



Making a home on a 1927 schooner

Rockland family runs B&B at sea

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

Balancing a plate of lobster mac and cheese with one hand and turning the ship's wheel with the other, Capt. Jon Finger directs his 75-ton schooner, the J&E Riggin, toward Curtis Island.

A gust of wind picks up, and his daughter Chloe, 18, jumps to her feet to adjust a sail. As she walks by the helm they high-five each other and look back out at sea.

In the galley below, his youngest daughter, Ella, 15, slices veggies next to his wife, Annie Mahle. The cookbook writer, who creates spectacular meals on a cast-iron woodstove at sea, gently instructs her daughter as they prep dinner for 20 passengers from Toronto to Texas who loll about in the morning sun. It must be pushing 100 degrees in the space the size of a food truck, but the crew of family members and hired hands are upbeat. Another windjammer food cruise is underway.

Through countless weather patterns, ebbs, flows and currents, the rugged Riggin has been a safe harbor for this nautical nuclear family. At first glance, the former oyster dredger resembles any other charter plying Penobscot Bay waters to give out-of-towners a taste of Down East.

On deck and down below, from stem to stern, they are raising a family by old-school values

This is the 19th summer the Rockland-based wind-powered gourmet hostel has soothed stressed-out teachers from Boston and hedge fund managers from New York by sailing to ports such as Castine and Stonington for extended excursions. Cutting a timeless image, the 1927 two-masted, gaff rig may look like it's powered by sail only, but the majestic vessel is animated by something more. The family, skipper, galley cook and crew keep the sails taut and the ship in trim and passengers crying out with delight.

He skippers, she cooks and their children pitch in from first light until the kerosene lanterns are lit.

"It's like camping on the water with all kinds of gorgeous food. Oh, and P.S., we are sailing," Mahle, a spunky blonde with ice-blue eyes and boundless energy, says.

In constant motion, she lifts a platter of buttermilk pancakes garnished with flowers to a ship's apprentice, who sets it next to a tray of bacon, peach compote, coffee and cinnamon syrup laid out for breakfast.

Most summers since they were newlyweds, Finger and Mahle have lived at sea. Since they bought the Riggin, lighthouse, lobster and culinary-focused tours have been their specialty. On deck and down below, from stem to stern, they are raising a family by old-school values.

"It's a very simple lifestyle. There is no TV, there is no Wi-Fi. We simplify things as much as we can," the ship's captain and patriarch says.

Walking barefoot on the deck, Ella and Chloe blend in with the crew. They reef and douse sails, instruct guests how to hoist sails, jump in the yawl that acts as a tugboat to help mom get the ship out of port.

"I learned how to walk on the boat before I learned to walk on land," says Chloe, who got so deft on her sea legs that when she tried walking on land, "I'd tumble."

As an infant in a sling strapped to her father at the helm, the rolling sea was the nourishing environment she was born into.

"In the early days, we had just bought the boat and had our first baby. Not only did we not know how to run a business, we didn't know how to raise a baby," Finger says. "There is no manual for either."

The unplugged experience that guests seek is one keel that keeps this nontraditional family even.

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GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Bill Warman talks about day lilies at his farm in Waldo. Warman bought the land from his parents and started clearing land to breed peonies and day lilies.

Fields of lilies and dreams

Waldo man found his real vocation after retirement

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

Bill Warman toiled for 40 years setting and selling tile so that he could spend his retirement doing what he loves: breeding vibrant peonies and delicate daylilies in nearly all the shades of the rainbow.

Warman, 64, a grizzled Waldo County native, is just as colorful — though surely not quite as delicate — as the flowers he breeds, grows and sells from his business, The Maine Garden.

"This is why I retired," he said this week. "So I could raise my own vegetables, breed my own plants and never have to go to work again."

Of course, that depends on one's definition of work. Warman, who lives with his wife, Lynn, on the 9-acre parcel located off a dirt road in Waldo, doesn't lounge around and admire his blossoms all day long. He makes small mountains of compost with grass clippings and seafood byproducts and uses that to grow thousands of flowers, many of which he bred by patiently hand-pollinating many generations of plants to get just the right colors, shapes and sizes that he wants. His goal is to develop very hardy, beautiful and unique flowers, and the work is worth it, he said.

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"It's not the money that I'm doing it for," he said. "There is nothing I enjoy more. It's either like making love or being in heaven."

Warman said that his knack for plants was evident when he was just a boy helping to tend the vegetables in the family garden. When he



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Bill Warman talks about how to transplant day lilies at his farm in Waldo.



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

One of the many varieties of day lilies at Bill and Lynn Warman's farm in Waldo.

was still a youth, he cut his breeding chops on a slightly more controversial plant — marijuana.

"I got caught [by police] hybridizing marijuana, and that's a fact. I'm not ashamed of it at all," he said.

Since then, Warman has shifted his specialty to flowers. In mid-summer, his gardens are alive with color, as beds of daylilies — from pure white to pale yellow to a deep, dusky purple — wave in the sunshine. They are open to visitors and shoppers every day, except when it is raining, from May 1 to Sept. 15, and many have come over the years to see what Warman is up to. Terry McNeal and Ernestine Hooper, both of Searsport, stopped by this week to look at the daylilies.

"They're perennials. You don't have to mess with them," McNeal said.

Warman dug up a mauve daylily with particularly small blossoms for the women.

"It's very dainty," Hooper said. "It just caught my eye because it's so delicate looking."

Over the years, Warman has planted many thousands of flower seeds and has used his own cultivars to hybridize many different kinds of peonies and daylilies, and more than 200 different peonies and 2,000 different daylilies can be found at The Maine Garden. He grows the peonies for his wife, who loves them, and sells the plants he has developed primarily to breeders, who come from many different states and countries to see what is growing in rural Maine.

"They come here with the expectation of finding something special," he said.

The daylilies are a little different. He loves growing beautiful and unique blooms, and is happy to sell the plants to the folks who wander into his gardens. He also works every year with local nonprofit organizations, selling his plants but donating the proceeds to groups that do good works.

"I want to create something that has not been done before," the self-taught botanist said of his desire to keep hybridizing plants and share them with the world. "A pretty plant to look at — that beats a bottle of beer all to hell every time."

The Maine Garden, at 49 Old County Road in Waldo, is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day — except when it is raining — from May 1 to Sept. 15.

Heirloom seed farmers settling into County life

BY ANTHONY BRINO
BDN STAFF

On the same road as potato, grain and cattle farms in Fort Fairfield, Randel and Pam Agrella have a small farm with a distinctive purpose: preserving heirloom seeds.

"We think agriculture is at the beginning of a renaissance," Randel Agrella said in late June, two years after they moved to the 3½-acre property they've named Abundant Acres.

Agrella works for Baker Creek Seeds, a rare and heirloom seed company based in Missouri, where they had lived before spending three years living in Baker Creek's 1767 seed homestead in Old Wethersfield, Connecticut.

"We loved it there. We love it here," Agrella, who's originally from Sonoma, California, said.

Although he's not a yet a fan of winter and has some concerns about large-scale agricultural practices in the region, Agrella said they're settling in well and finding the space to pursue their farming passion, carrying along the lineage of heirloom seeds while trying new approaches.

"Experimentation has always been my way when I was first getting into gardening. You never know what's really going to thrive. You can look at something and say, 'that's a Thai variety — there's no way it's going to grow in Maine,'" he said, pointing to a Thai basil plant in the greenhouse. "You're probably right when you say that, but you might not be, and trying is the way to know for sure."

Living in a clapboard home built in the 1890s, with a massive oak tree in the front yard, Agrella is doing a mix of experimentation and tried-and-true planting for Baker Creek, as well as for their own food and seedlings and produce they sell locally.



ANTHONY BRINO | BDN

Randel Agrella holds a winter squash seedling at his farm in Fort Fairfield.

This summer, the largest plot at their farm is devoted to a "cucurbit grow out" for Baker Creek, with three heirloom cucumber, pumpkin and squash varieties that will be harvested for seeds: Japanese Long cucumber, Bylinka squash and Omaha pumpkin.

The Japanese Long cucumber is a "burpless," crisp and sweet cucumber that can be picked thin and seedless or grow up to 18 inches long. "I don't know if it'll work here or not, but we'll see what kind of seed producer it is," Agrella said.

The other two are northern varieties that should grow well. The winter squash variety, Bylinka, was bred in Soviet Russia with resistance to the fungal diseases anthracnose and powdery mildew. The Omaha pumpkin in an early, oblong sweet pumpkin that was passed on by the Hidatsa Tribe of the Dakotas.

Agrella is also doing a trial for Baker Creek of 13 varieties of Amaranth, the ancient, gluten-free quinoa-grain. For themselves, they have an experimental plot with chickpeas and lentils, as well as a large vegetable garden, including potatoes.

Artist inspired by Penobscot Nation river stories

BY JULIA BAYLY
BDN STAFF

ORONO — There is a story among the Penobscot people in Maine that tells of a time long ago, when a giant frog wouldn't allow them to use any of the water along which they had settled.

As the people began dying of thirst, they turned to their spirit chief, Gluskabe, who demanded the frog turn over the water to his people.

Gluskabe eventually had to kill the giant frog to release what became the Penobscot River from its mouth.

Penobscot artist Christiana Becker has taken that story and others she heard growing up and is using them as inspiration for a series of carved woodblock prints she created

as part of a printmaking class at the University of Maine.

Becker, 24, is an art major at the university, where prints such as "Water Famine" not only depict her artistic interpretation of the river creation story but also serves as a statement on the modern environmental threats facing the Penobscot River.

Becker told The Maine Journal that, through the piece, she expresses the river has been highly polluted with Mercury and PCBs ever since the Penobscot people lost control over the waterway. Her work embodies the disquieting feeling of being disconnected legally from something that holds a large spiritual connection between her people and the tribal land.

Becker said that in the piece, the frog represents a dam obstructing the natural pro-

ductivity and health of the river, transforming a legend into a metaphorical reality.

"I like to put the [written] stories of my people with my art so people can read about them," Becker said sitting down for a recent interview in Orono. "I want people to understand the meaning behind the art."

Penobscot hero Gluskabe figures prominently in several of Becker's prints, including the large woodcut "Gluskabe Bags All the Game Animals" depicting his ill-advised attempts to capture all the game animals for himself.

"His grandmother, Woodchuck, was not happy and scolded Gluskabe," Becker said. "When he realized he was keeping all the animals from the people who relied on them, he released them."

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