

The Magazine of Maine • EST. 1954

# Down East

May 2017



**+MAINE'S BEST-KEPT SALTY SECRET+**

LOCAL MAINE  
FARMS IN THE  
LIGHT

THE STORY OF A  
MAINE TEEN'S  
JOURNEY

A SEVENTH-  
GRADER'S  
UNDERSTANDING  
OF DIVERSITY

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June  
2017

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Welcome to paradise, a hidden treasure that is kept a greedy confidence by visitors.



A photograph of a garden bed. The bed is filled with dark grey gravel. A green garden hose is coiled across the gravel. Three grey plastic pots are placed on the gravel, each containing dead, brown plant matter. To the right of the gravel, there are some green plants. The garden bed is bordered by a wooden deck railing at the bottom. On the left side, there is a white wall with a light switch.

**Gardens missing something? Need to spruce up the flower beds?**

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# The Road

The journey of a Maine teen learning to endure life through many seasons.



**A road winds across the twin towns in which I have spent the past four years of my youth.**

Beginning in a jumble of intersections in Camden, a petite little village made up of a small harbor and decorated with tiny tourist shops, the road climbs a hill up through a wealthy neighborhood of Victorian-style houses. It then drops down past a cemetery and then acres of pasture with a gleaming pond as its centerpiece, all the property of a farm which houses beautiful black creatures with a band of white across their bellies which the tourists call the “Oreo cows”. After cutting

through the farmland The Road descends into the village of Rockport which is known as Camden’s twin sister. This village sits atop a hill overlooking another harbor. The distant mountains which one can see from almost anywhere on the road shadow the dark harbor water. This road certainly is not consistent throughout its journey between the towns: most of it is ragged and winter-torn while shiny and charcoal black newly paved patches spot its length sporadically. But despite its inconsistency, it is all the same road to a Camden teenager like myself. It is The Road.

It is a sunny summer day on The Road. The protective trees stand proud and tall beside the ragged concrete and young squirrels skip across its pavement just before tourist cars rumble by. Three figures skip along the roadside sporting stained tank tops, torn jean shorts, and feet baked red by the burning black pavement. The three appear to be teenage girls

somewhere around the age of 14. Two of these girls are sailors with bronze shoulders and sun-bleached salt-curled hair, one a farm child with a severe farmer's tan and a bright red hay rash which creeps from her knuckles to her elbows. This last girl is me, and the other two are my friends which have walked up this same road with me again and again for the past four years. Now any southerner would look at me- this lanky and somewhat awkward ever-sunburned creature who dresses in salt and manure-stained jeans and wonder how I could possibly have only lived in Maine for four years. The answer is simple: the mountains and the ocean and the forest and the pastures can change a child, especially a dreamy-eyed wanderer like myself. The adults who move to Maine halfway through their life may never grow into tatty jackets and greasy hair, but the children will change. Many will grow into proud sailors, farmers, lobsterman, and hunters. They will learn to live and breathe the salty waves, the sweet pinesap, the fresh mountain wind, and the cow manure as I have. After only a short time in Maine, I find myself walking up The Road with my fellow Maine children and a serious lack of direction, care, and footwear. Where are we going on this particular summer's day? Not even I could answer that.

We could be walking up the road to stop at nearby Laite Beach where we can count to ten and then dunk our heads beneath the cold waves and scream when we see a lobster make an appearance a few feet away from our blistered toes. We could just as easily be heading up to the farm where I keep my four sheep and steer so that I could feed them. Maybe we are going to usher my many plump sheep down to the pond or back down the road towards Camden for a leisurely expedition. Or we could just be wandering the road, giggling and humming along to indie pop which we blast in terrible sound quality through our cell phones. Maybe we are doing all of those things.

If it were fall and we were wearing floppy wool sweatshirts we could be walking into town to buy a coffee and cinnamon bun and then to sit in the park above the harbor and talk about school, friends, boys, and food. If it were winter we could be zipped up in big puffy jackets and boots, waddling through gusty snowdrifts to find a warm place to rest before our cheeks grew raw from the cold, all while slipping on the ice hidden within the snow on the barely visible sidewalk and landing abruptly on our behinds with a

thump followed by hysterical giggling. If it were the spring, or as we Mainers call it: "Mud Season", we could be proudly tying our winter coats around our waists and jogging through the melting snow on our way to the harbor for the first ocean swim of the season.

If I weren't with my sailor friends I would most likely be pedaling my old squeaky street bike up to the farm where I'd have to work on my animals to get them ready for the big agricultural Maine fairs. I could be running with my slightly overweight (well-loved as I like to call them) sheep to burn off some extra fat. I could even be in my family's big white truck driving down the road bound for out of town with a crate full of sheep in the back, headed for the next fair. If I were with my friends from the farm I could be biking up the hill, gasping for breath as I try to keep up with my speedy, hyper-athletic friend. We could be headed over to the farm to work on our cows or to work for pay.

Sometimes I will be all alone on the road, and I think that sometimes I like it best alone- where the lanky teenage farm girl can simply pedal her bike with her earbuds in, blasting melancholy music and matching the tunes to the glowing mountains in the distance. Alone on the road she knows only one friend who sings a soft and familiar tune as she travels. Her friend is The Road, the same road which has stuck with her through her youth, has taught her the ways of the distant mountains and of the long grass which dances in the wind. The Road watches over her and makes sure she arrives safely at her destination like a protective parent. The girl has grown from nervously pushing her bike in the wrong direction to speeding downhill without a helmet (to her mother's disgust), her hands grasping the salty wind. She will continue to live out these short days of her wild youth through summer, fall, winter, and mud season, with friends and with sheep and with music.

The air has begun to cool as the sunlight which smirks through the trees turns from yellow to bronze as morning turns to afternoon. You are wandering along a lengthy ragged road when you find three girls skipping towards Rockport. They look slightly rugged, but their eyes seem to hold one million stories and their grins thirst for one more. Where are they going? Well, you'll have to ask the road.

# Humble.

The visual story of  
local Maine farms.





**B**lueberries,  
potatoes,  
cows,  
maple  
syrup,  
alpacas.  
Everything

that the agricultural state of Maine is known for all coming from the same supercell: Maine farms. Small local farms are found almost everywhere from Portland to Skowhegan in Maine, and since factory farming rarely occurs, most farms are small family or community run businesses. Many of these small businesses work to better the community, such as the Erickson Fields and Aldermere Farm Preserves in Rockport, Maine who work side by side to educate the public about agriculture and donate homegrown food to local food pantries.



*Aldermere Farm is home to sheep owned and boarded there by teen members of the Aldermere 4-H club. Occasionally, the sheep and the way Belted-Galloway cows will share a brief conversation.*

The local "4-H'ers" of Aldermere often take their heifers on seaside strolls.



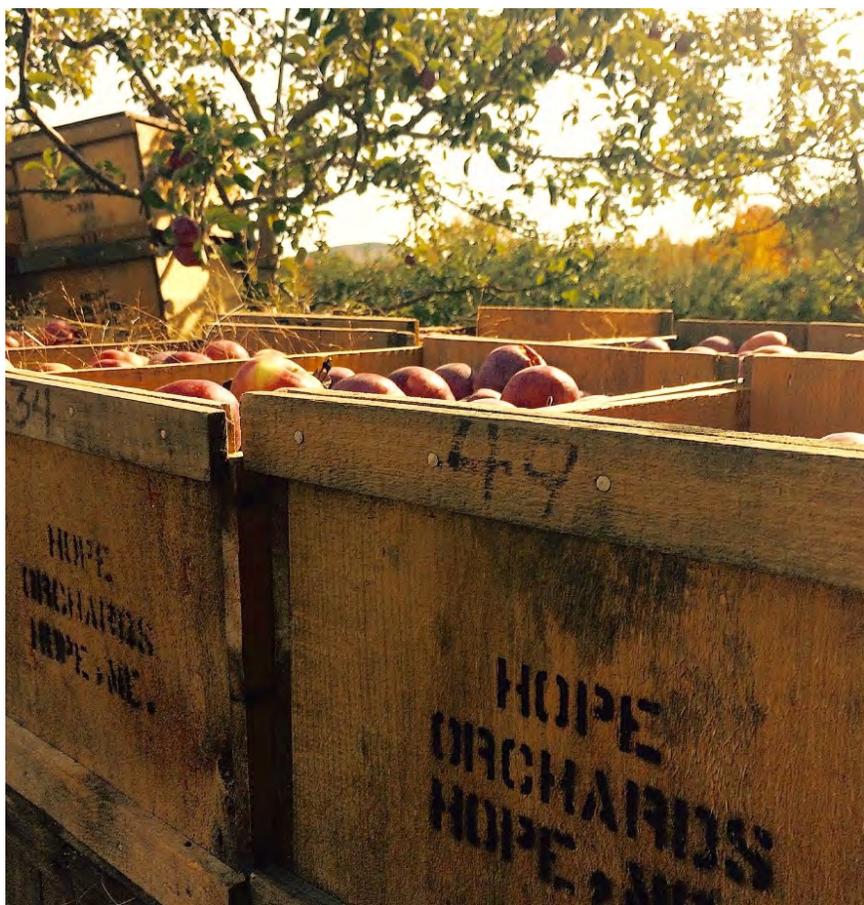
*Erickson Fields Preserve in Rockport, Maine provides opportunities like a community garden, a garden group for kids called “Kids Can Grow”, and a Teen Agriculture Group.*



*Kids get an opportunity to collaborate during a day of garlic growing(below, left). Locals can get a breath of fresh air while enjoying the trails at Erickson Field Preserve(below, right)*



Although farmwork is tough, especially throughout the ruthless northern winters, glimpses of beauty are not rare within these community assets. In fact, at least one small sighting of homegrown wonder is guaranteed during an expedition of the northern farmlands and the humble lifestyles of their wardens.



*Above: Picking apples at family-owned Hope Orchards had become a tradition each fall for many*

*Left : Local farms provide opportunities for kids to get out and get their hands dirty while gaining farming experience, like the "Kids Can Grow" program at Erickson Farm Preserve.*

# In our differences, we are the same.

The story of how two groups of students  
from two entirely different worlds  
find what they have in common  
through their diversity.

BY ROBYN WALKER-SPENCER

*Photos from the  
exchange always  
release swarms of  
memories for the  
students, all of good  
times.*



One would think they couldn't possibly be more different. What could be the connection between a small coastal community in mid-coast Maine and a secluded island in the Bahamas surrounded by the warm Caribbean sea? A stamp in a passport shows one of the most substantial differences between the two. To add to their nonconformities, the two coastal towns of Camden, Maine, and Deep Creek, Eleuthera are over a thousand miles apart. When the thermometer reads 60 degrees, the wardrobe choices of the people from the different towns show another contrast — climate. The t-shirts of Mainers and the sweatshirts of the people of Eleuthera speak for itself. The conservative, Christian community of the island in the Bahamas is a sharp contrast from the fairly liberal community of Camden. It would not be wise to bet on the existence of any connection between the two places.

But a connection is there, and like many cultural connections, it is because of kids. During Camden Rockport Middle School's February break in 2015, while many students were traveling with their families to Florida or skiing at the Camden Snow Bowl, I flew down to the Bahamas with eleven other seventh graders to participate in a cultural exchange with Deep Creek-- many of us leaving the US for the first time. Two years later, the students who traveled down still talk about how much we were affected by the contrast between the communities. But what the travelers also talk frequently about are the friendships made and



*The visual contrasts were instantly apparent, even from the plane.*



the realization of how similar the two groups were.

Kids from Camden tend to have a reputation for being sheltered from the rest of the world, supposedly unaware of the difficulties the rest of the world has to face each day. And although the town isn't completely ignorant, this belief doesn't come out of nothing. Camden isn't what someone would call "ethnically diverse", and the unemployment rate is less than 3%: the people are richer and the beliefs are quite a bit more liberal. And so right after arrival in Deep Creek,

the contrasts were what was originally apparent. Although they would later become less important, they were all that the students noticed at first.

Everything felt different. A tidal wave of balmy air washed over the group the second we stepped off the plane. Everything was green, and lush, and warm-- so different from the Maine winter that had just been left behind. The vibrance of the colors and the clear water instantly popped out at the moment of arrival, a sharp contrast from the gray skies, dirty snow, and barebones trees that were quickly forgotten. And so the group chose to observe the differences, because in new places it is the differences that always stand out.

The differences went beyond the temperature and color of the water. Although the beauty of nature was everywhere, among the lush greenery was the sense of poverty. Deep Creek has 81% unemployment, and the group of Camden travelers could tell. "I saw people walking barefoot, and houses that were really broken down. Although many people didn't have jobs, their spirits seemed be high," explains Audrey Bowman, who was one of the twelve seventh graders on the trip. "It made me feel grateful for the community that I have. For the education I get, the places I can go, and the many people that I can converse with."

Whenever anyone travels to a new place, the differences are what becomes clear, and that was initially what Bowman remembered seeing. "I think the part that impacted me the most was when we went to DCMS[Deep Creek Middle School] and saw how small the school campus was. There were only three small buildings with only two or three classrooms in it. This shocked

me to see where they go to school compared to our school with 800 people in it."

But as our group from Camden became more familiar with the DCMS students— playing games, having days of barbeques and capture the flag, and even traveling to the other end of the island for a beach camping experience, both school groups realized something that hadn't been initially clear: they were all very similar. The longer the group was in Eleuthera, the easier it was to see that while the locations were practically opposites, the people weren't that different.

Danila Borodaenko was another participant in the exchange from Camden. He described how impactful the exchange was for him, and how much he enjoyed getting to know the Deep Creek students. "The kids seemed just like us: living in a community with its own uniqueness, going through school, even having similar hobbies to many of us. The biggest difference really came from the fact that our cultures are different."

The kids of Deep Creek are the same age as

**"But a connection is there, and like many cultural connections, it is because of kids."**

the Camden travelers. They hang out with their friends, flirt with their classmates, make up ridiculous dances to their favorite songs... just

like any teenagers. But for the kids who got to travel to Eleuthera on an exchange-- it's the realization of how similar people are and getting to share in those similarities that matters. Bowman understood this. "The students from DCMS seemed to be shy to new people when they came to Camden, but when we went to Eleuthera they were very outgoing. I guess they're similar to people in Camden in that we're shy when we first meet new experiences."

**T**he exchange with Deep Creek was almost two years ago, but the connections formed from it are still just as strong. Many of the travelers are still in contact with the students from DCMS, and have maintained the relationships, explaining how they still talk to some of the students on a regular basis. Borodaenko tries to talk often with the friends he made in Deep Creek. "I still contact the student I hosted, and I follow

others on social media. Overall, strong connections were definitely made."

And many of the students, given a chance to return to Deep Creek, would leap at the opportunity. The people, the community, the island-- they impacted our group. Shannon Mackridge was deeply affected by the exchange. She still keeps in touch with a few of the Deep Creek kids, and follows them on social media. "I wouldn't hesitate going back and submerging myself in that place once again. I will never forget the beauty and adventure that place had."

The leader of the exchange was a woman named Katie Bauer, was the seventh grade science teacher at Camden Rockport Middle School during the time of the exchange. The summer before the trip was initiated, she had traveled down to Eleuthera and had familiarized herself with the island. And she fell in love with it. After returning from the trip the second time

around, this time with twelve middle schoolers, she decided to return once again-- but this time more permanently. A few months later, she turned in her resignation papers to Camden-Rockport Middle School and accepted the position of principal at DCMS. Needless to say, Deep Creek left an impact on her as well.

During each of her trips, Bauer was absolutely able to gain a sense of similarity, even through the differences. Perhaps that is why she returned. She was able to find similarities beyond the same activities the students liked to



*Mementos from the trip— plane tickets, photos with friends, seashells— are now some of the students' most treasured objects, reminding them of the past memories and friendships made.*

participate, or that some of the jokes that make their way through schools like wildfire are told in both schools, both countries. In each town, she was able to gather the feeling of community, the sense that both places care a lot about their children. She explained the feeling that she had found in both communities. "I think the Camden/Rockport education community is always looking for ways to offer unique experiences. I think the same can be said about DCMS too. Both communities care about their children and have a strong sense of identity tied to place."

Before we left Deep Creek, I became aware of another local high school on Eleuthera that featured semester programs for international students: The Island School. A 100-day program, it allows students to fully immerse themselves in the island, study the marine biology, and get to know the locals. Upon hearing about this program, I promised myself that I would return. Even if I didn't make it into the program, even if I couldn't afford an entire semester, I vowed that I would go back to Eleuthera. Now, two years after making this decision, I am applying to return to Deep Creek. If I can go, if I am accepted, I will not only return to Eleuthera for marine biology research and to see the island. I will return to see the students of DCMS: my friends.

There is something special about an exchange in middle school. For many, it was the first time leaving the country. It was the first time anyone had left the country without their parents. At age twelve, kids are still forming their own opinions. Almost all of their beliefs, including the way they see the world, are influenced by their parents. Decisions aren't often made

exclusively by themselves. And when twelve seventh graders go to a brand new place in a different country with new people, the kids have one of their first opportunities for freedom. They can make their own choices, and the opinions they form of the new place are strictly their own. Having this chance to go off on their own means the relationships formed with the people they meet are going to be more significant.

Because this exchange was one of our first experiences out in the world alone, because we allowed ourselves to look past the boundaries of comparing the two groups and simply embracing our diversity, we were more open with each other. This was our own experience, without our parents' influence, and the two groups were able to be closer and truer to themselves because of it.

When people think of the Bahamas, they think of expensive resorts and white sandy beaches. But for the students who traveled to Eleuthera, when someone mentions the Bahamas, we think of Deep Creek Middle School. We think of camping on the beach as a massive group, and we think of the friends we made. Hurricane Matthew crossed over Eleuthera, and we thought of the kids of Deep Creek. Because this trip affected us. We were exposed to the world, to the contrasts of other societies, but we were able to form a unique connection with the students anyway. And so parts of us are still in Eleuthera through the stories told and the awareness of our friends there. Mackridge was deeply affected by the friendships she made, and will never forget her experience. "Now Eleuthera has a little part of my heart."

# Maine's Best- Kept Salty Secret

*Morse Mountain Preserve and Seawall beach is a landscape secluded from the public, and sheltered from the hubbub of nearby Phippsburg, adding to the attraction of tourists every year.*



*By Hayden Thibeault*

When driving through the suburbs of Phippsburg, you will find a wooded parking lot sheltered by century old oaks and crowded with cars from all over the country. Under the shadows of these withering trees, is a wind beaten, hand carved wooden sign which hereby declares "Morse Mountain and Seawall Beach". These 600 acres are a nature preserve, managed by Bates College in Lewiston for research and educational purposes. This beach is also a preserve for piping plovers and least terns, two endangered bird species. When not being used for a learning device, this beach is open to the public during the summer. The only access is a foot trail. Once you have trekked the leisurely two mile trip with scenic out looks upon a partially paved road, you come out to an open walkway to the beach, lined with dunes with the sun-warmed sand blowing in the crisp air. The beach itself is over two miles long and there are virtually no rocks making for a perfect area for energetic play to relaxing walking, and everything in between. The water, which crashes into the warm, golden sand at speedy intervals, is warm and soothing to all who travel the almost two miles in. One can stroke between blue crests of refreshing water, walk along the shoreline into the horizon, or sit down and take in the stupendous view and truly appreciate what we have in our backyard here. Although this is a very popular beach for people "in the know" about it, there is limited parking and the beach itself is very secluded, adding to the attraction of it. And by "in the know", I mean that there is a type of religion so to say, that when one comes to know about these hidden jewels along the Maine coast, others will become annoyed that others let the word out about "their own secluded, private beach". Few people know about this beach, and hopefully it'll stay that way for the years to come.

After parking, you start off on a brisk path covered in a mix of black gravel and crumbling pavement, passing granite rocks covered in cool, emerald green forests of moss. After walking for over half the distance, you have the option to take an alternate path to a look out where the naked eye can see the whitecaps crashing onto the beach like a scene out of a fairy tale. If one so happens to fall deep in love with this fairy tale, and wants to continuously visit this wonderful preserve, there are three neat cottages available for rent in the preserve, with just the essentials; there is no TV, but an acceptable kitchen. And, they are all few steps away from the beach. They are in fact available for reservation on <http://www.morseriver.com/houses.html>.

After taking in the view, you walk through a marsh where the moist dew clings to your bones, a refreshing kick to finish this hike. After this, the beach is just a hop and a skip away. The beach itself seems out of place in Maine; the water is always warmer than other beaches, and it is a perfectly sandy beach, like those elder couples vacation to in exquisite destinations such as Hawaii, and Aruba.

After possibly walking along this shoreline, or going for a dip in the turquoise waters, you then begin the walk back, which, after experiencing this beach on this special strip of Maine, seems a lot shorter.



*One of many washed up logs on the sands of Morse Beach, perfect for pitching camp around, or on.*



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