

MAINE MODERNE | MOOSE POND MAGIC | BUZZ THRILL | E-CYCLES IN AFRICA

# PORTLAND<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE

Welcome to Our  
Camps

FEB./MARCH 2022 VOL. 37 NO. 1 \$5.95



WWW.PORTLANDMAGAZINE.COM  
MAINE'S CITY MAGAZINE

OUT THERE

# Maine Refrains

The wind through the pines. Lake waters lapping the shore. Campfires crackling, voices raised in harmony—all supply the soundtrack to Maine summers.

BY GWEN THOMPSON

ONE GRAY, blustery spring day an opera-singer friend of mine, her parents, and I converge on the Jersey shore the morning after her performance of the Bach B Minor Mass in a nearby town, determined to enjoy a stroll on the boardwalk before the clouds burst. “We’ll be fine, as long as we don’t walk backwards in the rain wearing a yellow slicker,” I say as we set off. “At Wohelo, where I went to camp, that was

## OUT THERE

the only rule—

"You went to Wohelo?" My friend's dad halts. "I went to **Timanous!**"

Wohelo's brother camp. "Then you must know 'Old Chief Timanous!'"

We burst into all three verses of this hymn to the founder of both camps—including the two-part harmony on the refrain—smack in the middle of the boardwalk as my friend and her mom look on in

life, with songs for every occasion and for every activity—from keeping a steady pace paddling to timing how long we had to tread water to pass the swim test. We sang to raise team spirit at morning crew practice, out of sheer exuberance sailing in good wind, and whenever we gathered together at mealtimes or around the campfire. "There are cheers, welcome songs, thank-you songs, and sad goodbye songs."

tively moved us: whenever one table started to sing an end-of-camp song for the first time that summer, another table inevitably decided it was too soon to get all verklempt and drowned out this attempt at nostalgia with the peppiest song involving the most hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and table-thumping, sung at the top of their lungs.

### "DOWN THROUGH THE YEARS"

"The same songs are sung by many generations," says Barbara Klein, who went to Camp Vega for six summers. "I sing them with my daughter and granddaughter."

"It's a nice way to connect with alumnae, because when they return to camp they can sing along, and you can watch little girls recognize songs that their grandmothers or aunts or mothers sang to them," says Lucy Paiste, who spent thirteen summers at Wohelo as a camper and counselor. "When my baby was born I sang him camp songs all the time, because they were the only ones I knew by heart," says fellow Woheloite Hilary Hodge. And long before Wohelo's "Col-



astonishment.

"How did I not know your dad went to Timanous?" I ask Katharine.

"How did I not know my dad could sing? I've never heard him sing before!"

“When my baby was born I sang him camp songs all the time, because they were the only ones I knew by heart.”

The dining-hall tug-of-war surrounding the latter is indicative of the degree to which these songs collec-



### "THE SOUNDS OF CAMP"

In the world music class I took in college, we learned about African tribes that don't have any way to say "I can't sing" in the Western sense, because in their culture this would be tantamount to saying "I can't talk." Sleepaway camp is much the same. "Singing and camp are synonymous," says Abby Golden Shapiro, who spent six summers at **Camp Vega** in Fayette. "Every woman I've met who went to girls' camp talks about singing camp songs. It's part of the culture of being a camper."

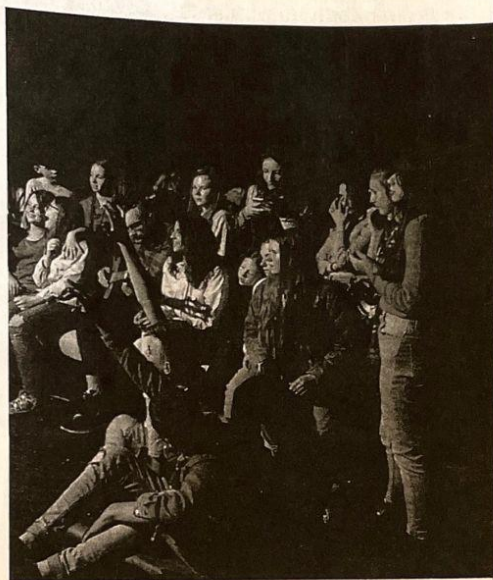
"I can't imagine camp without singing," says Andrea Price Stevens of Wohelo, where a camp chorus performs weekly and we all sang constantly as part of daily



or Song" become alumna **Maggie Rogers's** signature tune on stages around the world, "My mother went to the same camp and sang it to me every night at bedtime when I was a child," says Jenny Edwards Chavira, who spent five summers there herself.

"I find myself humming 'The W in Wina' all the time," says Stuart Henderson. "It's only been twenty years!"

"When I get together with my camp friends forty-seven years after I left **Camp Hawthorne**, we still sing the same songs," says Jim Brennan. "Our camp day generally closed with singing 'Taps,' so even now when we are together, someone will break into



"Taps" when it's time to wrap up the evening."

"I think if you attend a camp for years, the songs become part of your DNA," says Nancy Scheerer, who spent eleven summers at **Camp Wawenock** on Sebago Lake. "Almost fifty years later, I can still remember the words to the songs I learned my first summer."

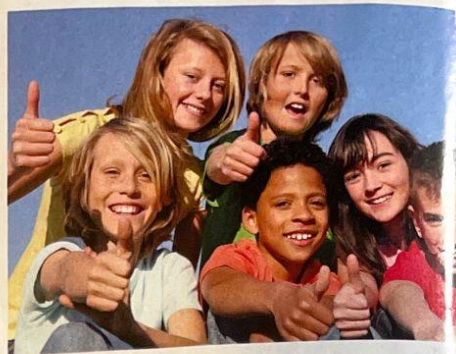
**A**nd after twenty-six years at Wohelo, "I am almost always humming a camp song to myself," says Sarah Wildrick Hamilton.

"I find the songs soothing," says fellow alum Jessica Bancroft. "I sing Council Fire songs to myself at the dentist to remind me of a place I felt calm and content. Thinking of camp is comforting to me, especially during stress."

#### "TIME WILL NEVER DIM"

How did such a potent tradition arise? "The camp was largely staffed by the sons of New

## OUT THERE



England Ivy Leaguers," says Westy Dain of Timanous, which was not atypical in this among Maine sleepaway camps. "When they had to come up with songs, they often repurposed their colleges' football fight songs. 'Old Chief Timanous' was taken, with very few word changes, from 'Lord Jeffery Amherst.'" When I went to college, I was startled to hear another of my brother camp's anthems, "Rise, Camp Timanous," ringing out over the Quad on the chapel chimes—based, unbeknownst to me, on the alma mater formerly known as "Rise, Sons of Bowdoin" (now re-titled "Raise Songs

"I sing Council Fire songs to myself at the dentist to remind me of a place I felt calm and content."

to Bowdoin" to accommodate coeducation).

**S**ome songs at Wohelo are well over a hundred years old, while others were written last summer. "We have songs from 1910," says Louise Gulick Van Winkle, whose grandparents founded the camp. "My Paddle's Keen and Bright," one of the oldest songs we sing, has spread to many other camps and is now considered a generic camp song." At Camp Vega, "Every year a songbook would be compiled," says Erika (Kim Singer) Burke. "It must have started in the 1930s or 1940s, because there were older a cappella songs and harmonies that stood the test of time, and each generation added songs, like folk songs in the late 1960s. The mixture of folk, spirituals, contemporary, and old-

## OUT THERE

time provides a musical education of cultures and eras that brings the ages together and becomes part of the tradition."

### "SEND THE ECHOES FAR AND NEAR"

A tradition that flourishes at Maine summer camps to this day. "Counselors are constantly writing songs for camp events," says Jim Morse of Winona Camps in Bridgton, and at Camp Wawenock "most campers collaborate on songs" too, says Nancy Scheerer. "The fact that songs have been written for many decades by campers speaks to the camp's deep-rooted traditions." At Wohelo, says Deb Gamber, "songs are written once a week for use at the weekly Council Fire skit, known as Count, as it recounts the week's events. Some survived, but most were one-hit wonders," a microcosm of the vicissitudes of pop music.

"You need good camp imagery and a



catchy tune with a relatively small range so that most people can sing it," says Lucy Paiste.

"I particularly like songs with harmony," says Camp Vega alum Carla Schine Dener, while Vega counselor Kate Phillips favors songs "that include activities that haven't changed or traditions that

camp, you get to put down your thoughts on what you love about it so much."

Case in point: "The Sounds of Camp Are Happy Ones" is an upbeat tune that sings through the specifics of our day at camp based on the noises of different activities, from sailing to metalworking to weaving," says Anne Lathrop Snow. "As we approached mid-summer, hoping for Beach

generations of campers have passed down from mother to daughter. I am reminded of all the memories I have, the friends I've made, and all the glorious places around camp that I've sung those songs. When an activity requires you to make up a song about

Day, we'd sing this song more often and more loudly at the line about going to the beach, so both the lyrics and how we sang it wove together a joyful picture of a summer day at Wohelo, sung to the tune of 'Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.'"

Much of my knowledge of the Great American Songbook was gleaned secondhand from all the Broadway standards we sang re-written with camp lyrics. As Maria Muth Connor puts it: "You know Wawenock is in your blood when you hear songs and all you can think of is the Wawenock words." After attending Camp Vega, "Every time I watch *The Sound of Music* I sing 'State of Maine' to the tune of 'Edelweiss,'" says Ferne Abrams.

### "DEEP IN THE WOODS OF MAINE"

Yet these were not summer theater camps or performing arts camps, as my school friends who didn't go to camp assumed from the number of times I exclaimed, "We sing this at camp!" on my first chance encounter with the original lyrics to one of my favorite camp songs.

## OUT THERE

### Total Recall

During our April 2021 interview with actor Matt Salinger (*The Ice Road*, 2021), he told us about his mom's days as a camper in Maine. We'd already discussed his dad's—the late J. D. Salinger's—childhood adventures at Camp Wigwam.

I just had a fun conversation with her about Wyonegonic! When I asked her about it, she immediately broke into what I gathered was the Wyonegonic song. My 87-year-old mother! Her voice cracked a few times, but she remembered it. She couldn't remember if she went two or three summers. "I wish it had been more." She was evacuated from London when she was a little girl during World War II. She'd bounced around to different cities, countries—at one time it was a convent school. What a relief **Camp Wyonegonic** must have been. She found it to be a wonderful, welcoming, empowering, kind place. Once, when I told her I was dating somebody who went there, she loved it.

*Then what kind of camp is it?*

I got a lot of blank looks trying to explain that it wasn't any kind of specialized theme camp, but just a cluster of cabins in the woods alongside a lake, where we did the obvious things to do in that setting—nature crafts and water sports—and sang while doing them. But clearly, from the even blanker looks I got—*Why would you do that?*—group singing was not an integral part of most teenagers' daily lives. Yet it was so thoroughly woven into the fabric of camp life as something everybody could and did do, my only answer was, *Why wouldn't you?*

"The first thing you notice as a counselor arriving for pre-camp training at Wohe-lo is just how quiet everything is," says Bailey McWilliams. "Camp doesn't seem alive until there's laughter and song coming from the dining halls. It elicits joy and brings people together." Group singing also "allows for moments of shared memory and reflection, both silly and serious," says Cassie Richardson of **Hidden Valley Camp** in Freedom. On a physiological level, "Music makes people feel happy by triggering the release of dopamine in the

## OUT THERE

### "Silver and Purple and Twilight"

If you're a fan of Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter **Maggie Rogers**, you've heard the haunting melody of the "**Color Song**" she sings from the edge of the stage to close out her concerts. And if you caught "Welcome to My Camp" in our Feb./March 2021 issue, you know she picked up the tune at summer camp in Maine, where the "poetic, descriptive lyrics paint a picture of how beautiful the light is as the day is ending on **Sebago Lake**," says fellow Woheloite Mary Griffin. "I once attended an organ recital in Old Orchard Beach where the organist introduced a 'mood poem' from the 1920s and I instantly recognized the melody as the 'Color Song' at camp. It made me smile, because **Wohelo** girls and women have long been writing their own lyrics to contemporary songs."

brain," says Wohelo alum Nina Pyle Furlanetto. "Singing together creates a bonding experience while feeling the benefits of the increase in dopamine."

"The songs are a special language that we share," says Sarah Wildrick Hamilton.

Without this common ground of music, "I bet the void would be filled by pop songs, which would be polarizing, because there would be some girls that knew songs that others didn't, so it would be less equalizing," says Lucy Paiste.

"I don't think I'd feel as connected to the camp and the people without camp songs," says Elle Yarborough of **Slovenski Camps** in Raymond, and Jessica Bancroft finds that "Camp friends are many of my closest friends. At the reunion, singing songs by the fire, I felt connected to all of the women there. We all knew all of the words, and sharing that thirty-five years later felt like I was a part of something bigger. I don't feel this way about high school or college."

"There's a special kind of connection to know that every girl sitting in the pitch black in the otherwise silent woods is imagining the same thing together, singing a song that connects them across space and time," says campmate Heather Ainsworth.

## OUT THERE

"Singing is how we transmit culture and values to new campers and maintain them across generations."

### "HEARTS FULL OF CHEER"

**A**lthough Maine summer camps have a long history as incubators for superstars in the arts, from **Rodgers and Hart** to **Stephen Sondheim**, **Lauren Bacall**, **Ben Stiller**, and **Claire Danes** (see "Welcome to

### Music & Lyrics

If you love the song "My Funny Valentine," it'll make you smile with your heart to know it was written by two **Camp Wigwam** alumni, **Rodgers and Hart**. A generation later, at **Camp Androscoggin**, **Stephen Sondheim** was inspired to hear "A Little Night Music" or, depending on how the kids in the next cabin behaved, "Send in the Clowns."

My Camp," Feb./March 2021), "Singing camp songs is something every single camper and counselor can participate in," says Ted Bucknam of **Winoona**. "It brings instant joy and belonging" even to campers who never sang outside of camp, because "I would have scared people," says Jim Morse. "That's why camp is incredible."

"It's pretty interesting that at an all-boys camp, never once did I hear anyone make fun of the singing, or not want to be part of it," says Bucknam. "But away from camp, it's likely the majority of those same boys (and men) didn't sing one song. Camp brings out a special ability to be yourself without anyone judging who you are and permits everyone to just have fun in the moment. So the songs are symbolic of much of what everyone loves about camp: a place to be yourself without fear of being judged. Everyone is accepted, and we all celebrate that together every day through the songs we sing." ■