

GLAMPING • SIMON PEGG • SUMMER IN MAINE



This magazine  
has been  
treated with an  
antimicrobial  
process

# Hemispheres

JULY 2023

THREE  
PERFECT  
DAYS

# Melbourne

Where you  
can admire  
the city skyline  
from the  
St. Kilda Pier

STAR ALLIANCE



UNITED





A photograph of three people diving into a lake. The person at the top is in mid-air, diving headfirst. The person in the middle is also diving, slightly behind the first. The person at the bottom is already in the water, creating a splash. The background features a dense forest of green trees and a range of blue mountains under a cloudy sky. A small wooden dock is visible on the left side of the frame.

# Generations

In search of a connection with the past, a writer brings her family to a Maine resort where her late father summered

By Hannah Selinger

Matt Cosby (both images)









**N**athalie Orans opens a cardboard box. Inside it is my heritage.

It's my second day at Quisisana Resort, a legacy property owned by Orans and her husband, Sam, on the shore of Kezar Lake in Center Lovell, Maine. I have come here not entirely by accident. When an invite to visit the property as a journalist came across my desk last winter, a bell rang: I knew about Quisisana because it was a place my father had stayed on a pair of summer vacations. I said yes without hesitation. Sometimes, a trip calls because the story has already written you into it.

My father has been gone for 11 years, but he has also already been written into this story—by hand, no less. A resolutely analog place, Quisisana keeps its records of past guests in ledgers and boxes of index cards. From one of these boxes, Nathalie plucks a card, which reads:

*Selinger, Neil (w/Rima Grad)  
Villa Lane  
Larchmont, NY  
914-833-2432  
7/8–7/15/95, Impromptu, 1, 2*

The simple entry takes me back to 1995. I was just shy of 15 years old, about to enter my sophomore year of high school, spending my summer at Camp Kippewa for Girls, 65 miles east of here, for the last time. That same July, my 41-year-old father, Neil, came here for a week with my stepmother and my sisters, 2-year-old Julia and 5-year-old Emily. At the end of the week, on their way back to Westchester County, they snaked over to my camp, on the shore of Lake Cobosseecontee, bringing me culinary contraband: Twizzlers and Pepsi, Skittles and Doritos. I hid these under my camp-issued mattress like a thief in the night.

Now, 27 years later, at age 41, I'm at the beginning of a week at Quisisana, and I've brought along my husband and our two small boys. (The last line of our index card reads 7/2–7/9/22, *Maestro*, our dates of stay and cabin name.) My father came here for the tall pines and foggy Maine mornings, where the mist sits on the lake so thick that you can't help but wonder where sky ends and water begins, and I find myself bewitched by the same tall pines, glassy lake, and sleepy atmosphere that drew him. He loved nature, and especially summer camps, a sentiment he passed along to me. I think if he could have frozen time, he would have pinpointed his boyhood days at Camp Northwood in the Adirondacks. His brief visits to Quisisana as an adult—not to mention watching me ship off to Kippewa—were a way to try to recapture that feeling, however fleetingly.

**Above:**  
sailboats and  
kayaks on  
Kezar Lake, at  
Quisisana Resort

Matt Cosby





I'm thinking about all of these connections and parallels, in part, because this week marks the anniversary of my father's death. This story may have started as a press trip for a travel writer, but to me it's so much more. I've come to Maine to retrace my father's steps, to try to recreate a week he spent here at the same age I am now, and, perhaps, to find some measure of healing. After all, Quisisana, translated from the Italian *qui si sana*, roughly means "here we heal."

**T** rue story: Neil Lewis Selinger never learned to ride a bike. He was also less than 6 feet tall, but don't let either of those facts fool you; my father was a heroic athlete. He was a fast runner, an excellent basketball player. He could kick off a diving board

***"My father came here for the tall pines and foggy Maine mornings, where the mist sits on the lake so thick that you can't help but wonder where sky ends and water begins."***

into a jackknife—up, touch the toes, back down into the water like a silver blade.

My father was born into a complicated family. His grandmother had escaped Russia sometime around the fall of the czar, arriving in the U.S. with her parents and siblings. The New Jersey ranch (a former poultry farm) where they settled housed a jumble of relatives who were falling all over each other all the time. It was messy and big, orange shag carpeting and a Venetian mural painted on the wall of a formal living room, ersatz statues perched in corners, too many people and not enough listening. The family ran a beach sundries business out of the house, and as a child my father often felt forgotten amid the commercial and domestic

*mishegoss* (Yiddish for "chaos"). Many times, he told me the story of getting lost for hours on a cruise ship while on a family vacation, only to return to relatives who had not even noticed his absence.

In nature, though, he was able to shed that boisterous immigrant household and embrace his athletic side. He got his first taste of freedom at Camp Northwood, in the summer of 1964. He was not quite 11. I can picture him experiencing the sweet release of the woods, feeling as if he were coming up for air.

My childhood was also difficult. There was a divorce, travel between multiple states. I felt uprooted. When I came to Maine and Camp Kippewa for my first full summer away from home, at age 12, I found a sense of permanence, of quiet. There was solace in camp—my father and I both experienced this—and though you can never really return to your early camp years, Quisisana was a place where he, then, and I, now, could attempt to rediscover some of that magic.

**Above:**  
Adirondack  
chairs and a  
cabin with a view  
of the lake at  
Quisisana

Matt Cosby



I'm hardly the only one attracted to Quisisana by a familial bond. Nathalie Orans estimates that about 20 percent of the guests here are staying with large, extended families, two and three generations sharing meals in the dining room.

"There's a couple of families that have been coming maybe 30-plus years, and all the family members now know other families who have been coming so long," says Colin Sullivan, one of the two dining room servers the property assigns to us for our week-long stay. "It really does have a rich, familial draw to it."

Of course, the resort itself is a family business, and has been so for decades. "We had been guests since I was 3 years old, since 1971," Sam Orans recalls, "and it sounded like it was going to be sold to someone who was going to develop it into condominiums." In 1984, Sam's mother, Jane Orans, along with a partner who was later bought out, purchased the property, which dates as far back as 1907 and had long been owned by musicians and music appreciators. Sam and Nathalie became the sole owners after Jane's death, in 2020. "She ran it because she loved having all these people living together in a community, singing songs," Sam says of his mother. "She called it a camp for adults."



Not only for adults, though. During our stay, my husband and I play Skee-Ball with our children in the game room, and our whole family attends fine performances of *Shrek The Musical* and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. In the tradition of resorts throughout the Northeast, the hospitality staffers also provide the nightly entertainment. Colin Sullivan, for instance, holds a BFA in musical theater from the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point; when he's not entertaining us at mealtimes, he's playing Lord Farquaad, the diminutive villain of *Shrek*, at the resort's outdoor theater. (He performs the role on his knees).

One bright day, my 5-year-old son, Nathaniel, decides he wants to water ski, and I am transported back to

**From above:**  
Quisisana Resort owners Sam and Nathalie Orans; a fish dish from the property's dining room

long-ago days on a similar lake: the brisk cut of air off the water, the spray from the wake, the split-second question as to whether you'll rise or fall with the boat. I also think of my father, who loved to water

ski—the performance of it, the athleticism, the competition against oneself.

Out on the water, my son holds the bar back and keeps his elbows straight. He's up for just a millisecond before the physics of it confound him, and then he's down, with a mouthful of lake. Like my father, though, he's resilient—right back up for another try. I can sense a friendly specter shadowing us as we go. When it's my turn, I find that I still remember how to be weightless in water. I'm up, gliding through space the way I used to at Kippewa, the way





my father, I imagine, did both at Northwood and here.

I'm left to use my imagination because I didn't join my father the second time he came to Quisisana, either. In 2001 I was a 21-year-old college student, working a summer internship in Manhattan. My father was still sanguine and healthy then; he was also, I now know, living life through an hourglass. Eight years later, he would be diagnosed with ALS. He walked first with a cane and then with a walker, before an automated wheelchair became the framework for his body.

He did not come back to Maine in those final summers of his life. He could not dive or body surf or shoot a three-pointer. Even if he had wanted to learn to ride a bike then, at age 55, it was too late. During this week, I find myself contemplating the gentle passing of time in my own middle-aged muscles and bones, and how for him middle age turned so quickly into something insidious.

***"I can almost see my father's outline in the hazy light, sitting in a rocking chair on the screen porch."***

The cruelty of his too-young death, at 57, makes me want to soak up these last moments more completely, to take from them what he would have. On the hottest day of the week, I forgo lunch in the dining room and eat a lobster and shrimp roll at the casual outdoor café. In the melting afternoon,

I swim out to a raft and, from there, dive into the black center of the lake. I can't even pretend to fake my father's perfect jack-knife, though; that's one trick I'll never be able to replicate.

Near the end of our time at Quisisana, I watch my kids pick just-ripening blueberries at the neck of a trailhead. It makes me think of the blackberry bramble my father and I used to walk through each summer in Putnam County, New York: our stained fingers, the pricklers putting up their fight, the delight at finding berries stashed in the overgrowth. My boys, it occurs to me, now

know that joy, too—the thrill of hunting for a thing in nature, the tenderness between earth and person, parent and child. That, I realize, is something we can take with us when we return home.

Later, in the purpling evening, I walk past Impromptu, the cabin my father stayed in when he first visited Quisisana. I can almost see his outline in the hazy light, sitting in a rocking chair on the screen porch, reading, closing his eyes, falling asleep, starting awake. How many times did he produce a pack of cards on a thick summer evening like this one, to show off his prowess at a game of hearts? He hated to lose, and he taught me to play cards—and to be thankful for the lack of television in places like this, where nature, books, and people make for the best entertainment.

I may never have been to Quisisana with my father, but in this stay I feel the layering of our experiences: his old camp days and mine, his 40s and mine. It's a game of Tetris, a fitting together of the pieces of our lives. I don't believe in ghosts, but it's not hard to sense the presence of the people who have trod before you, and to feel that someday other people—your children, perhaps—will walk in your steps.

**Above:** resort staffers put on a theatrical performance for guests

Matt Cosby