-capped chickadees

BY LAURA ERICKSON

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single bird in possession of a good territory, must be in want of a mate. With a bit of tweaking, Jane Austen's opening sentence in *Pride and Prejudice* describes many birds, but her depiction of English society in the 18th century most closely mirrors the life of the black-capped chickadee.

Chickadees lead lives more provincial than did Austen herself, staying within their neighborhood and associating with a small circle of acquaintances season after sea-

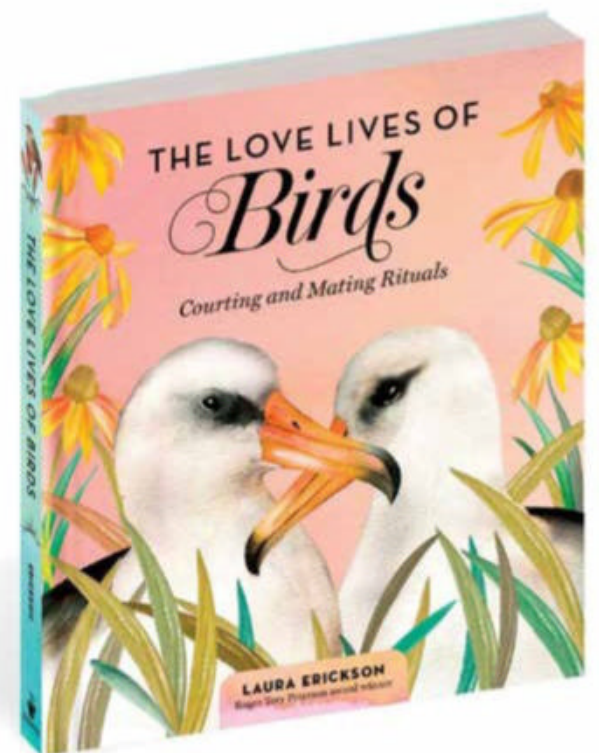
son, year after year. To the undiscerning eye their existence may appear to be nothing more than "a quick succession of busy nothings," but like Austen readers, observant birders notice individuals and their relationships and dramas within any chickadee flock.

As in Austen's world, chickadee flocks have a strict, stable social hierarchy. Chickadees become "marriageable" the spring after their first winter. Those young chickadees start out at the bottom of the social ladder, rising in rank as they get older. Pairs are composed of birds of equal social standing. Elizabeth Bennet could have been a chickadee when she noted about Darcy, "He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal."

Female chickadees can't help but look over the neighborhood males, finding the best singers especially attractive.



Illustration by Veronica B. Lilja peppercookies.com





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WILDLIFE

Like Austen characters, a chickadee's "imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony in a moment," but no English heroine would accept mashed-up insects from a lovestruck male. In both worlds, settling love relationships involves drama, but once mate choices are worked out, the dénouement is short and sweet, the consummation private. Some infidelity has always occurred; as Mrs. Bennet might have noted, "I assure you there is quite as much of that going on with chickadees as with people." Yet in both cases, lasting bonds endure year after year.

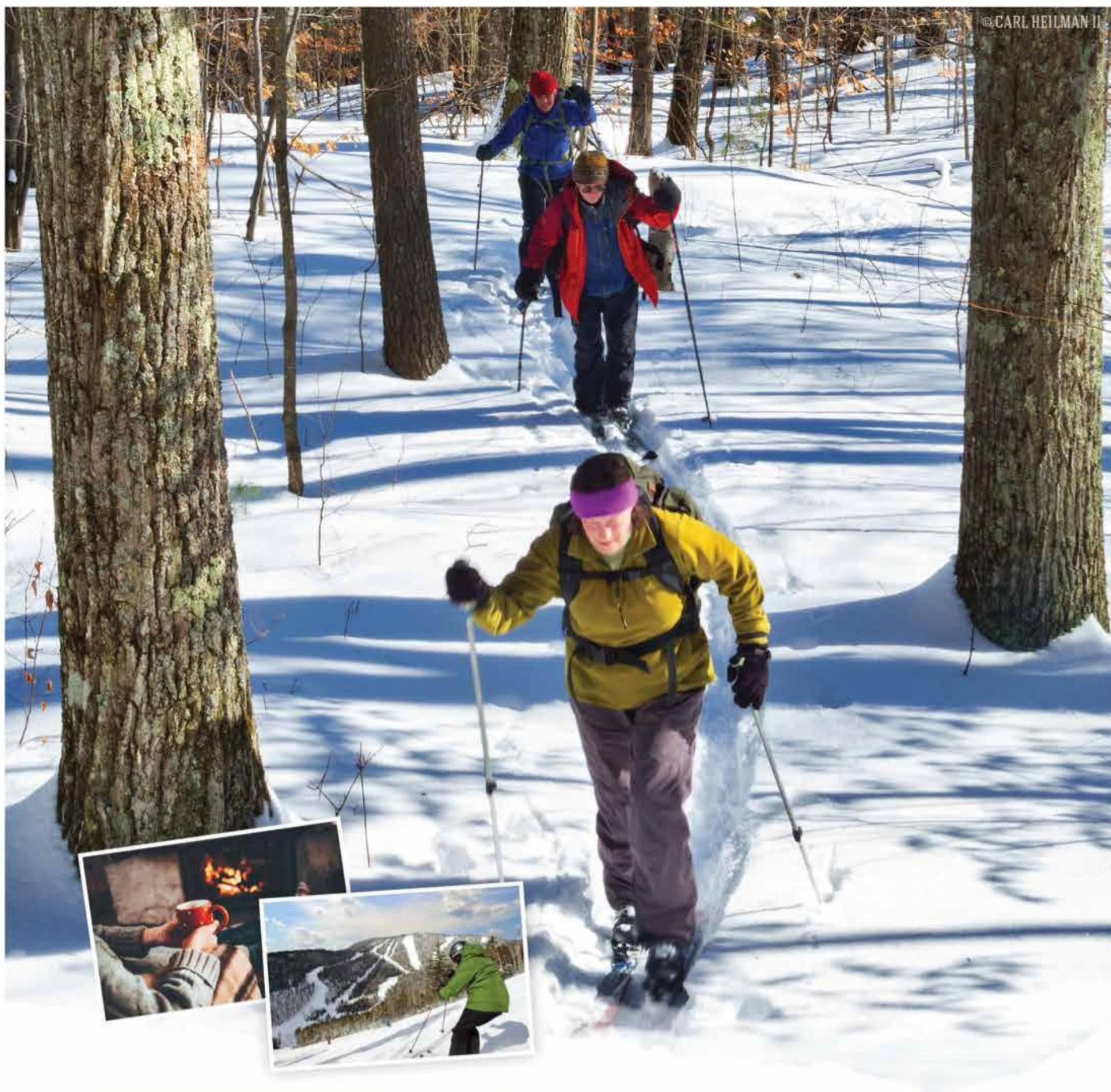
A pair may not seem like a unit in fall and early winter, but one sunny January morning, the male starts singing anew, and his mate listens afresh. He may ask her, like Darcy, "If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged."

Chickadee romance surges every spring and ebbs every summer. A pair may not seem like a unit in fall and early winter, but one sunny January morning, the male starts singing anew, and his mate listens afresh. He may ask her, like Darcy, "If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged." And just like the previous April, and the April before that, their feelings will not be repressed. Chickadees probably cannot fix on which hour, or glance, or words laid the foundation, but for yet another season, they settle into domestic felicity.

It worked in Jane Austen's world, and it works for chickadees today. 🌱

Adapted from *The Love Lives of Birds* © 2020 by Laura Erickson. Used with permission from Storey Publishing.





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LOOK TO THE *Lake George Area* IN NEW YORK'S ADIRONDACKS

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Nick Zachara, Lake Placid, NY



MEET SOME OF OUR FAVORITE ADIRONDOGS

YOU SEE ADIRONDACKERS' FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS just about everywhere around here, hiking, swimming, napping in the sun, lounging by a campfire. So, we figured, why not spotlight these park pups in an *Adirondack Life* dog photo contest?

Three hundred-plus entries later, we realized our mistake. Those fuzzy faces, the soulful eyes, the doggy elation of splashing, digging and doing all the things that outdoor exploring allows, photographed by the humans who love them—well, every single image is a winner. So we leaned hard on our judges, photographers Lisa J. Godfrey (@godfreysdogpack) and Brendan Wiltse (@brendanwiltse), to help us pick the standouts, based on the spirit of the subject matter within their Adirondack surroundings.

Following are the grand-prize, first-, second- and third-place winners, and as many other shots as we could squeeze onto these pages. The winners will receive *Adirondack Life* swag; all the pups here, as well as other entries, will appear on our Facebook page and Instagram feed (@adklifemag) when we begin posting an #Adirondog a day at the beginning of January.



EMMY ON THE NORTHVILLE-PLACID TRAIL NEAR WELLS

Steff Obkirchner, Amsterdam, NY

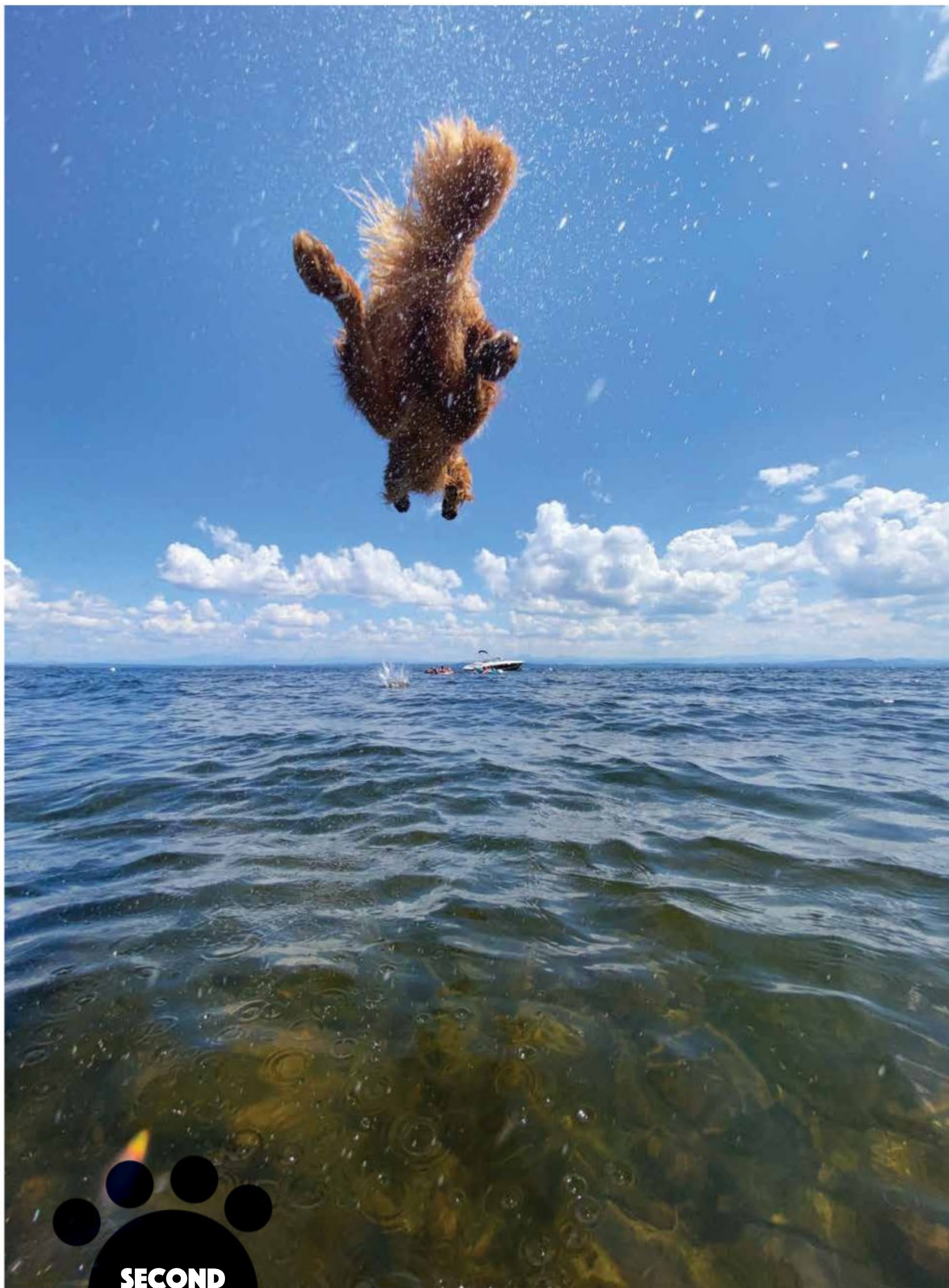
TAILS ON TRAILS

While dog owners should keep their pets within sight and on leashes to respect other outdoor recreationists and protect wildlife across the Adirondacks, New York State requires that in the Eastern High Peaks, dogs are leashed on trails, at tent and lean-to sites, and at elevations above 4,000 feet or any other areas where they may come in contact with the public.

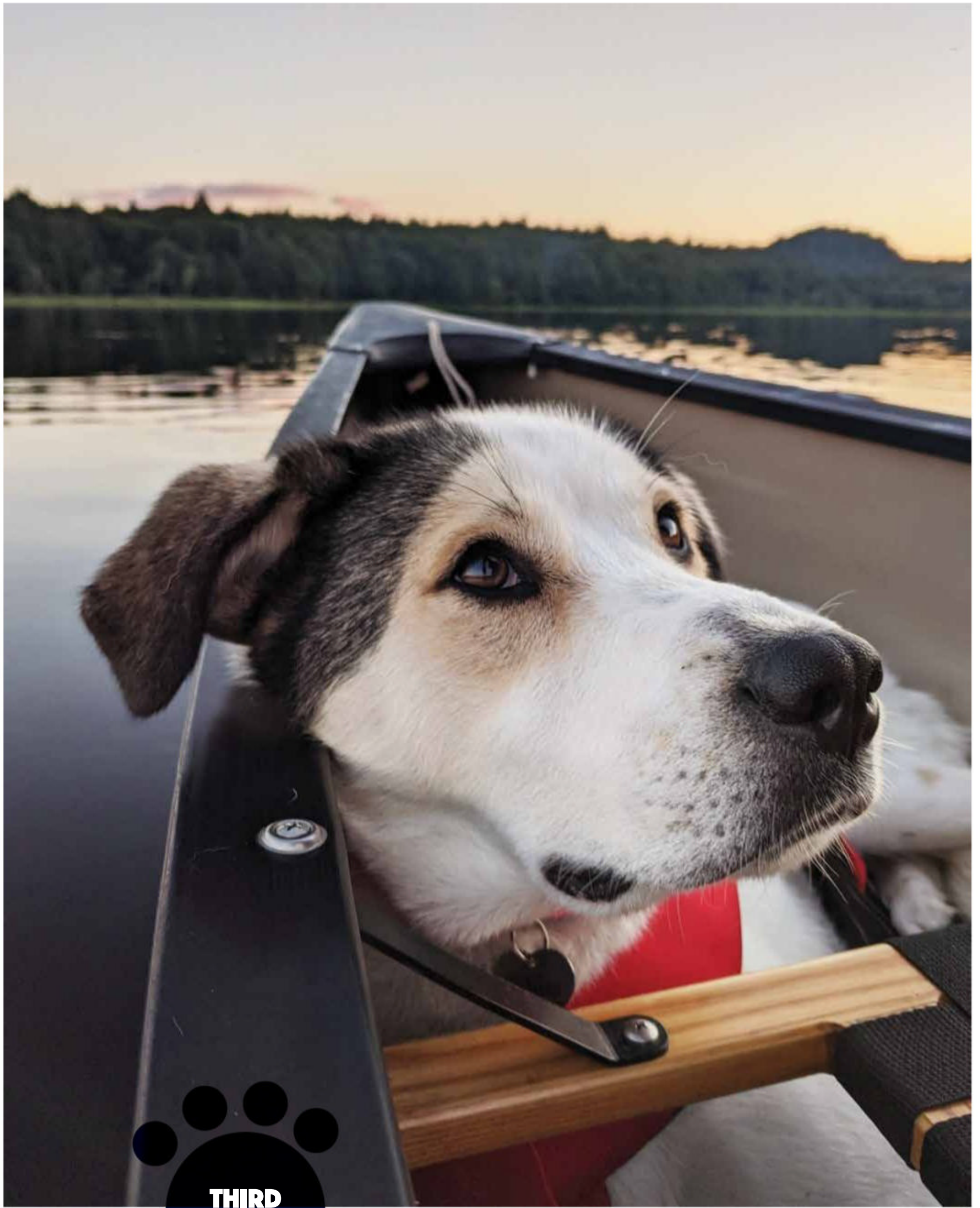
Dog owners should be aware that people hunt and trap on designated state lands—another reason to leash your dog.

Pets need to be prepared for physical exertion, and need water, food and protection from the elements. Their waste should also be picked up or properly buried.

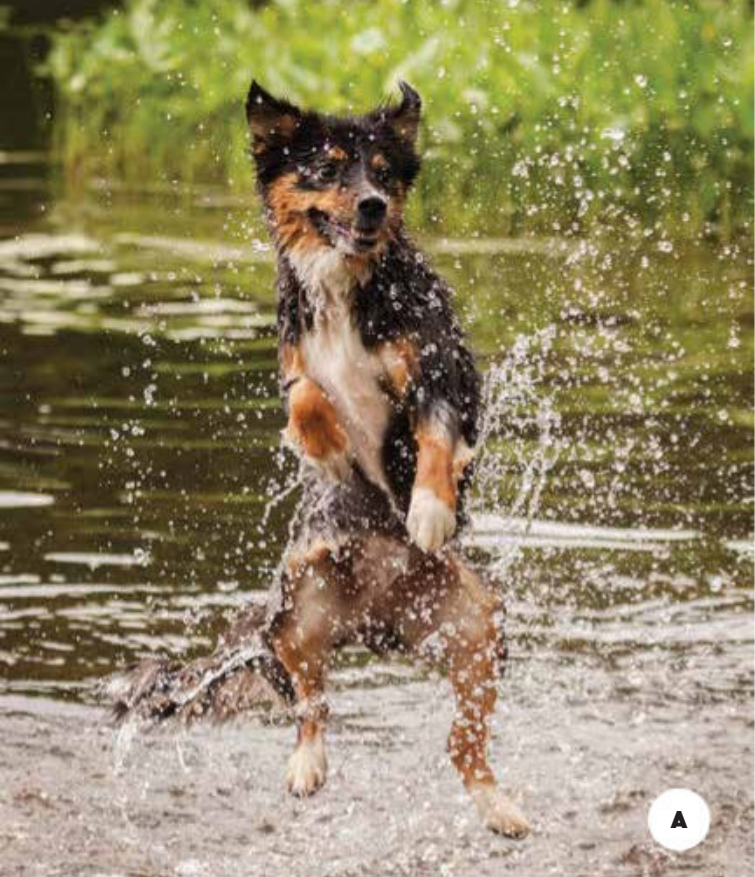




BLANCHE LUNGES INTO LAKE CHAMPLAIN, IN WILLSBORO
John & Lauren Hogan, Albany, NY



ELLIE ON GOOD LUCK LAKE
Addisen Osterhout, Ravena, NY



A



B



C

A
BASIL AT WEST STONER LAKE
Joe Mulone, Scotia, NY

B
BECKY & ANGIE
ON WHITEFACE MOUNTAIN
Maria Farnsworth
Saratoga Springs, NY

C
KING IN LAKE KUSHAQUA
Helen Sisco, Onchiota, NY

D
TEDDY AT SCHROON LAKE
Carlyn Rapoport, Vergennes, VT

E
SADIE AT MIDDLE SARANAC LAKE
John Hurley, Corinth, NY

F
PENNY & HARLEY
NEAR BIG MOOSE STATION
Rebecca Freligh, Saratoga Springs, NY



D



E



F



G



H



I

G
SKYE ON PHELPS MOUNTAIN

Noah & Ashley Monge
Clifton Park, NY

H
ZIVA ON BLUEBERRY MOUNTAIN

Kara DuPlessis, Fulton, NY

I
KYLO REN ON CASTLE ROCK

Kacey O'Brien, Lake George

J
BASIL AT
LEWEY LAKE CAMPGROUND

Katlynn Sacco, Georgetown, KY

K
RUMOR ON SCHROON LAKE

Jessica Quazza, Totowa, NJ



J



K



L



M



N



O



P



Q

L

LUCY AT RAQUETTE LAKE

Chip Knapp, Chester Springs, PA

M

DOBBY IN CASCADE LAKE

Sarah M. Howell, Germantown, MD

N

BENTLEY & WINSTON AT LAKE GEORGE

Catherine Ayers, Flint, MI

O

EDDIE ON THE OSWEGATCHIE RIVER

Wendy Kuceyeski, Tupper Lake, NY

P

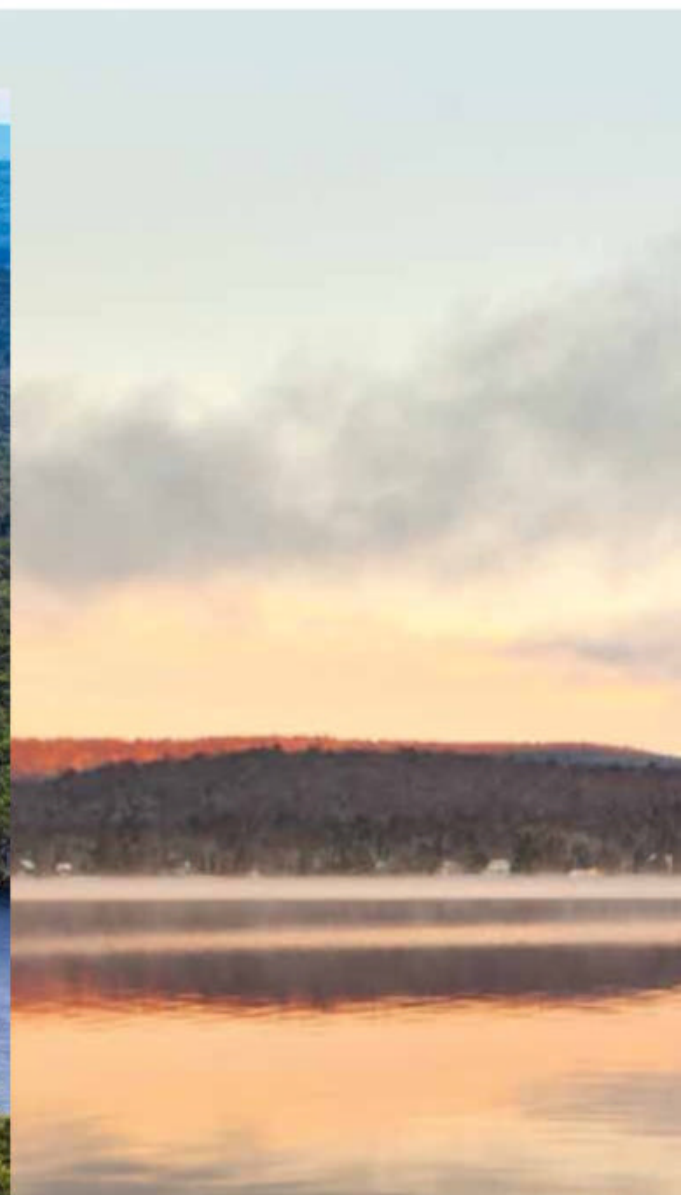
BAILEY AT BRANT LAKE

Lauren Williams & Scott Hinojosa
Manchester, CT

Q

PORTER ON THE SANTANONI RANGE

Sarah Glendon & Brian Carvalho
Hastings-on-Hudson, NY



ONCE THE SNOW FALLS,
EVERYTHING CHANGES IN INLET

BY NIKI KOUROFSKY
PHOTOGRAPHS
BY NANCIE BATTAGLIA





POLAR OPPOSITES



IT'S THE BEST KIND OF COUNTDOWN, heading southwest on Route 28: Eighth Lake ... Seventh Lake ... Sixth Lake ... Fifth Lake, then BAM! Inlet's tiny downtown explodes in a funfetti of color and movement. Families line up for Northern Lights' gelato or paninis at the Caboose, then hop over to Kalil's for charcoal and bug spray. Green-and-yellow cottages, their clotheslines dripping with towels and trunks, line the way to Arrowhead Park's buzzing beach. Mary's White Pine Bakery starts pumping out donuts at seven a.m.; over at the Tamarack Cafe, the frenetic pace only lets up for the nanosecond between breakfast and lunch.

In the summertime, Inlet's year-round population of about 300 plays host to thousands more. For businesses, that's three-plus jam-packed months of making hay while the sun shines. "Oh, it's huge," said Carrie Stallard, who took over Fourth Lake Wine and Spirits with her fiancé, Stephen Cole, in





Events like Frozen Fire and Lights, above, bring the community out to play. There's more time for fun once the weather turns cold, said librarian Joanne Kelly, since locals work so hard during summer's tourist season. FACING PAGE: Main Street empties after warm-weather crowds head for home. PAGES 34–35: Fourth Lake in winter and summer.



2017. Eighty percent of their business kind of huge. (Even during the summer of COVID, Stallard said, the pace didn't slow.) For workers—like 27-year-old Brendan Simons, a bartender, waiter and historical society docent—that often means juggling at least two jobs. “You’re basically stockpiling income to live off in the winter,” he said.

By Columbus Day, the scene has emptied out, leaving darkened storefronts and a handful of cars parked along Main Street. Camp signs are packed away for the season and snowmobiles replace crosswalk crowds. Though winter weekends in big-snow years can be busy, it's nothing compared to the hurly-burly of summer. “Absolutely everything about it changes,” said Inlet's library director, Joanne Kelly, who's been in town for 20 years. While the rest of us might be digging in for long winter's



naps, the year-rounders in Inlet are just starting to play. “You kind of shift gears and slow down. You try to enjoy things a little bit more,” said Misty Townsend, a sales associate at Inlet Department Store. “Locals come out of their dens.”

Margie O’Hara, who retired here in 2006, said many of her neighbors are too busy in the summer to socialize—so, when the weather turns frigid, they invent any reason they can to get together. “That’s what makes our life up here so much fun,” she said at a pre-pandemic crock-pot cook-off dubbed “Let’s Get Crocked.” The adult Easter egg hunt is another favorite, along with a Wii bowling league at the pizza-and-wings joint Screamen’ Eagle. But one of the biggest parties of the year is Frozen Fire and Lights, a bonanza of skiing, sledding, skating and snowshoeing during the day, with fireworks and a bonfire after the sun goes down.

Deep winter isn’t for everyone. It gets cold here—double-digit negatives cold—and the bakery, bookstore and coffee shop close, among other businesses. “You can’t expect every luxury you have in the summer to be available, but I think that’s part of the beauty of it,” said Carrie Stallard, a transplant from Chicago. “Things that used to be necessities are no longer necessities.” Wintertime in Inlet—and in many Adirondack hubs—brings something more precious: a little time to recharge. ▲

“Winter can get very slow,” said Cody Earl, facing page, who worked at Kalil’s Grocery. But a good snowy season can bring snowmobilers, skiers and snowshoers. “It’s all weather dependent,” he said. “In summer you need sun; in winter you need snow.”





PRIMROSE & DOCKSTADER'S

GREAT AMERICAN MINSTRELS



George Primrose
and Lew Dockstader,
"veteran stars of
the minstrel world,"
according to *The
Post-Star*, brought
their show to Glens
Falls in 1913.

BACK AGAIN
- LEW DOCKSTADER -
"THE MAN WHO MAKES MILLIONS LAUGH"



CAUTION:
This article
quotes historical
sources that
used offensive
language.

Adirondack Blackface

IN THE NORTH COUNTRY, MINSTREL SHOWS
WERE POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT INTO THE
1960s. HISTORIAN AMY GODINE REVEALS THEIR
PROMINENCE THROUGHOUT THE REGION

MAYBE YOU RECALL THE NEWS ABOUT A racist blackface cartoon on the cover of a SUNY-Plattsburgh student newspaper in 2015. Or the SUNY-Potsdam students who filmed themselves cavorting to rap music in black facial masks. Unsettling incidents, followed swiftly by hurt and fury, apologies and solemn editorials. The proof of blackface's unacceptability may be the lashing rage that greets it. Minus a few idiots, people do seem to get that this thing is just *messed up*.

What is much less understood is Adirondack blackface when it was the opposite of unacceptable. When it was absolutely everywhere. Not just in the bigger cities around the region, but in towns as small as Port Henry, Clintonville or Long Lake. And everybody did it. Schoolkids and women's clubs, fraternal orders, firemen. Not, as college students do it now, for the thrill of messing with a stern taboo, but for comfort and community and love of a tradition whose essential racism went unheeded and entirely unchallenged.

But first, to the theft (or as the parlance has it now, the appropriation) that launched a thousand blackface revues. In the 1820s in Manhattan, a white actor, Thomas Dartmouth Rice, made a study of a brilliant dancer, a Black man, a stable hand. The man, never identified, was disabled, but the moves he made, both lurchy and elastic, syncopated, spry, turned his bad leg into an asset. And such a catchy chorus! "Weel about and turn jis so.

Eb'ry time I weel about I jump Jim Crow." With an eye and ear for novelty, Rice memorized the dance and song, and took it to the stage.

How big a deal was this? In two decades, Jim Crow dance, song and style—what became known as a minstrel show—had whirled itself into the nation's leading form of popular performance. Louisville, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and New Orleans would each declare itself its birthplace. By 1844, a blackface troupe, the Ethiopian Serenaders, was performing for President John Tyler in the White House. Pop critic Greil Marcus has called Thomas Dartmouth Rice, or "Daddy" Rice as the world knew him, the Elvis of his age, a polymath who wrote and acted all his skits, and developed characters both relatable and nuanced.

For good or ill, Rice's mimetic and dramatic gifts would not distinguish his successors. As early as the 1840s, minstrel routines began to stale. Black characters grew less rounded—still comedic but crudely stereotyped and ready-made to mock. Formula drove the skits; corny jokes were culled from newspapers. Minstrelsy, its sheet music, costumes, makeup and hand-me-down palaver, was commodified. This went for Black minstrel shows and white alike, both well-steeped in their routines when they finally ventured from the fringes of the Adirondacks to the harder-to-reach interior, riding in on new rail spurs, setting up in village opera houses and town halls.

| Continued on page 50



cool family fun

ICE FISHING WITH PHOTOGRAPHER VERONICA SPANN

Mv

My dad's been the captain of every ice-fishing outing I've ever been on. And there have been plenty.

Most people envision ice fishing as a quiet, solitary activity—sitting alone on a bucket, bobbing a line up and down until there's a hit. That's not what it's like to fish with my father. With him, you're in for intense competition as well as a party.

The sport of ice fishing, as my dad says, breaks fishermen into two categories: "fishers" and "catchers." We always want to be the catchers. This means that if a hole isn't producing fish within a matter of minutes, we're packing up camp and moving to a different hole. We're tracking the depth of the water under the ice and taking detailed notes when the bite is good. We're watching the fish finder like our lives depend on it. We're changing bait, we're switching poles, we're jigging at different speeds. We're on the ice at the crack of morning and staying out past sunset whether the bite is good or bad. (My forever optimistic dad always thinks it's just about to get better.)



My mom, Evelyn, takes a break from fishing to skate on Lake George. FACING PAGE: A friend and first-time fisherman lands her first trout.



A friend joins our family for a day on the ice. FACING PAGE: My dad, Rick, and my brother, Clayton, on Schroon Lake. Dad lands a big one while wearing his lucky hat.



The party of ice fishing is about bringing family and friends together. My dad's enthusiasm is contagious. He encourages competitions to see who can drill a hole the fastest. There's hooting and hollering after a glove is tossed off so an arm can plunge into a hole of freezing water to coax out a squirming trout. When the ice is good, we take breaks to skate. We discuss and solve the world's problems. We roll our eyes after my dad's umpteenth proclamation—after he drills yet another hole following a catchless stretch—that “The fish are right here, I know it!” We laugh when he says he has “Moby Perch” on the line before pulling up a fish the size of his pinkie. There's my mom's chili and hot chocolate and her good fortune of landing the biggest fish, usually after fishing just 10 minutes of an all-day outing. Then there's celebrating a pile of perch and debating whether we'll have a perch fry or perch tacos for dinner.

Ice fishing lets us observe nature's stillness when it's at its coldest. We fish, we laugh, we eat, we drink and we appreciate these moments together. ▲







Camera Shy

PORTRAITS OF THE ELUSIVE AMERICAN MARTEN

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
LARRY MASTER

Ninety minutes after sunrise on a spring morning, I arrived at a High Peaks lodge with hopes of photographing one of the Adirondacks' most delightful denizens. On the ground lay a light cover of snow over hard-pack, and red squirrels chattered in the trees. Camera at the ready, I waited.

Twenty minutes later, the squirrels suddenly went silent and seemed to have disappeared. Then, a few minutes apart, two beautiful martens appeared.

American martens (*Martes americana*) are part of the weasel family, distinguished from other Adirondack mustelids (river otter, fisher, mink, long- and short-tailed weasels) by their medium size and light brown coat. Adding to their photographic appeal are a bushy tail, endearing face and white-trimmed ears. They live in mature, northern coniferous and mixed forests, where they hunt for voles, shrews, red squirrels and other small critters, and they will gobble nuts and berries in season. They may hunt anytime, but peak activity is at twilight or, as I was fortunate to witness, in early morning.



Until then, my experience with martens in the Adirondacks had been limited to viewing nocturnal images on trail cameras near Lake Placid, or catching a glimpse as one ran across Whiteface Memorial Highway before sunrise.

Although wary, the martens let me watch and capture them with a telephoto lens as they hunted. I admired their skill as climbers and photographed them in the trees, where they might have been tracking those missing squirrels. I followed one from a respectful distance, watching it forage on the ground—looking, listening and smelling for a vole or other potential meal. I didn't see it catch anything as it bounded and loped in its search, leaving distinctive twin tracks in the snow with its hind feet placed directly on front footprints.

Martens are superbly adapted to snowy winters but need large areas of relatively unfragmented habitat. If you're lucky, you might see one visiting a campsite or a suet feeder. Alert hikers might catch a glimpse on a trail, but should look up in the trees—especially conifers—since martens will take temporary refuge at the approach of people or dogs and will sit quietly until intruders pass. ▲

See more of Larry Master's wildlife photography at www.masterimages.org.



The American marten, a member of the weasel family, is found primarily in mature, northern forests. It is a solitary hunter, active throughout winter.



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ADIRONDACK BLACKFACE

Continued from page 41

Why its long appeal? After the devastation of the Civil War, blackface's cheerful skits about African Americans was, for white America, a solace and relief. In the South and North alike, Black Americans were pressing for equal opportunity and equal rights. Emancipation was one thing, but social and political equality was, for most of white America, too much, too fast, too far. The blackface stage, where child-like, impulsive Black people gratefully embraced their place, was more than funny. It consoled. It gave the two devastated white halves of the nation a little common ground, something that could ease their reconciliation. It gave them a vision, writ in rags and cork, of Black inferiority. And the more hungrily Black America pressed for political representation, social parity and voting rights, the more the counternarrative of Black servility delighted.

Regardless of the venue—rural, urban, east or west—blackface sought the same effect. It effaced the human individual and reduced character to type. Burnt cork and shoe polish, red paint and white smeared human features into a mask. Kinky wigs intimated wildness and lack of personal control. Costumes either foppish (for the character Zip Coon) or ragged (for the rustic goofball Jim Crow) spoke either of pathetic vanity or an uncomplaining destitution. And, of course, there was the minstrel's exaggeratedly rough speech, ranging from ungrammatical to outright nonsensical. This speech, maybe more than dance or gesture, was the thing that racialized the blackface character, vesting him with the helpless immaturity that justified white oversight. Give him fancy words, he'd mangle them to mud. Give him means to buy new clothes, he'd overdress and preen. The only help for it was to love him for what he was: a child-man in everlasting need of a father's patience, firmness and direction.

On stage, that parent-figure was the interlocutor, the always white, unflappable straight man who fed his Sambos and his Bones teasing questions that provoked the jokes and hokum that evidenced the lesser status of Black Amer-

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ADIRONDACK BLACKFACE

icans then, now, forever. But scripts are made to be subverted, and as blackface scholars insist, while blackface was inarguably racist, it was also something more, and this *more* mattered. While the style and form of blackface banter was predictable, the content was adaptive. Troupes both homegrown and from away made a point of wrapping local names and goings-on into their shtick, a tradition that made the audience experience interactive, something straight-up opera never did.

That was one kind of subversion. There were more. Since blackface characters stood for an underclass, their routines were often lightly seasoned with digs at local guardians of respectability, like bankers, school principals, town merchants. And through these takedowns on the safe space of the stage, blackface democratized—a feature that accounted for a good part of its popularity.

Which points to sex and sexuality, another feature of the blackface show that helped account for its appeal. Long before blackface emerged, Black men had been racialized by whites as randy and impulsive, Black women as promiscuous. Blackface skits reinforced these clichés through bawdy jokes and suggestive costumes. And where else was this allowed? Blackface couples, the women played by men, enjoyed a physical expressiveness unthinkable on other stages—and in these raucous dealings was the kernel of something relatable.


How much of this ribaldry actually infiltrated northern New York is hard to know. The scripts are gone. But smuttiness was enough of a threat to move several blackface promoters to declare that their Adirondack shows were free of all salacious content. Indeed, their ads could make you think that blackface's mission was strictly reverential. "Minstrels ... capable of impersonating the genuine negro" brought throngs to Johnstown in 1891, offering an introduction to "the tints, lights, and shadows of darky life." The emphasis on craft and culture allayed concerns about blackface's unrespectability. Here was fun, sure, but also—folklife! A taste

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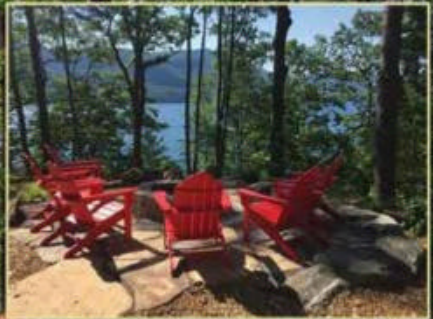

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ADIRONDACK BLACKFACE

of the Lost South! A jolly land of music, dance and unassailable devotion to God and Massa. This was how 300 years of chattel slavery shimmered in the fun-house mirror of blackface.

The distortion was even more arresting when Black minstrel troupes, mostly Southern, held up the mirror and assured their audiences that yes, “Old Black Joe” and “De Camptown Races” got it right. Plattsburgh audiences in 1866 really would hear from the Georgia Minstrels “entertainments illustrative of Negro plantation life in the Southern States.” And when Black bellboys and waiters threw a watermelon-eating contest in Warrensburg in 1901, they really would invoke “the sunny South and cotton fields” of their past.

This was not their past. This was a market-driven, confected narrative of a preindustrial, racialized America. Which suggests that when Black minstrels served up the same cozy scenes of servility as whites, they, too, donned a kind of blackface, if minus greasepaint and burnt cork.

But more generations of Adirondackers knew minstrelsy as a white thing. Not only did it reach the region earlier, piggybacking as a side act with the circus, but its venues were more numerous, and its staying power more robust. Though the ad for the Patriotic Minstrel Troupe in Lake Placid in 1918 opened with “All Coons Look Alike to Me,” the drophead reassured. “But these are different.” Why? Because the performers were not “coons,” but white. Under all the paint, still white faces you could depend on to look like your own: unique, individuated, human. “All-white performers,” promised the flyer for the Hi Henry Minstrels when they played Sacandaga Park in 1903. The description put local readers on notice. Accept no substitutes. Whatever these colored outfits claim they do, we’ll do better. This thing belongs to us.

That “us” tightened up as the 20th century progressed. It still meant white, but when small-town Adirondackers began putting on their own shows and giving the bigger city shows a run for their money, blackface also came to stand for home. Boasted the *Lake Placid*

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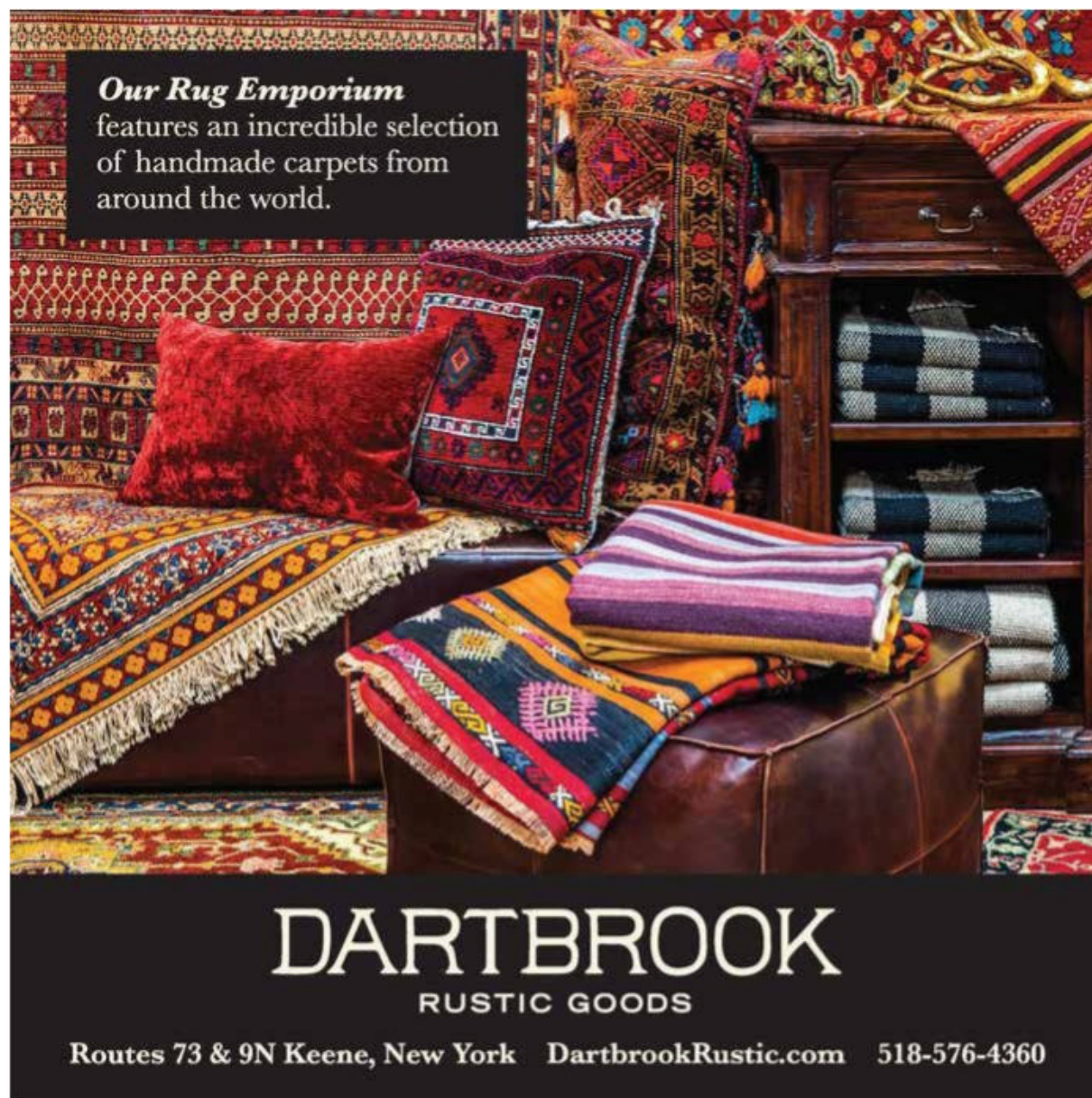
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ADIRONDACK BLACKFACE

News about a 1915 Elks benefit at the crowded Happy Hour Theater (capacity 400): the “kings of minstrelsy” have nothing “on our local talent.” The local blackface playbook was not much different from the city’s (among the tunes were “Jungletown” and “Laugh You Little N—s”), but seeing neighbors playing rascals, strumpets, clowns—this was novel, and it drew. Some of these homegrown revues got so good they took it on the road, the Saranac Valley Grange Minstrels to Beekmantown, the Wilmington Grange Minstrels to Reber and Au Sable Forks, Jay’s Whiteface Grange Minstrels to Keene, Whallonsburg and Peru. Black minstrel shows raised cash for Black colleges, farm schools and philanthropies; white productions poured earnings into community improvements. Blackface benefits fundraised for hot lunches in Vermontville. In Tupper Lake, for the Boy Scouts and the fire department. In Long Lake, for the Calvary Women’s Society. A minstrel show visited Clinton Prison, in Dannemora, to raise funds for an inmates’ recreation center.

Local productions bolstered non-sectarian community identity and pride. Protestants, Catholics and Jews (some of whose immigrant parents had been “othered” on their arrival), happily blacked up together for a cause. Children put on minstrel shows. At the Ticonderoga Playhouse, 1928, eight schoolgirls debuted as the Pickaninnies. In 1954, sixth-graders in Clintonville put on “The Crazy N—” for Halloween.

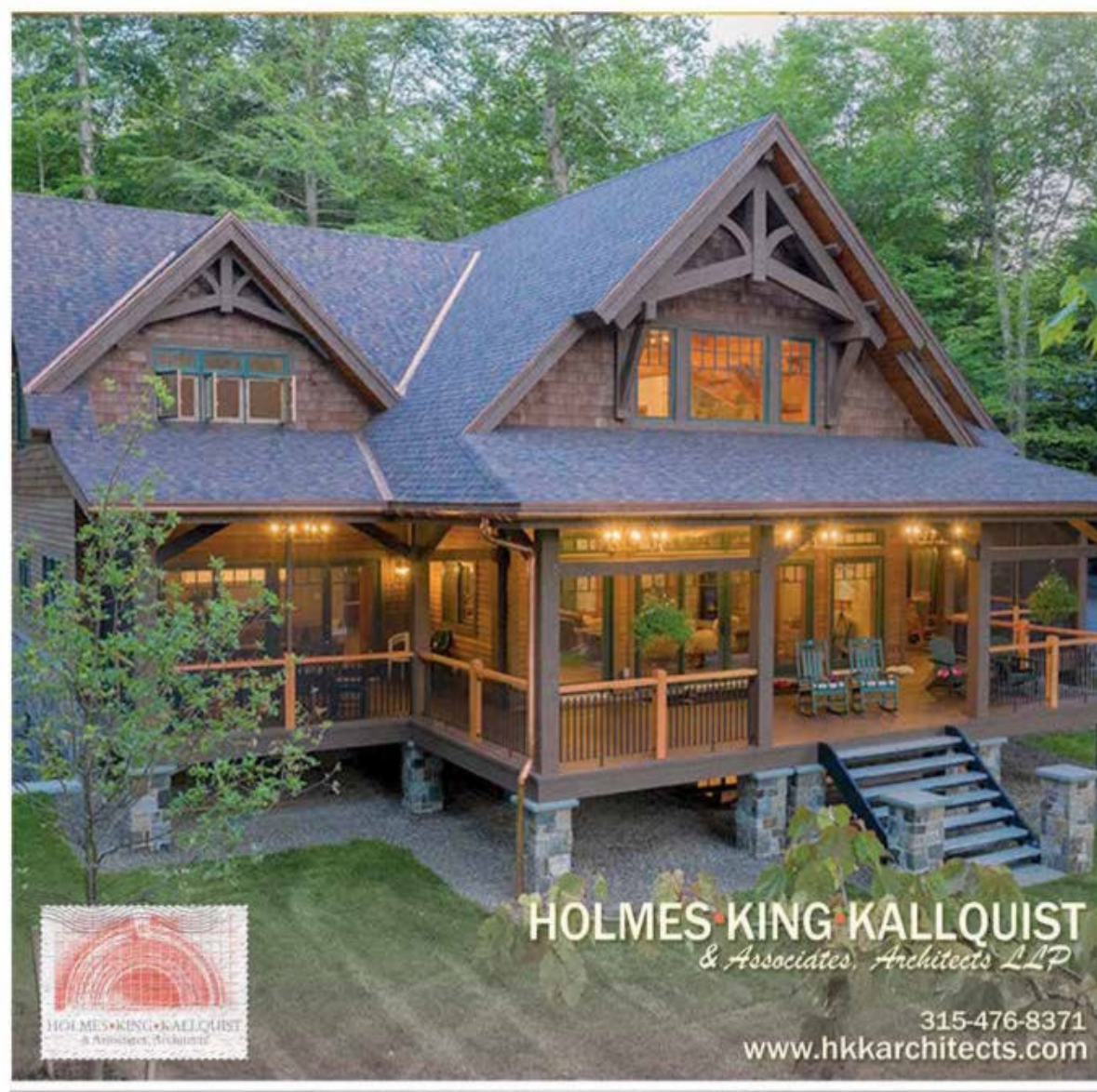
The stage alone could not contain this craze. It was too liquid, and too loved. It leaked into parades, dances, classrooms, hospitals, ice-skating galas and a Civilian Conservation Corps camp rec hall. In 1926, patients in a state hospital in Tupper Lake were entertained by a local women’s troupe in blackface, playing “Bell-Hops and Southern Mammies in true cottonfield colors.” The Dominion Days parade in Malone, 1935, featured a float from the “Darktown Fire Department,” a blackface crew of firemen with hook-and-ladder. Tupper Lake’s junior high organized a basketball game during World War II to raise funds for soldiers posted overseas:



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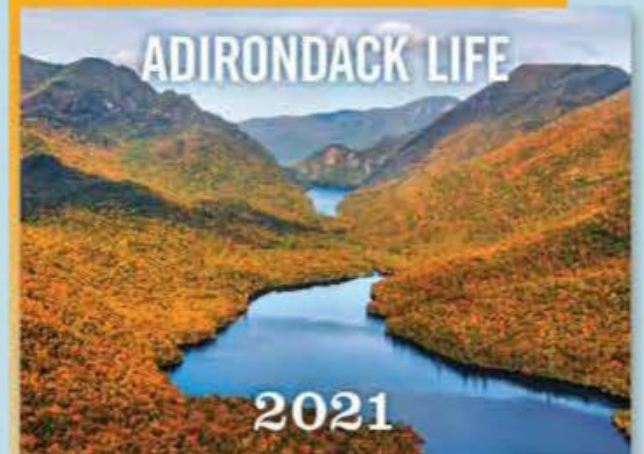
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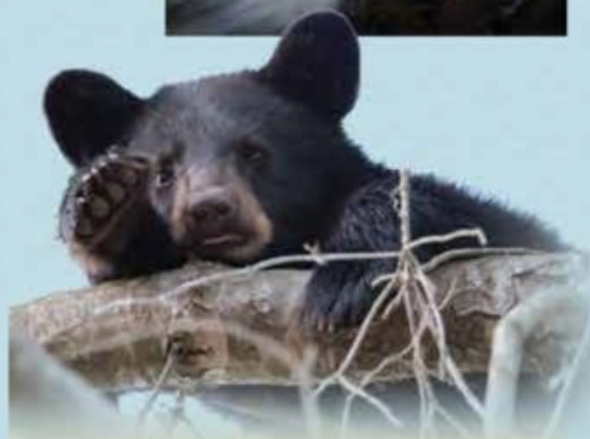


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ADIRONDACK BLACKFACE

one team wore clown suits, the other burnt cork.

Other iterations of blackface style, once removed, were found in Adirondack homes and lives: Mammy cookie jars. Wind-up toys of grinning bellhops. Cast-iron lawn jockeys, painted features racialized to the point of caricature. For the Christmas play in 1941, young students in Speculator, Saranac Lake and Ellenburg blacked up for the role of “N— Doll.” In 1931, a St. Regis Falls newspaper offered home-decorating tips for boys’ upholstery patterns featuring “colonial scenes of gaily bannanna’ed mummies picking cotton in the fields of the South.”

In 2004, ethnomusicologist Susan Hurley-Glowa interviewed several older folks in Colton, an Adirondack hamlet in St. Lawrence County. This community hosted a blackface revue as late as 1969, and many of Hurley-Glowa’s subjects recalled these shows with keen affection. All counted the experience as nothing but good fun, nothing racist about it, and anyway, how could it be, and how could they be, when none of them knew Black people?

But the reach of a prejudicial bias has no need of personal exposure or experience. When Hitler came to power, the Jewish population in Germany was less than one percent, yet anti-Semitism was the iron spine that stiffened Nazi ideology. In the United States, a derogatory idea of Blackness claimed a territory much wider than where Black people lived. From the first days of the slave trade and a Supreme Court ruling in 1857 that declared all Black Americans, free or enslaved, “beings of an inferior order,” to humor columns in Adirondack newspapers that traded in dialect jokes, to the weekly badinage of the Amos and Andy radio hour, little Colton, no less than Brooklyn and Savannah, was carpet-bombed with white ideas about Blackness. And what blackface Blackness meant inside the Blue Line was what it meant all over. It meant less-ness. Less brains, poor character, no demonstrable capacity for citizenship, no value but in cheerful service.

What distinguished Adirondack blackface from urban iterations wasn’t



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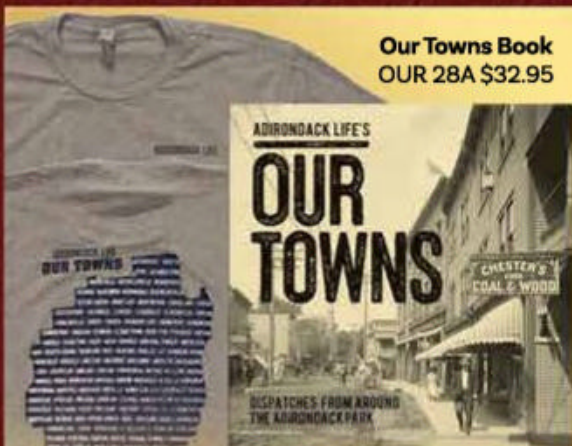
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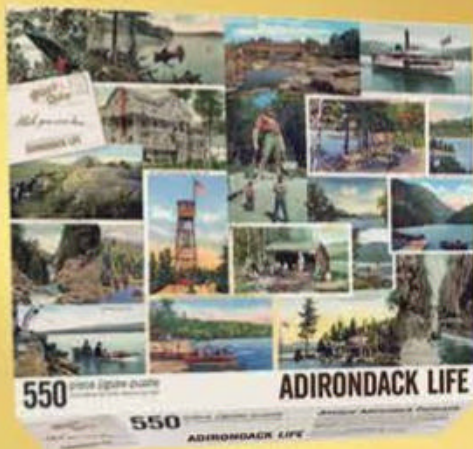
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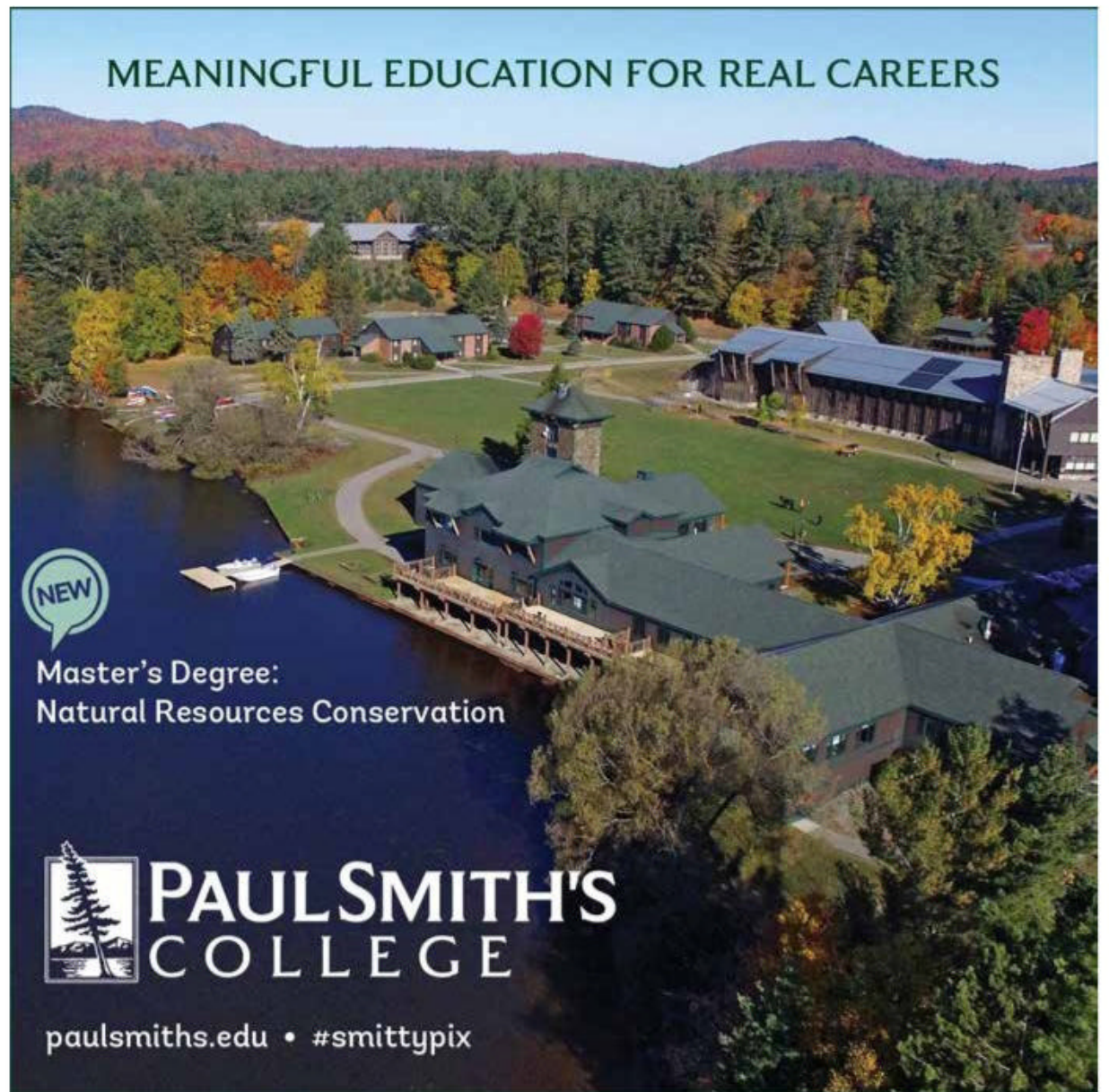
ADIRONDACK BLACKFACE

the content or racial subtext of the shows, but how it came to be identified with public service and community building. Which may seem like a saving grace. But good works are less than lovable when they reveal a debt to a ritualized assertion of white supremacy, an assertion so cheerfully embedded in tradition it could seem almost incidental, just another “thing we do, we’ve always done, no harm meant, and no harm done.”

No harm meant? Maybe not. But no harm done? For a century or so in Adirondack communities, democratic values of volunteerism, family fun, school spirit and town pride were annealed to an idea of Black inferiority, an idea so deep-sunk it seemed as natural as breath. Surely, harm was done to schoolchildren who grew up with images of Black servility and incapacity, vivid images that stick, sometimes for a lifetime. And harm was done to everybody when Black travelers, guessing how Adirondackers saw them, gave the region a wide berth.

As to blackface in the North Country today, my guess is we’ll continue to see the odd incident and we shouldn’t be surprised. Taboos will always drive young people to defy them, especially when they’re so indifferently explained. And what does any Adirondack college sophomore know about blackface except it’s A Thing You Shouldn’t Do? Does she know the history? Know how it started, what it signified, how it worked? How would she, how would any of us, when the history isn’t taught? Local and regional historians never wrote about it. No Adirondack museum has plumbed the popularity of minstrelsy inside the Blue Line. No high-school history curriculum has tackled it. Until it’s owned as a shaping part of Adirondack history, how do we outdistance it? How do we expect that blackface incidents won’t keep crashing in like microbursts, as if from nowhere?


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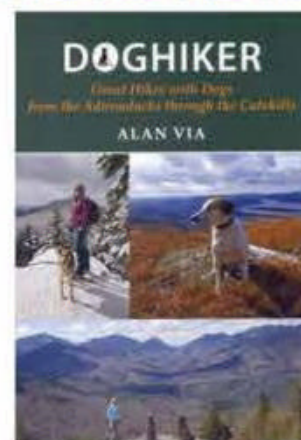


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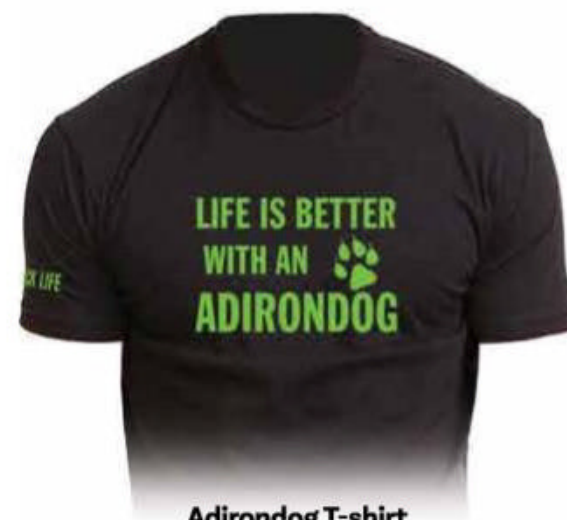
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BY JOANNE KENNEDY

For many years, cross-country skiing has been one of my favorite winter activities. When snow's not abundant where I live in Peru, on the northeastern edge of the Adirondack Park, I ski Avalanche Lake or the frozen ponds in the St. Regis Canoe Area.

Two winters ago there was lots of snow, so most of my skiing happened in my backyard. My husband, Bruce, and I feel fortunate to have miles of trails on more than 300 acres of mixed forest, our property divided by a winding brook. One morning, we strapped on our skis and headed out behind our house for our daily dose of fresh air. As usual, our goldendoodle, Bucky, was excited to join us.

It was a perfect skiing day, with a blue sky and temperatures in the teens. The conditions were excellent. We glided along what we call the Boneyard Loop, Jenny's Lane and

KC Willow Run—all trails on the south side of the brook. After observing fresh deer tracks, we skied to the spot we use to cross to the other side of the brook. There, open water surprised us. Bruce skied to the right and Bucky and I to the left in search of a safe place to cross. Within a minute, I called out to Bruce that I'd found a beaver dam and it looked like we could cross safely over it.

At the edge of the brook I used my poles to test the crust of snow. In an instant, the shelf on which I was standing crumbled, and I slid into the cold, icy water. It took my breath away.

The water reached my waist. It took me a moment to catch my breath as I lay on my back on the edge of the brook and wiggled my legs, trying to pull my skis upright. They were caught under a log and I couldn't pull them out. The more I moved, the more I slipped beneath the huge log. I knew I was in trouble.

For the first time in my life I yelled, "Help!" and really meant it.

Bruce quickly appeared at the edge of the brook, testing the snow and ice to keep from breaking through. I continued trying to pull my skis from under the log, but kept slipping farther in. There was no way to kick off my skis and no way to take off my boots with their ties, zippers and straps.

Bruce held out his pole, I grabbed on and he began pulling me out. Meanwhile, Bucky danced around and we shouted for him to stay back.

Finally, I was out of the frigid water and soaked up to my armpits. All of this probably happened in just minutes, but it seemed much longer.

We didn't have extra clothes. Bruce said we had to move immediately, and quickly. I'm the first to admit that I'm a relatively slow skier, and having asthma slows me down even more. My inhaler had been immersed in the water, so I didn't try to use it. I suppose the adrenaline had kicked in, because I've never skied so fast in my life. My skis were wet, so I worried they'd cake with snow. Why they didn't, I'll never know.

As I skied, I kept thinking, *Don't stop. Don't stop.* I knew my temperature would drop further if I did. We had a 15-minute

The author with her dog, Bucky, on her Peru property.



Photograph courtesy of Joanne Kennedy

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SURVIVAL

ski to get back to the house. I believe it was my wool clothes that saved me. I wore top and bottom wool base layers, a wool hat, wool socks and double-layer wool mittens.

At the house, Bruce pried the frozen boots off my skis and we hurried inside. I was unable to remove my boots myself, so Bruce unbuckled, untied and unzipped them, pulling them off my feet. I removed my now-frozen clothes off my very red skin. I resisted the temptation to jump in the hot tub, shocking my body, and instead let the room temperature warm me up slowly.

As I look back on that day, a few things come to mind: I'm glad I wasn't alone—I often ski by myself. I'm not sure I would have made it out. Also, I agree with the saying "cotton kills"—my wool clothing kept me from freezing. And water crossings, no matter how familiar you think you are with the terrain, should be approached with caution in all seasons.

I'm hopeful that we'll have an abundance of snow this winter, but my icy dip will forever be in the back of my mind as I navigate this landscape on skis. ▲

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The Department of Environmental Conservation offers the following tips:

Never stand on ice less than four inches thick, though even thicker ice can be compromised if covered in layers of snow.

Avoid moving water, including boathouse bubblers; shorelines are often the first to melt.

Be cautious of following other people's tracks on unfamiliar ice.

Wear layers of moisture-wicking clothing and carry ice picks to use as leverage if you fall through the ice.

In freezing water you have limited time before hypothermia sets in. Don't panic. If possible, self-rescue by positioning your body (ideally with skis off) horizontal to the ice shelf.

Swim onto the ice.

Don't stand, but roll toward safety, dispersing your weight and keeping your center of gravity low.

Once out of the water, call for help. Find a heat source, remove wet clothes and drink warm liquid to heat the body from the inside out.

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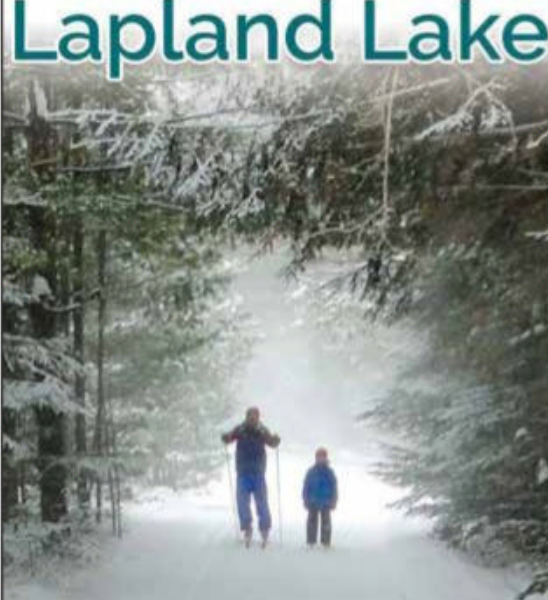
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A winter ride-along with a Lake Champlain ferry captain

BY LEATH TONINO

On an evening of gray skies, gray sleet and horrendous gray chop, I stand abreast the shoreline, my hood cinched, shivering. Lake Champlain conjures in many hearts a sweet, gentle environment, all neon swim trunks and cocktails sipped at sunset, but my heart is different. Though I love this big sloshing basin in every season, I love it most in raw, rowdy winter. Because it terrifies me then. Because it enlivens me. Because it reminds me of an eternal, yet easily forgotten, truth—that we puny humans are just that, puny, and nature is quite the opposite.

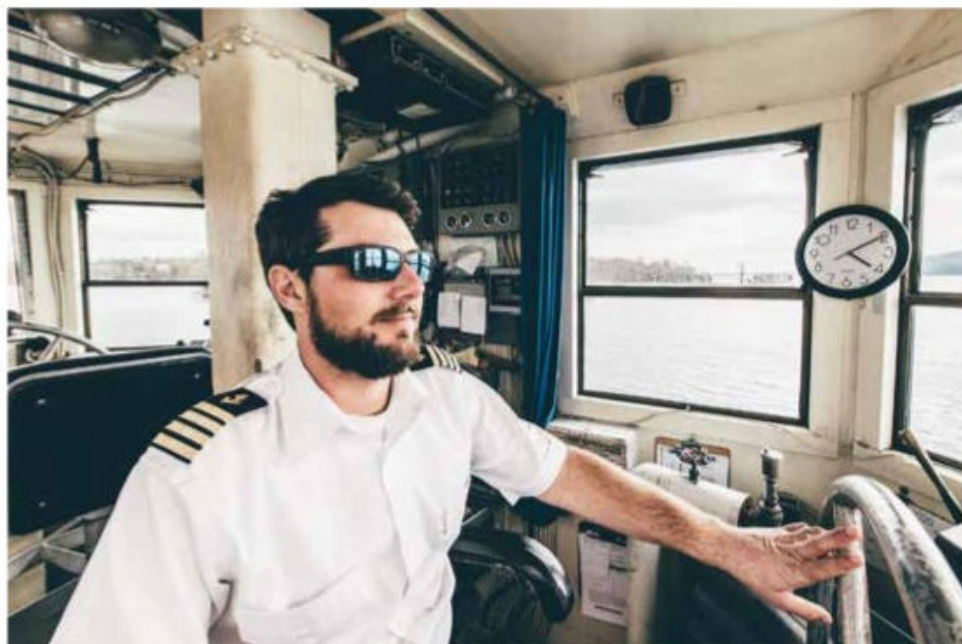
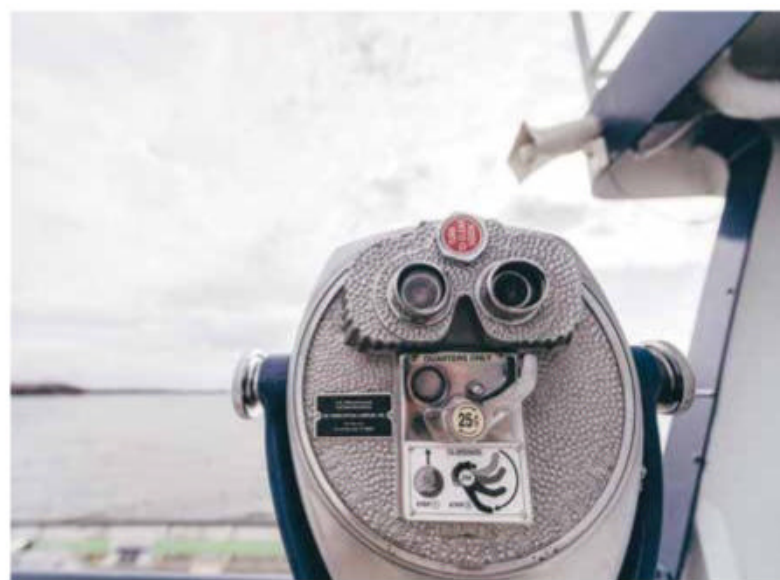
And so, standing there, borderline hypothermic, transfixed by the vast violence of the scene, wanting badly to somehow touch its primal energy, I consider my options. Kayak: certain death. Canoe: ditto. Then it strikes me,

spume in the face and a flash of inspiration. The ferry. Given the poor visibility, I can't actually glimpse the vessel motoring from Charlotte, Vermont, to Essex, New York, but I know it's nearby, achieving the unthinkable, a kind of intimacy with this intimacy-averse place and time of year.

To my delight, a mere 24 hours and one email to the Lake Champlain Transportation Company later, I have procured a ticket to ride.

The ride—a “morning watch” alongside Captain Andrew Silverman—is scheduled for a winter day that, by chance, dawns downright gorgeously: clear, low 40s, scant snow on the ground. Where are the foul conditions infamous for launching giant waves over the rails and denting the hoods of Mazda Miatas? Arriving at the Charlotte dock by nine a.m., I observe nothing remotely foul. Ripples lapping a pebbly beach. Some 200 Canada geese drifting on a shining

Captain Andrew Silverman criss-crosses Lake Champlain in the M/V Grand Isle.



Photographs by Carrie Marie Burr

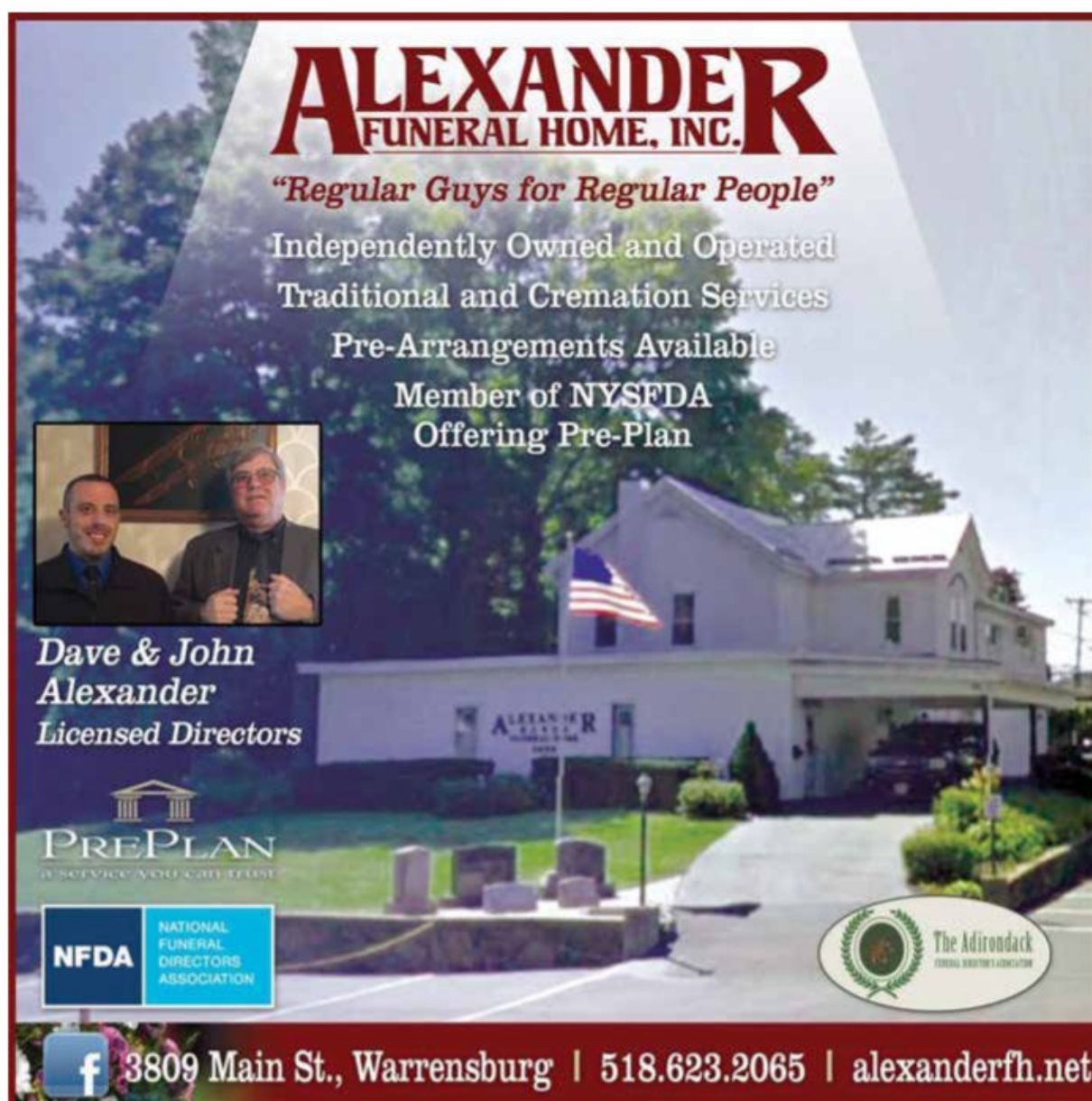
cove. And a young guy—combed black hair, trim black beard, black sunglasses, black V-neck sweater with epaulets stitched to the shoulders—inviting me aboard.

Originally from Saratoga Springs, Captain Andrew worked summers as a deckhand while studying at the University of Vermont, then officially took the helm in 2010, two months shy of a decade ago. I introduce myself by whining about the “nice” weather. “Yeah, I won’t deny that I get a thrill out of a rough day,” he says, smiling. “But it can be stressful, too. There’s stuff that makes you worry.”

Though commercial ferries have plied Lake Champlain’s waters since the late 1700s, it wasn’t until 1977 that regular winter travel was attempted—Grand Isle, Vermont, to Cumberland Head, New York, ice be damned. Or perhaps that should read, damn this ice. Writes historian Ralph Nading Hill in his 1990 history of the Lake Champlain ferry: “One difficulty arose when the vessel froze into its slip on particularly cold and windless nights. The crews hoped for heavy trucks on their first trip. The weight of a heavy vehicle, settling the boat, broke the grasp of the ice just enough to let the boat’s power finish the job.”

That pioneering ferry, the M/V *Grand Isle*—a “diesel screw” type, 850 horses snorting in the engine room—is presently assigned to Charlotte–Essex, where during the winter months it undertakes 11 daily crossings. (Three ferries run at busy Grand Isle–Cumberland Head, offering round-the-clock service.) For Captain Andrew, this schedule means 12-hour shifts and fat mugs of coffee: repeat, repeat, repeat. It likewise means sideways whiteouts and thick steam fog. And ice. And vigilance. And more ice.

“The main issue is cutting a channel and keeping it open,” he says, leading me up two flights of steep stairs to the pilot house, a snug nest of radar screens, compasses, throttle knobs, steering wheels (the M/V *Grand Isle* is equipped with stainless steel propellers both fore and aft, hence the dual controls), and encircling windows. “Everything depends on the freeze scenario. With a calm cold



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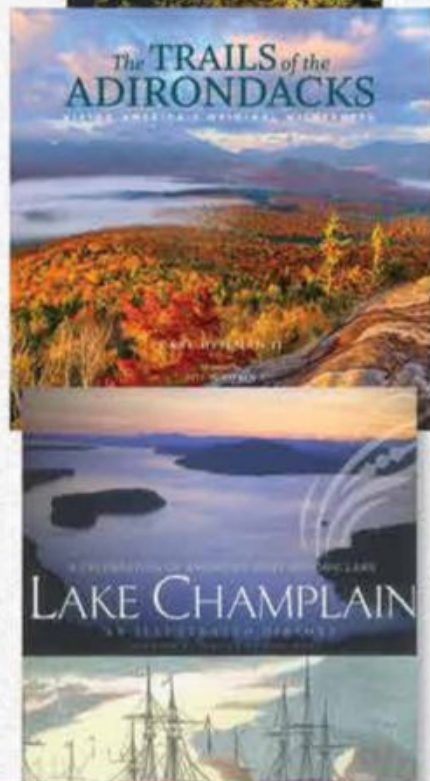
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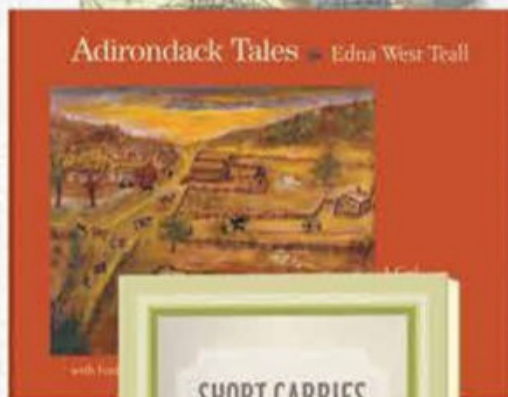
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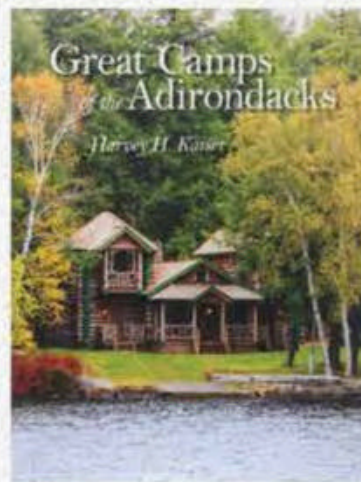
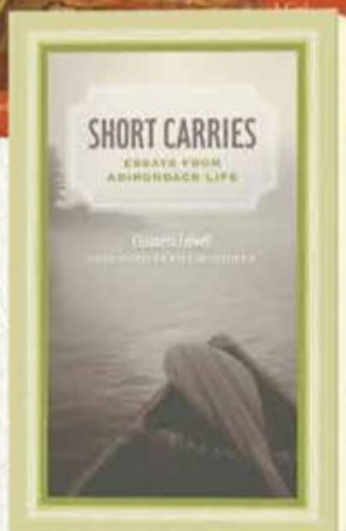
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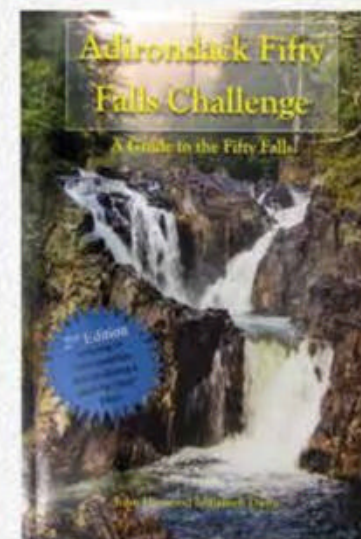
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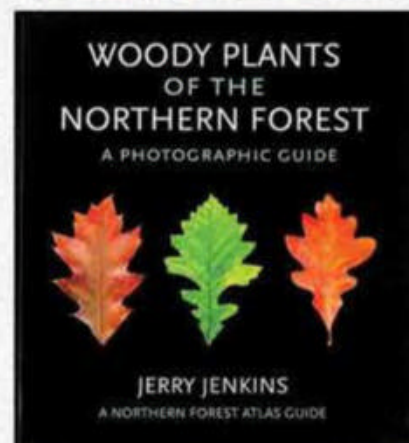
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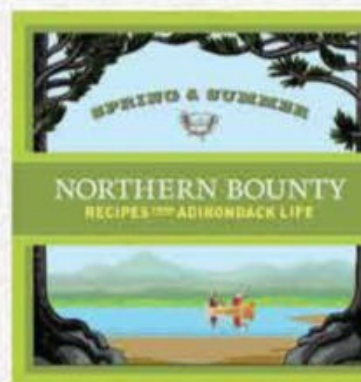
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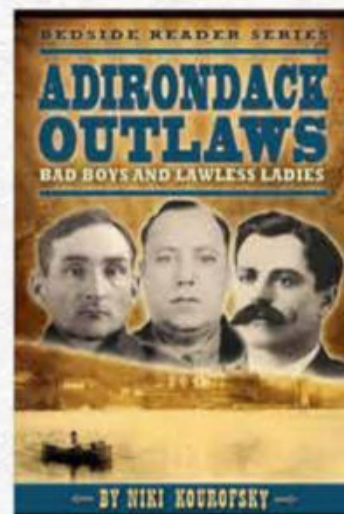
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WORKING

snap, the lake freezes clean, and we can break that virgin ice no problem. But if wind comes out of the northeast, the Plattsburgh area, it can push junk down here—thickly stacked ice that has been broken and folded and refrozen. You can literally see the channel closing behind you, disappearing.”

He pauses.

“In 2018 we only lost a week. In 2015 we had to completely quit, February to April.”

Despite the trouble it causes, the lake’s hard lid occasionally grants Captain Andrew his mellowest reveries. “This is tranquil,” he says as we ease away from land, aiming for the Adirondack horizon, a faint mechanical hum droning in our ears. “Oh, but when you’ve got ice everywhere, and you’re slipping through the open channel, then it’s so serene.” This makes sense: by molecular definition, ice is extremely still water. Thus no waves rocking the boat, no chaos of slashing spray. I recall surreal sessions gliding infinite panes of Lake Champlain’s perfect glass, hockey skates laced tight, and for a second imagine Captain Andrew enjoying a similar sensation, the *M/V Grand Isle* beneath him in lieu of blades.

At 9:35, having deposited nine vehicles at Essex (a Prius, lots of Subarus, two pickups with Maine plates) and replaced them with a fresh batch, we push off, retracing the same invisible line back to Charlotte. Discussing the peaceful lake on this peaceful morning is fine, plenty cozy, but my fundamental interest lies, of course, in severity. For the duration of the return trip, Captain Andrew, at my request, shares memories of blizzards, tempests, bomb cyclones, you name it.

“Battle scars,” he says, nodding to a metal first-aid box mounted next to the pilot-house door—a box dented as though struck with a home-run swing from a baseball bat. My eyes swerve from there to a stool that could be bolted to the floor via flanges but isn’t bolted to the floor via flanges. “Got flipped during that recent Thanksgiving storm, thrown against the wall,” he says. I reference the lack of bolts. Mutual chuckling. “A bunch



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of captains switch in and out of here. We'd never be able to agree on where to set the thing."

Ten minutes pass and our conversation segues from broadside swells to swamping. "Sometimes the bow of the ferry will scoop three or four feet of water, just shovel it and send it streaming along the deck," Captain Andrew says. "A couple years ago we had life rings floating off their hooks, and we had greenwater—full-on buckets of green lake—hitting the pilot house."

I peer through the window, down to a dabbling duck far below, trying to remember the steps we climbed to reach this perch: 18, 24, 30 steps? Like if the backyard swimming pool jumped up and tagged the top of your house's chimney, I think. Greenwater! Buckets! Badass!

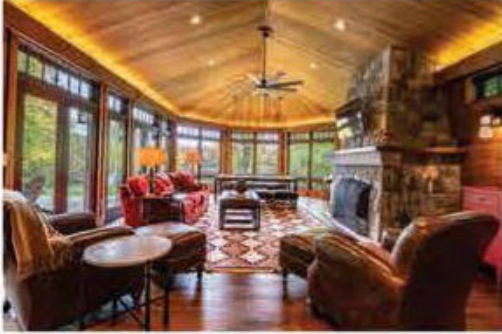
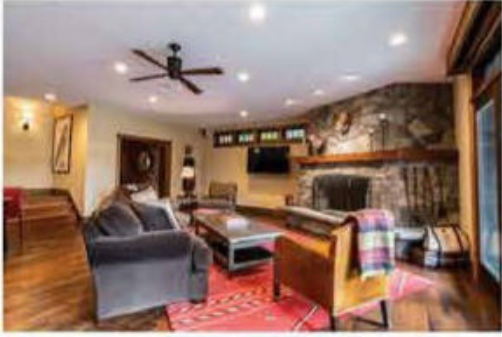
Split Rock Lighthouse to starboard, Four Brothers Islands to port—I lose myself for a spell in the sweeping views and, simultaneously, in the vicarious pleasure of Captain Andrew's gnarly anecdotes. Then, too soon, it's done, the M/V *Grand Isle* nudging into the Charlotte dock, vehicles idling patiently in a row. I blurt out a final question: How many trips have you made over your career, all told?

"Oddly, I'm not sure," Captain Andrew says, turning to a desk and pulling out a calculator. He punches buttons, generates a figure. "Maybe 25,000? Give or take."

I thank him, depart, and from the parking lot stare west to New York's brown fields, purplish hills of bare deciduous forests, and distant High Peaks. The M/V *Grand Isle* recedes, shrinks, goes specklike: a dark dot amid bright beauty. Part of me wants to be upset that the treacherous winter lake of my dreams didn't emerge today—but honestly, legit outrage is tough to muster. There are untold ways to be humbled, to be made puny, by this big sloshing basin. Twenty-five thousand ways and counting, I suspect. ▲

Visit ferries.com for Lake Champlain Transportation Company's ferry route schedules and COVID-19 restrictions.

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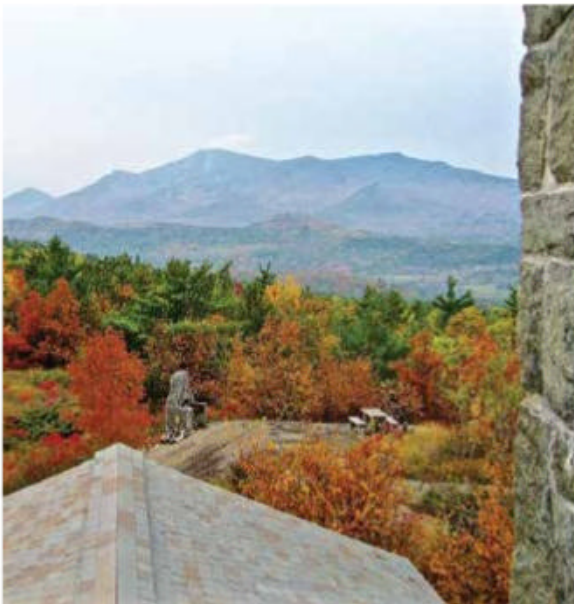
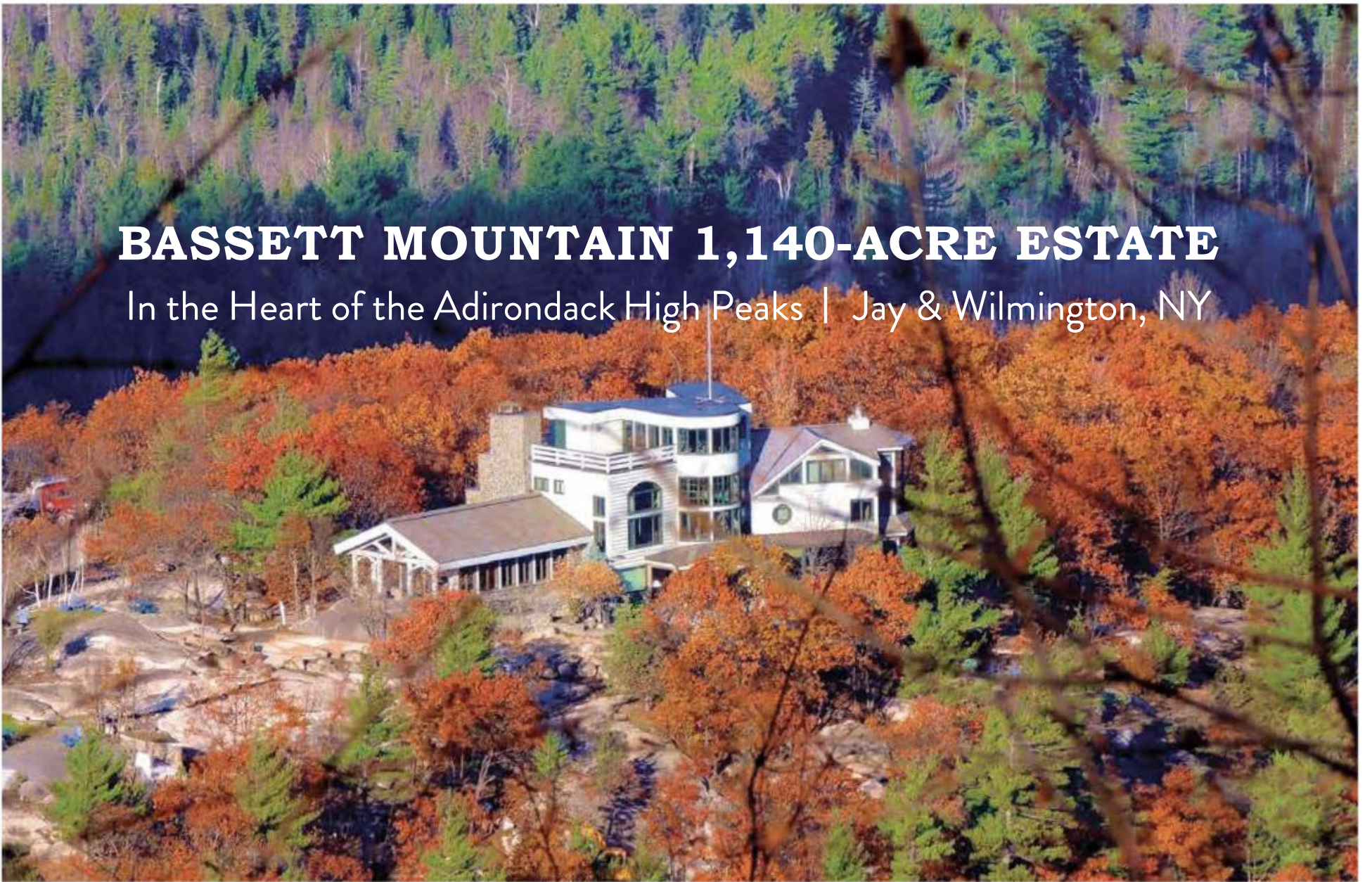


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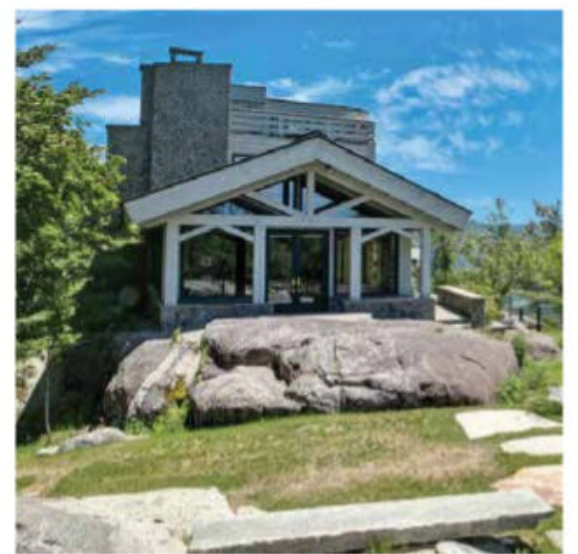
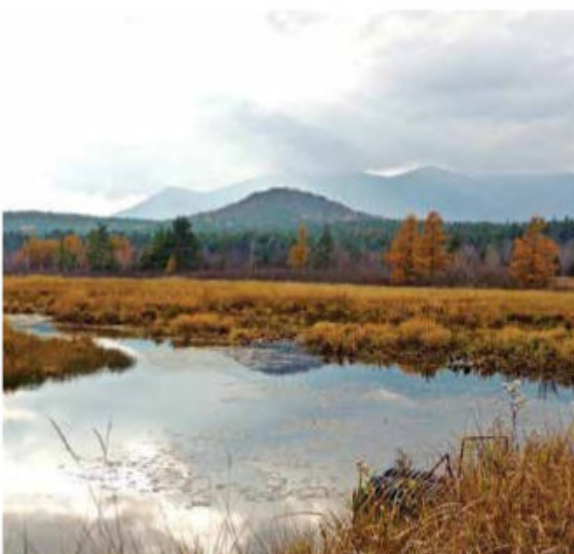
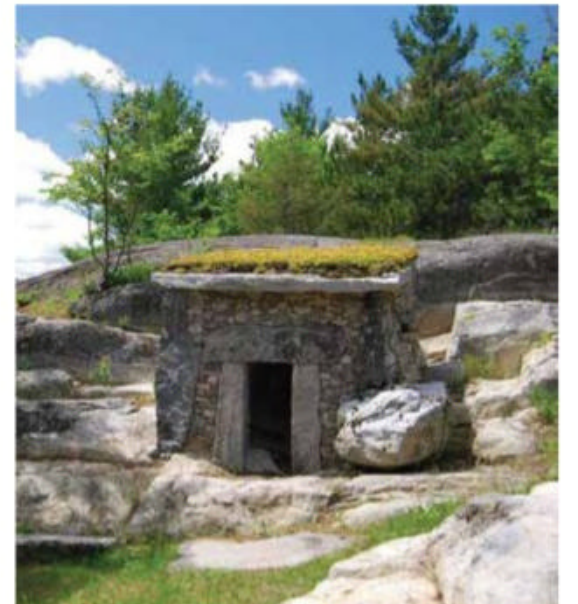
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For more than three decades, starting in 1977, Breck and Julie Turner were the proprietors of With Pipe & Book on Lake Placid's Main Street. Their emporium sold tobacco, vintage maps, prints, postcards and used books and magazines. When the Turners weren't working, they hiked, paddled and skied. By the time their twins, Fred and Phelps, were five years old, the boys had accompanied their parents to the summits of all the Adirondacks' 46 highest peaks.

Now, Breck says that retirement "is awesome." He and Julie spend their time doing what they love—mostly skiing and paddling. And, occasionally, (almost) bumping into familiar faces on the trail.

Last winter, just as Breck was descending to Lake Colden after a ski through Avalanche Pass, he saw someone in the middle of the trail at the bottom of the hill. "About halfway down I knew I was going to crash if they didn't move ... and then the person knelt down in the middle of the trail. Either we'd collide or I'd kill myself veering into the woods." Just a few seconds later, "I was whizzing by" and, "amazingly," Lake Placid-based photographer Nancie Battaglia "got the shot and got out of the trail."

PHOTOGRAPH BY NANCIE BATTAGLIA

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