

Lake Kezar: Camps in the Woods

By JAMES EGAN

In the summer of 1962, when pianist Vladimir Horowitz was preparing to return to the concert stage after several years of retirement, he booked a cottage at a camp called Quisisana on Lake Kezar, Me. He had a Steinway shipped from Boston and put in his long daily hours of practice in the cottage, while Quisisana's dazzled guests lurked among the pines to enjoy the unexpected bonus.

During the virtuoso's three-week stay he attended evening concerts by members of the staff, a feature of Quisisana. The camp recruits young artists from the Juilliard School, the New England Conservatory and other music schools to do chores by day and perform by night. One morning Horowitz came into the office where a budding pianist was busy typing. Horowitz watched her for a moment. "I'd ask for a job here," he said, "but I can't type."

Lake Kezar in Center Lovell on the western edge of Maine about five miles from the New Hampshire border has long attracted musicians and music lovers as well as admirers of crisp clear waters, fresh pine-scented air and showy views of the White Mountains. (Playing in a different league from Horowitz, Rudy Vallee owned a lodge and 250 acres on the lake in the 1930's.) An Englishman who spent 25 years compiling a book titled "The Hundred Most Beautiful Lakes in the World" awarded Kezar fifth place. The lake is 10 miles long, shaped roughly like a fishhook and covers about four square miles.

There are two adult camps at Kezar that offer accommodations on the American plan: Quisisana and Farrington's, side by side on the eastern shore of the lake. Each provides cabins scattered among tall pine trees around a central main house as well as rooms in the house. Comfortable but not luxurious, the cabins are simply furnished in early-summer-cottage style, finished in rough pine boards on the inside, white or green clapboard on the outside, all with screened porches, several overlooking the lake. They consist of one to three bedrooms, and some have living rooms with fireplaces, which come in handy on cool Maine mornings and evenings. Young staffers keep the wood replenished.

Both camps offer swimming at natural sandy beaches (two at Quisisana, one at Farrington's), free canoeing and, at a moderate charge, sailing, outboard motorboating and water skiing. There are also bass and salmon fishing (although the fish are reluctant except in spring and early summer), cards and television in the main lodges and tennis. Quisisana accommodates 165 persons, Farrington's 94, and both are usually filled to capacity during July and August. Guests run to couples over 40, with a few teen-agers and children, but there are no special programs for children.

My wife and I have enjoyed stays at both camps—three times at Quisisana, once at Farrington's. The major difference between them, aside from size, is that Quisisana provides organized musical entertainment in the evening. There's some rivalry between the two camps, and each has its devotees who return year after year. Farringtonians like the utter quiet of the Maine woods; Quisisanans like the

night filled with music. As music lovers, we prefer Quisisana.

According to Robert Littlefield, a 74-year-old native of Lovell, former First Selectman and a walking repository of local history, the first white settler on the lake was George Kezar. A hunter and trapper who built a cabin on the north end about 1760, he gave his name to the sparkling waters. Now approximately 270 cottages border the lake. "Summer people," as we speak of them," said Littlefield, "started coming here back in the 19th century. We've always been fortunate in those we get. Many have built homes on the lake or patronized the summer camps. I'd say they pay between 60 and 70 percent of our taxes." Then he added in a burst of generosity, "I don't think we can object to summer people."

Farrington's was founded by Will Farrington in 1911 and remained in his family until 1975, when a group of long-time guests called Friends of Farrington's took it over and installed David Klingenstein as director. Quisisana started in 1917. (The name, borrowed from the resort hotel on Capri, means "Here one heals oneself.") In 1946, Ralph Burg, then a Boston musical-instrument entrepreneur, took over Quisisana and began importing staff-member performing artists. He sold the camp last year to Elliott Hyman and Leonard Haskel, who are carrying on the musical tradition. Guests stay a minimum of one week, Saturday to Saturday.

We arrived at Quisisana last summer on a balmy Saturday afternoon in mid-August, established ourselves in our cabin, Mazurka II (all have musical names), and plunged into the cool refreshing waters of the lake. Later, we sat on our porch looking across the water at New Hampshire's Presidential Range to the west, where the highest

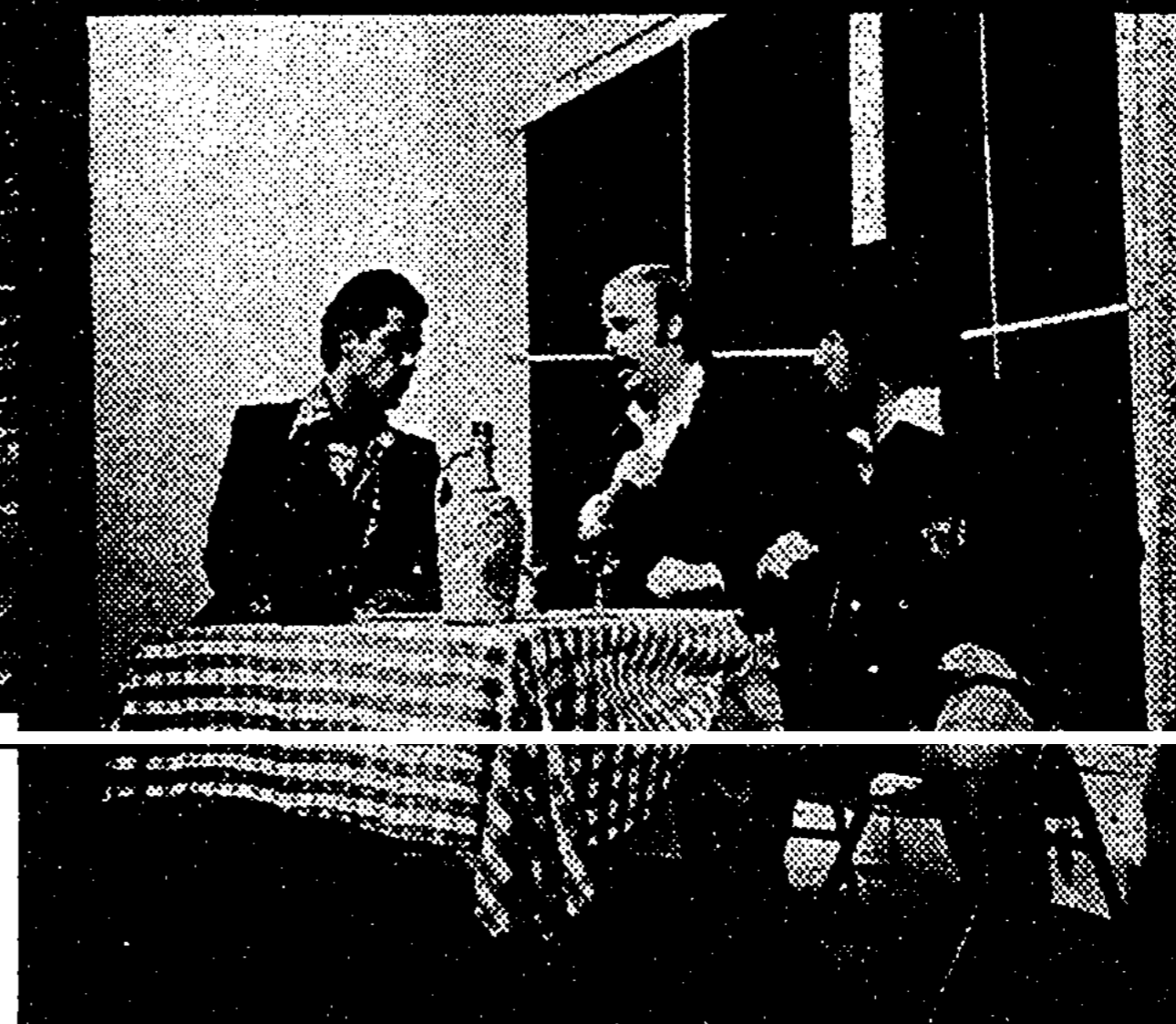
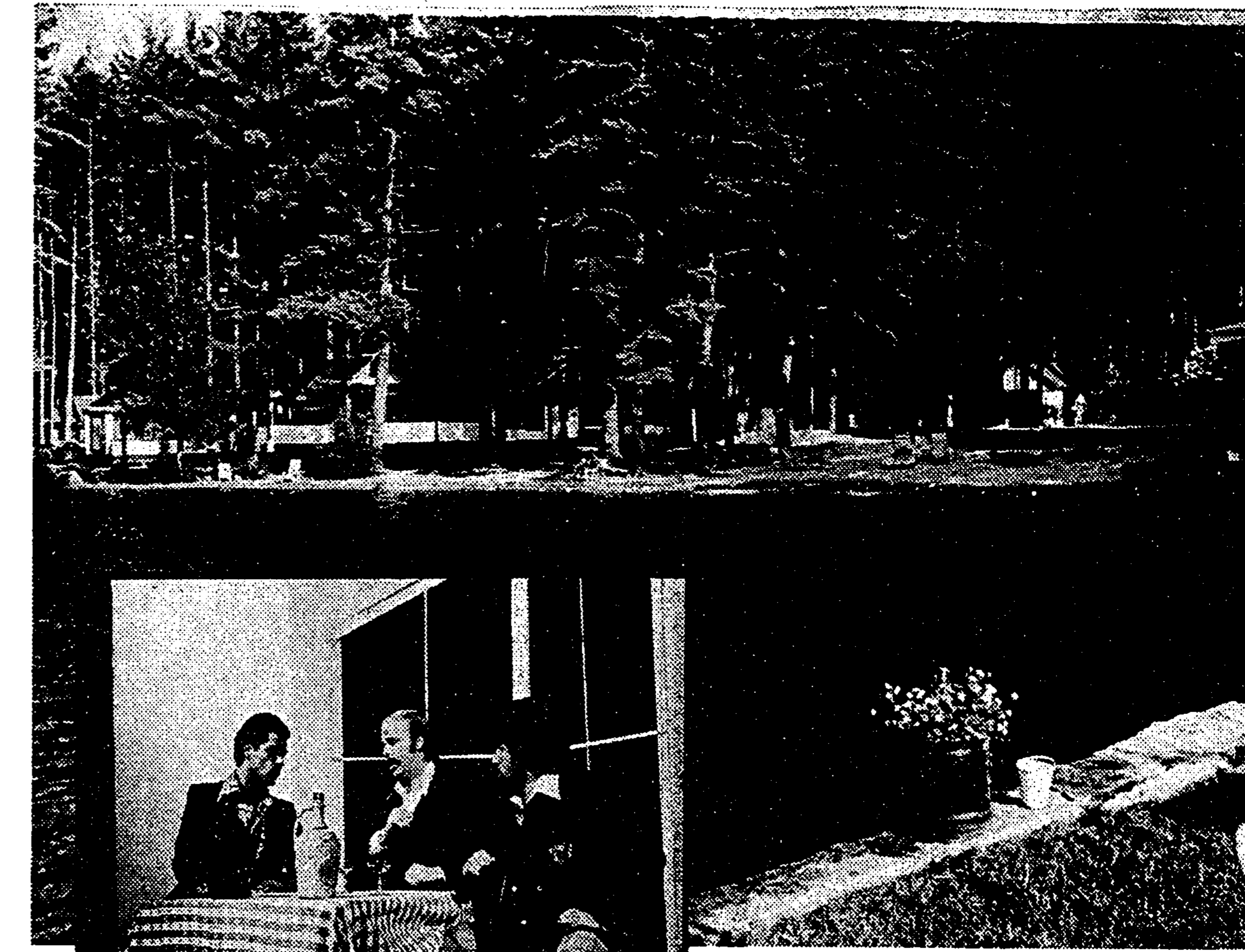
peak was wreathed in a nimbus. We mixed a drink from our own supplies and started to unwind. (The camp serves only wine and beer, but cabins are equipped with refrigerators or ice chests for setups.)

We ate at individual tables in the big pine-walled dining room, noisy with the clatter of hungry guests. Saturday night dinner offered melon with prosciutto, onion soup gratinée, broiled sirloin or seafood casserole au gratin, baked or home-fried potatoes, fresh asparagus hollandaise, salad with a choice of dressing, fresh Maine blueberry pie à la mode and an array of other desserts. Our young waitress with long blond hair introduced herself as Amelia. I tried a small musical query on her: "Amelia as in Menotti's 'Amelia Goes to the Ball?'" "Yes," she said, quickly topping me, "and Amelia as in Verdi's 'Un Ballo in Maschera.'"

The daily menu is as bountiful as the music. For lunch, there may be a choice of broiled chopped sirloin and cheese blintzes with blueberries and sour cream. For dinner, crisp roast duckling bigarade may compete with broiled fresh salmon with dill butter. For dessert, the options run to pineapple chiffon pie, strawberry shortcake, hot-fudge sundae and watermelon.

"Our Famous Smorgasbord" on Sunday nights comes off as a major production, with seven kinds of salad, corned beef, ham, turkey, roast beef, whole cold lobster mayonnaise (the camp orders 225 lobsters a week), cold salmon, cold shrimp, hot deviled shrimp, beef curry with chutney and coconut, caviar aspic mold with crabmeat and so on, inexorably, down to a dozen varieties of French pastry.

After dinner the first night we wandered down to the semi-circular lakefront Music Hall where "A Musical Welcome" was billed, as always on



"Bohème" excerpts enliven Quisisana's Opera Night.

Photographs by James Egan

Saturday nights, to introduce the staff to the new week's guests. Music director Tom Johns, a bearded young master of ceremonies who doubled by day as speed-boat driver and water-ski instructor, presented a cast of 11 youthful vocalists. They did a sampling of forthcoming concert numbers for the week, ranging from the first-act tenor aria from "La Bohème" to the boy-and-girl duet "Hey There" from "The Pajama Game." After the concert, just in case hunger pangs were gnawing at 11 P.M., the guests filed out past a table spread with homemade cookies, cake, milk, coffee and tea.

On Sunday night Steve Goetz, who had studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music and at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, gave a piano recital that included works by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. And during the week came Opera Night, with excerpts from "Cosi fan tutte" and "La Bohème;" Showcase Night, with a pastiche of numbers running from show tunes to Brazilian folksongs; Cabaret Night, with a four-piece combo and fairly intricate choreography on the part of performers and guests, and Concert Night, the final night with a dozen stars performing and the entire audience singing the Brahms "Lullaby," a Quisisana tradition.

The musical spirit tends to permeate the camp. It's not unusual to hear, on an otherwise quiet afternoon, a mezzo-soprano practicing scales on a point of land that thrusts out into the lake. And in the dining room "Happy Birthday to You," sung by eight soprano waitresses, comes off like "The Ride of the Valkyries."

There are some nonmusical activities as well. Guests compete for tennis courts, and sometimes even get on. Last year there were only two clay courts, and some wily players sent a small boy to sign up the night before as soon as the schedule was posted. This year a third court has been built, which may relieve the crush. There is also a sporty, well-kept, nine-hole

golf course three miles away, the Lake Kezar Country Club, with electric carts and caddies (greens fee \$4).

Farrington's, where we stayed the summer before last, did better by its tennis courts: three courts for little more than half as many guests as at Quisisana. The food was not quite so lavish, but it was substantial and good: steak Saturday night, prime ribs Tuesday, lobster Thursday, buffet every Sunday. A smaller dining room and fewer guests keep the decibel level down. Lunch is served outdoors, barbecue style, by the shore of the lake.

Director David Klingenstein, an old Maine hand at camping, conducts all-day canoe trips from Farrington's, an activity Quisisana doesn't offer. During our stay at Farrington's, a group of middle-aged adventurers idled downstream in canoes for about eight miles along the Saco River, an easy paddle through virtually uninhabited territory, then stopped for a swim on a sandy point and tore into grilled hamburgers and roasted fresh corn. Both my wife and I recalled having made the same canoe trip as 12-year-olds in nearby Maine children's camps; either the paddles were longer then or our arms were shorter.

In fact, one of the great pleasures of our stays at Lake Kezar is the sense of the past recaptured. There are some things you can't retrieve from your youth and some you can. The excitement of entering the Maine woods, the brisk morning air, the softness of lake water, the piney smell and slippery needles on a trail, the whisper of trees at night—they're all still there. And when you're plunked down in the middle of it, you get that same 12-year-old feeling.

One day last summer we made an assault from Quisisana on Mount Sabattus, a modest mountain only 1,800 feet high, the base about five minutes' drive from the camp. We started up a gentle rise through a forest of pines, following a marked trail. A chipmunk scampered down a pine

tree and across the path ahead. Fat toadstools—white, beige or brilliant orange—clustered at the bases of trees. Here and there grew lady slippers, jack-in-the-pulpit, Indian pies. One whole section of forest was carpeted with ferns.

As the trail became steeper, we leaned forward into the rise, scrambling over fallen logs. The forest was mysterious with dappled light and shadow and silence. After about half an hour, we came out at the top, where a granite ledge juts above a sheer drop. The view spread itself below—all of Lake Kezar and receding levels of the Presidential Range in the distance. It was, as my wife put it, liberating to the soul.

Another day we took off in a small outboard boat to tour the lake. Putting south, we reached the narrows, an estuary that connects the main body of water with the lower bay. Along it lie several small private bungalows with porches and docks. The owners watch the boats go by as the passengers watch the owners, with an occasional indolent wave of the hand.

Almost swamped by a speeding twin motor hydroplane, we stopped at the Kezar Lake Marina, which rents and repairs boats, to borrow a can for sailing. On our return, the late-afternoon sun made a golden path on the water, splintered by a single canoe in silhouette. We arrived back at camp about 5:30, cramped by our positions in the boat, dazed with sun and ready for a dip.

So our week at Quisisana last summer passed in a round of enormous meals, prodigal music and nonstop nature worship. Before we departed Saturday morning we said goodbye to our waitress, Amelia, a pupil of Eileen Farrell in the School of Music at Indiana University. "I haven't decided yet whether I'm a lyric or coloratura soprano," said Amelia, "but my dream is to be a musical star. Come back again and catch my next performance."

We'll be in Mazurka II later this month.