

I KNEW THIS PLACE

A Personal Recollection
of the Early Years of the
MAINE COAST SEMESTER

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Maine Coast Semester Director
1988-2004



I KNEW THIS PLACE

I knew this place, I knew it well
Every sound and every smell
Every time I walked I fell
For the first two years or so
There across the grassy yard
I a young one runnin' hard
Brown and bruised and battle-scarred
And lost in sweet illusion.

And I remember every word
From every voice I ever heard
Every frog and every bird
Yes, this is where it starts
A brother's laugh, the sighing wind
This is where my life begins
This is where I learned to use
My hands and hear my heart

*Written by Maine singer-songwriter David Mallett
— Sung by the faculty to the students at graduation —*

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INTRODUCTION

It's the first day of fall, 2021. Earlier this morning, Sue West was on the phone with a student from MCS II discussing Chewonki's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fund, a very important issue for both Sue and the student. During the course of the conversation, the student mentioned testifying twice to committees of the Maine legislature during her semester concerning plastic vs. paper bags, and the plastic six-pack rings, that were ensnaring and killing seabirds at that time. Both measures passed, something the student is very proud of, as is Sue, since she orchestrated the visits and testimony.

As they talked, Sue was reminded how little of the early history of the Maine Coast Semester is currently known at Chewonki. When she retired earlier this summer, she was the last of the original MCS faculty pioneers.

The truth is that there is no one left at Chewonki to tell the stories, relay the traditions, point out what succeeded and what failed. As a former history teacher, I find this to be unfortunate. Chewonki does have organized archives, of course, but the material is not readily available in an easily discoverable, easily accessible format, and there is almost nothing about Chewonki's rich, hundred-year history on the website, much less anything about the Maine Coast Semester's history. That is why I believe that this brief history is needed.

I Knew This Place is not meant to be encyclopedic. Rather, it attempts to paint, in broad strokes, what life was like on Chewonki Neck in the mid-to-late 1980s, the 1990s, and early 2000s. Where did the idea come from? What were the challenges we faced when the program started and how did we overcome them? What was the semester like in those early years? What were the successes and failures as MCS went from its formative years to a more mature phase several years later. Which traditions remain from the early years and which ones have disappeared?

As you read, you will notice that I tend to refer to the Maine Coast Semester as a 'program.' That's how we tended to see it at the time. Yes, it had a very important academic component and we were preparing high school juniors to return to their sending schools, but it was hard to see MCS as a *school* in the traditional sense of the term. It was not until Willard Morgan took over as the second MCS director in 2004, and the 'program' became officially accredited, that his title became Head of School, and we began to refer to the Maine Coast Semester more consistently as

a school. The program really was no different than it always had been, but perhaps it was a sign of the times, a growing-up and maturing. Whether called a school or program, I suspect that the description I gave to *Independent School* magazine in 1995, would be as accurate, or at least as aspirational, today as it was then: “Through intellectual challenge, both in and out of the classroom, and through work on the farm and in the woodlot, we all grow to understand more about living and working with other people, about the satisfaction that comes from hard work, and about the importance of stewardship for the natural world.”

The Maine Coast Semester is now 68 semesters old, an amazing feat that few if any anticipated back in the fall of 1988. This recollection—imperfect as it will be—is an attempt to rediscover some of the origins of what, by any measure, has become an important part of Chewonki’s history.

I Knew This Place could not have been written without the support and close reading by people with eyes sharper than my own: Sue West, Tim Ellis, Don Hudson, Amy Rogers, David Liebmann, and my sister. I am grateful to them for being willing to read, critique, edit drafts, and add their own recollections. And Sue, in particular, I am so grateful for your careful critique.

I want to give special credit to Torrey McMillan who was an outstanding student and member of the inaugural semester. Later, she returned to work with me in the office. It was Torrey who painstakingly compiled the *Ten Year Directory*. Much of the information comes from that publication. Without it, I would never have been able to remember the details, or quote the thoughts, of so many of the participants of the time. I cannot thank her enough.

Finally, when I started writing, I didn’t give any thought to how this manuscript might be used or who might be interested in reading it. Of course, I’ll give copies to the people listed above, as well as to a few others who might be interested. I will also give a copy or two to Chewonki for its archives. Perhaps someday someone will come along who is interested in a bit of history about the first twenty years of the Maine Coast Semester, and who might wish to write about the next twenty years.

SSA

November, 2021

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* All black and white photos are from my own collection.

** The Great Blue Heron on the cover was drawn by Phineas Ewing, Don Hudson’s wife. It was used on the covers of the MCS newsletter, *Coastlines*, until the newsletter was absorbed by the *Chewonki Chronicle*.

PROLOGUE:

A MEAL

It's fall, and the food, fresh from Chewonki's Salt Marsh Farm lies steaming on the round, antique-green tables in the dining hall. About fifty teachers, students, and staff stand in groups of eight around each table. One of the students—the Plato of the day—announces where the food has come from—our own farm, or other farms and seafood distributors in Maine. The menu this evening is Chewonki lamb chops, potatoes dug weeks ago by the students and teachers, a beautiful green salad with late lettuce and tomatoes, and of course the home-baked bread that Loryn Kipp (MCS IX) is known for. And then one of the students, or maybe a teacher, begins to sing a 'grace,' and everyone joins in:

'Tis the gift to be simple
'Tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come 'round
'To where we ought to be..."

And then, the harmony—3rds, 5ths, octaves, 10ths—swells,

When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend,
We shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn 'twill be our delight
'Till be turning and turning,
We come 'round right.

The simple Shaker hymn ends, everyone sits down and begins to pass the food.

Conversation is wide-ranging and lively. By this time in the semester, students have gotten over any shyness. They know everyone who works at Chewonki, even if they're not directly a part of the Maine Coast Semester. A couple of months into the semester, the community has gelled and a few students are already secretly anticipating how hard it will be to leave in December.

At this fall meal, although still, and always, a work in progress, the community is quite strong, and this is not by accident. Everything about the Maine Coast Semester is *intentional*, designed

to encourage the building and nurturing of the small community—from the small, round tables that lead to good conversation, to the singing, to the food that is produced by the students, teachers, and the farmers working together. As the meal ends, the excess food is either brought back to the kitchen or scraped into plastic buckets to be recycled and turned into compost on the farm, and the tables are wiped down by students and teachers volunteering for the task. Some students head to the couches to play music, sing songs, play games, knit, or chat. Other students and teachers wash dishes and pots and sweep and mop the dish room. At 8:00 pm, it's time to hit the books.

Part of the community-building that is taking place this fall evening is happening through the



simple fact of doing good work together with other students and teachers; it's also happening because of the regularity of actions that by this time are anticipated. Everything seems to work seamlessly, with simplicity and purpose. In so many ways, mealtimes define the Maine Coast Semester experience.

CHAPTER 1: BEFORE THE BEGINNING

The first Maine Coast Semester students arrived on Chewonki Neck in the fall of 1988, but MCS was an idea that was years in the making and in order to understand its origin story, we really have to go back at least to the early 70s.

Clarence E. Allen, Headmaster of the Rivers School in the Boston suburbs, was founder of Camp Chewonki in 1918. He created the summer camp program, which in great part is what still exists today. In 1963, when Mr. Allen began thinking about retirement and was ultimately unable to find anyone who would both commit to continuing to run the camp and who could afford to purchase it, he formed a 501(C)3 non-profit corporation. In 1966, Tim Ellis, who had grown up at camp, and who was teaching in Vienna, Austria, at the time, was hired to be Camp Chewonki's Director and the new Chewonki Foundation's Executive Director. Allen's decision to move the private camp into non-profit status, Tim Ellis believes, was critical to the longevity of Chewonki and its ability to consider year-round programs.

Tim was the spark who lit the ideas that would culminate in the Maine Coast Semester. For years, Tim had pushed the boundaries of 'summer camping' by adding 'shoulder season' programs following summer camp such as Maine Reach, a challenging program for high school and college-aged students, Environmental Education programs for mostly elementary school groups (using an encampment model rather than the usual dormitory/dining hall model that most environmental education centers used), boat-building programs for adults, college-level semester programs for would-be outdoor leaders and environmental educators, traveling in-school nature and wildlife programs, wilderness trips for adults and families, and eventually, a series of tuition-based apprenticeships to build the winterized facilities that would become the home of the Maine Coast Semester. But this was all before that idea was even hatched.

Maine Reach, in particular, was a pioneering program. Small groups of students, ranging from high school seniors, to students taking a gap-year before college, would live for an academic year on Chewonki Neck. They explored Maine's history, culture, and environment, through the lens of environmental issues. The Maine Reach academic year was split into three general parts—the fall interdisciplinary study in which they would study a particular environmental issue

in depth, 8-week-long internships early in the new year for which the students would make their own living arrangements, and group action projects the following spring. There was a 10-day wilderness trip typically to Mt. Katahdin and Baxter State Park in the fall, followed by potato

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harvesting in Aroostook County. A winter wilderness trip usually went to Tim's family camp on Lake Umbagog, and in the spring, students would go on a 10-day canoe trip to the St. Croix region, along the New Brunswick border. In addition, students and teachers did the work needed to keep the community running, rotating jobs such as cooking and cleaning, ordering the food, working on the farm, and helping with maintenance and construction. The fall study and spring action projects, in particular, would later form the basis for the Maine Coast Semester's own Environmental Issues and Ethics course. If Maine Reach sounds a bit like the Maine Coast Semester, that is exactly the case.

At the same time that these programs were taking place at Chewonki, other programs were taking shape around the country. Sea Semester was already a well-established program as was the Audubon Expedition Institute. For high school students, there were a number of semester options in addition to programs like School Year Abroad, Outward Bound, and the National Outdoor Leadership School. In 1986, a semester program for high school sophomores based in Switzerland was founded. And in 1984, Milton Academy launched a new program—the Mountain School—in Vershire, VT. This would become the closest model to what four years later became the Maine Coast Semester.

Tim was well-aware of all of these programs, having visited many of them, and having served as an advisor to a number of them, including the Mountain School. In the meantime, a number of things were happening on Chewonki Neck. The Maine Reach program had ended after ten years because of declining enrollment, and Tim had begun to believe that Chewonki needed to develop another school year academic program to replace it. Interestingly, Don Hudson, who would develop MCS's Natural Science course and eventually become Chewonki Foundation's President, taught at Maine Reach in its early days, and Sue had been a Maine Reach faculty member in its final year.

Several years before the Maine Coast Semester was developed, a capital fund drive was launched to provide expanded winter facilities. Typically, the new building program would enroll 'students' who would work under a master, gain experience and skills, and importantly would pay a tuition that would help to pay the master builder's salary. This was the same model used by Chewonki's earlier boatbuilding program. Paul Arthur, later to join the Maine Coast Semester as an English teacher, was one of those building construction students.

In some ways, the most important factor in propelling the idea of a semester school at Chewonki may have been the stunning success of the Mountain School. Almost immediately after opening

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its doors, the numbers of students applying for admission grew to be more than it could handle. Its directors, David and Nancy Grant, began to encourage Chewonki to start a similar school, not just because it was a powerful idea, but frankly to relieve some of the admissions pressure.



CHAPTER 2: ABOUT SEMESTER SCHOOLS

The idea that students could take a period of time away from their schools and colleges, although not common, was an established one. School Year Abroad, for instance, allowed students to spend a semester or a year in a foreign country to learn the language and culture. Other programs allowed students to apprentice themselves in order to learn new skills. Sea Semester and NOLS offered challenges on the sea or in the wild. But the idea of taking high school juniors, in what was traditionally understood to be the most important year of high school in terms of college preparation and future admission, was unusual. Could 11th grade students keep up academically or would they fall woefully behind? Being away from their parents, would students be mature enough to handle the responsibilities of group living and the new and challenging situations they would find themselves in? Would private schools allow their students to attend? And if students were on financial aid at independent schools, how would it work? Would private school students be forced to pay two tuitions? Ultimately, the experience of the Mountain School, the work of its directors, David and Nancy Grant, with the support of Milton's Headmaster, Jerry Pieh, helped to answer all of these questions.

So, although it was perhaps counterintuitive to think that students could take half of the junior year away, it turned out that it was the perfect time in their secondary-level academic career to do so. We learned that they were in fact mature enough to be granted some true independence; they were academically capable of handling high-level work; they were curious and hungry for new experiences; they were thirsty for true responsibility. Over time, semester schools proved that with rigorous academic programs and gifted teachers, students did not fall behind academically. On the contrary, it was often found that they surged ahead. The fact that there are now dozens of semester programs in the U.S. and other countries, with more being considered, is testament to the power of the idea.

At the heart of all of all these programs is a strong *sense of place*: the coast of Maine, the hills of Vermont, the Colorado Rockies, the Bahamas, the North Carolina Appalachians, New York City, Washington, DC, or the Napa Valley. Curriculum is always strongly based on this sense of place. Although I believe that semester schools do not necessarily need to be residential, they do need to be place-based (The Burlington, VT, City and Lake Semester, founded and run by former MCS faculty member, Andy Barker, is a successful example). The fact that all these programs exist in beautiful, interesting, and stimulating locations, serves to unify and focus the curriculum and helps, of course, to attract prospective students.

All of these programs are also small, thus allowing the development of powerful social communities. Further, strong academic programs are a critical part of the equation. Programs may differ as to the specific details of the curricula, some offering more courses that meet the academic needs of the sending schools, some offering fewer, but all insist on rigor and on classwork that is challenging, interdisciplinary, and often experiential or hands-on. Students who attend semester programs seem to mature, not just as individuals, but also in terms of academics, because the small communities, the purposeful work, and the place-based learning, all serve to focus the mind, and instill responsibility and discipline. Later, we would find that when MCS participants returned to their schools, they were often ahead of their peers academically. Additionally, we found that their grades were often lower than what they were accustomed to, while at MCS, the result of different academic standards and little opportunity for grade inflation, that dip didn't last once they returned home, and colleges seemed to understand the reason for this when evaluating their applications.

Finally, most of the programs feature physical work to balance the work of the classroom. The Maine Coast Semester and the Mountain School, for instance, have strong work programs, with students doing everything from maintenance and cleaning, to new construction and farm work. And this work is done alongside faculty members, leading to better student-teacher relationships. When students and teachers dig potatoes, mop a floor, or muck a stall—together—a better relationship between them is the result, which in turn develops into a more effective and enjoyable classroom experience. It is the combination of physical work, challenging academics, small communities, genuine responsibility, and the emphasis on place, in combination with students who are mature enough to leave the familiar behind for a period of time that, together, make semester programs so successful and powerful.

Perhaps the following description by a former MCS II student, Kirsten George, although specifically describing her experience at Chewonki, can also serve as a general description for all semester schools:

Coming from a bland...public school, into a small community of curious peers and inspiring mentors was more than culture shock. My notions of 'school' and 'learning' were blown open. Biology [Natural Science] class convened on a barnacle covered...rock in the intertidal zone. Trigonometry equations fresh from the morning's lesson were applied in the wood shop to construct curved benches in the afternoon. The discussion on Thoreau's definition of 'wilderness' walked out of the

English classroom, across the pasture and into the milking stall. Compassionate advice from a dear friend who happened to be my art teacher helped me through a period of internal struggle. Shock at the reality of the solid waste crisis empowered me to testify before a legislative committee when Maine was drafting its recycling bill. For the first time in my life, I could see the relevance of everything I learned in the classroom...The experience of living in a dynamic...community beside a farm and managed forest provided fertile ground for hundreds of realizations about the interrelationships of all things. My 16 year old worldview was turned upside-down, and I began to reevaluate my life ambitions. *(From the Maine Coast Semester Ten Year Directory)*



CHAPTER 3: CHEWONKI TAKES THE FIRST STEPS

From 1979-1984, I was co-director of the Environmental Education programs and served as Tim's assistant director, primarily doing admissions for all Chewonki programs. Sue had started in 1979 as a fellow environmental educator, and had then served in a number of other capacities. In 1984, after several years of taking on more and more administrative work at Chewonki, I began looking for other challenges and was especially keen to return to a more traditional school community. And for Sue, the opportunities at Chewonki were more limited after Maine Reach ended.

So, in 1986, Sue and I had moved to Massachusetts, to the Stoneleigh-Burnham School, a girls boarding school in Greenfield, where I taught anthropology and Native American history and culture, and was dean of students, and Sue ran its outdoor skills program and taught art at Eaglebrook School just down the road in Deerfield. We found we both enjoyed living in the dorms, the contact with older students, the teaching, and the collegiality of the faculty. I especially enjoyed the complete experience boarding school offered: the theater and music programs, the sports teams and clubs. However, we missed Chewonki, and especially Maine, to the extent that we purchased a piece of property in Phippsburg on which to build a possible future summer home.

That spring, I received a call from Tim telling me about plans for a semester school. The idea had already been developed at a staff retreat, and shortly thereafter was approved by the Board of Trustees. At the same time, the new natural history center, a year-round dining hall, and a renovated Farmhouse, were coming along. Would I be interested in returning to run it, Tim asked?

The idea was intriguing, but also daunting. We were happy at Stoneleigh-Burnham. Were we ready to disrupt our lives and move back? I wasn't quite sure. After chatting with Tim—who was always very persuasive!—I agreed to at least consider it, and the first part of the process would be a visit to the Mountain School and then a more formal sit-down with Tim. At this point, we were in an exploratory phase; an offer was not yet on the table.

Shortly thereafter, Sue and I headed up to Vermont to meet David and Nancy Grant and visit the Mountain School. Anyone who first sees the school cannot help but be impressed. This is how

David put it when he first visited the old Mountain School before it was purchased by Milton:

We stood on the hill in the center of the 300-acre campus and saw the evidence of a remarkable educational opportunity. The huge school garden stretched before us and sloped down to the field where a few sheep and cows grazed beside the barn. At the end of the field, we could look down on the buildings of the school...Beyond the campus stretched Vermont and New Hampshire, the peaks of the White Mountains visible in the east. We were struck both by the fact that the Mountain School students lived and worked close to the natural world and by our own sense that to appreciate this work and one's part in it is educational in some fundamental way.

(from the Mountain School website)

Both David and Nancy were very welcoming. Sue and I sat in on classes, toured the buildings and grounds, participated in work program, and went to a faculty meeting followed by a social hour. We sat with students and asked lots of questions about the experience they were having. They were enthralled by the Mountain School and very much wanted to see other students get to have similar experiences. The vision that David and Nancy imparted was powerful.

Since I was responsible for discipline at Stoneleigh-Burnham, and had wrestled with more than a few incidents, I asked David if that was ever a problem. David said no; the students completely embraced the ideals of the program and were mature enough to abide by the rules. I was reassured by his answer, though in hindsight, I was a bit naive, or perhaps just dazzled by this little educational utopia in the hills of Vermont.

Chewonki's Maine Reach had always seemed a bit wild and woolly to me; by comparison, the Mountain School was more traditional and organized, but at the same time, both programs were extraordinarily vibrant and exciting. In so many ways the two programs were of a piece. Both enjoyed stunning locations, both used physical work joyfully and proudly, both had a tradition of exploring the natural world, both embraced small, intimate communities.

There were obvious differences as well, the most important of which was the Mountain School's academic program. Although Maine Reach's fall study was powerful, Chewonki didn't have deep experience offering the courses that would be necessary: mathematics, foreign languages, U.S. history, and perhaps chemistry and physics. On the other hand, as powerful as the Mountain School community was, Chewonki, especially during summer camp, was far more experienced in "building community," as Tim would put it. In addition, while the Mountain School had the beautiful Vermont hills, Chewonki had the saltwater environment and the

equipment and expertise to explore the woods and waters in Maine and beyond. The Mountain School was situated on a lovely, large working farm and sugarbush, which served as the centerpiece for the work program, while it was a stretch at the time to even call Chewonki's 'farm' a farm, except historically. Finally, because TMS was owned and backed by Milton Academy, it had access to, and the trust of independent schools, that Chewonki did not yet enjoy.

A few other differences were also crucial when envisioning a similar program at Chewonki. At the Mountain School, students lived in traditional dorms with faculty apartments attached, as is the case in any private boarding school. This is one reason David told me that discipline wasn't ever a problem; the housemaster lived right there with the students. In addition, the Mountain School hired boarding school teachers almost exclusively, teachers who loved dormitory life. Chewonki, on the other hand, had no such living quarters. Students would have to live in cabins, and although Tim liked the notion that faculty would also live in the cabins, and in fact broached the idea with Sue and me, this would prove to be unrealistic.

Another important concern also cropped up: Would the Chewonki community of seasonal environmental educators, traveling natural history educators, and others be willing to embrace a new group of perhaps 40 or so people that would inevitably become the centerpiece of a brand new community? When I first arrived at Chewonki in 1978 as an environmental educator, Maine Reach was the center of the community. When not on program, we were expected to eat with the Maine Reach community, to cook, and to participate in various work days. After five days in the woods with our small groups of young fifth or sixth graders, EE instructors were exhausted, needing to clean-up, recoup, write comments, pack food for the next week, and get ready for the next group. Being part of a larger community was hard, and I could anticipate that the fit of a brand new, even larger program, might not be smooth or easy. For the occasion of the Maine Coast Semester's ten year anniversary, Tim, wrote the following:

The late 80s were a time of consolidation and focus. The Maine Coast Semester brought together much of what we had learned. The creation of MCS was a collaborative process, [which included] many staff and others from outside. The decision to start MCS was not an easy one...And there were legitimate concerns among some staff and board members about space and the impact that a new program would have, but the decision to proceed full speed ahead was the right one as the last 10 years have proved over and over again...

(from the Maine Coast Semester Ten Year Reunion publication)

In the end, did I want to throw myself into what would be a very challenging, albeit exciting, new venture? And did Sue want to move back to Maine, where she would not even have a job until the program started a year later? It was a huge decision—and officially I hadn't even been offered the position.



CHAPTER 4: THE MAINE COAST SEMESTER IS HATCHED

By the time the visit to the Mountain School was over, Sue and I were leaning in the direction of accepting the challenge if offered. The next step would be to head to Chewonki to meet with Tim. I don't remember exactly when Tim and I sat down in his office in the northeast corner of the Farmhouse, but it must have been the spring of 1987. What I do remember is a wide-ranging discussion about the new program during the course of which we began thinking about what to call this new venture. After batting around a few ideas, I believe I just said, "Why not call it the Maine Coast Semester?" It seemed so obvious at the time that it was an amazingly brief discussion. Tim and I also talked about 'sending schools,' which he had already done some work on, and we discussed the things we would need to accomplish during the ramp-up year. We were already anticipating welcoming the first students in the fall of 1988.

I left that day thinking that if Tim offered me the job, I would probably accept, and shortly after I returned to Greenfield, I received a formal letter from him in which he started off by saying: "Let's stop beating around the bush..." and ended up with an offer (a couple thousand dollars less than I was currently earning!). Things were a bit less formal in those days, really just a simple ask and answer, a handshake, followed by a short, typed contract. Shortly after receiving the letter and writing back to accept the position, I gave notice to my headmaster and went on to have a really wonderful final semester at Stoneleigh-Burnham.

As soon as camp ended in August, Sue and I returned to Maine, and for a number of weeks, moved into what would eventually become the history classroom in the Clarence E. Allen Natural History Center. Camp director Dick Thomas was living across the hall in what was designed as an apartment. In the spring, Sue and I would eventually move across the hall into that apartment when Dick moved off campus. Downstairs, in the basement, Don Hudson, Chewonki's Head Naturalist, had an office adjacent to the science lab, where what we called at the time 'Outreach' (now the Traveling Natural History Program) was located. While I got started putting together MCS, Sue found a job teaching middle school art in Winslow, with the long daily commute that entailed.

At about that time, the Farmhouse renovation was completed and I eventually moved into what is still the head of school's office. At that time, all staff offices were located in the Farmhouse. In our time away in Massachusetts, great strides had been made in terms of facilities, including the

building of the Allen Center, which included two (eventual) classrooms, a faculty/staff apartment, the Roger Tory Peterson Library, the Ellis room (named after Hardy Ellis, Tim's father), a two-story greenhouse, an art room, science lab and office, bathrooms and showers, and one other small room which housed the kiln and pottery, but which is now the dean of students office. The present-day pottery room was a porch that was enclosed and winterized during the first year of MCS. Given that the building was designed without a specific program in mind, the Allen Center has served Chewonki remarkably well.

The dining room and kitchen had been renovated, winterized, and renamed the Wallace Center in honor of long-time Chewonki supporter and former camper, George Wallace, with the addition of what we called the Social Room, which faced the quad. The kitchen was in the north end of the building. The mailboxes and 'Flintstone' couches and armchairs were approximately where the tables closest to the kitchen are located today. The barn, by the way, was located about where the food counter is now. It would be moved east at a later date in order to make room for the present-day kitchen. When we had meetings in the early years, gathered around the Flintstones, if a barn climb was in progress, it could be quite noisy as EE campers climbed the walls using ropes. Downstairs were bathrooms and living quarters, the wood furnace (affectionately known as the "DuMonster" for the flames that would leap up when it was opened-up for stoking), and the laundry room. Interestingly, when the Barn was finally jacked-up and moved several years later by a professional crew, I was amazed to see that they actually used Crisco to grease the skids and slide it east about 44 feet.

Space would be tight, but adequate for the new program. However, living quarters for students were especially tight. Two wood-heated cabins, Binnacle and Ranch House, had been previously insulated (sort of...) by Maine Reach students years before, but that was it. Clearly, this was something we would have to work on. The real crunch, however, would be faculty housing, something that the entire Foundation would have to wrestle with for many years.

As the fall began, the list of tasks mounted: create a budget, plan a trip to recruit sending schools, develop curricula, design the first view book, hire the first faculty members, and recruit the first two semesters' students.

CHAPTER 5: ON THE ROAD

That fall, Tim and I hopped in the old Honda Civic and headed off to visit schools. One of the concepts that the Mountain School pioneered was the ‘member school’—the idea that schools would form a contractual relationship with the host semester program. We planned to do the same. In exchange for saving spaces for a set number of the school’s eleventh graders (usually two per semester), we would be invited to visit the school and present the program to tenth grade classes. In addition, the school would agree not to charge tuition during the student’s absence, would allow the student to return in good standing, would accept the MCS transcript, and perhaps most important, would allow students receiving scholarships to ‘bring’ that financial aid with them. This would allow the Maine Coast Semester to use its own financial aid resources for students from non-member schools, mostly public schools, particularly for students from rural Maine. It was an important philosophical belief that the Maine Coast Semester be as diverse as possible. In the early years, though, student diversity was mostly regional, social, and economic.

In terms of racial and ethnic diversity, Chewonki has come a long way since 1988. For years, Tim had worked hard to bring kids of color to camp by working with various agencies in Boston and New York, and of course MCS welcomed any student who wished to attend, but we found it difficult to attract certain populations to a rustic, work-based farm program in the wilds of Maine. With few exceptions, students of color who did apply tended to come from boarding schools rather than from public schools. As I look back on it now, we did not always serve these students very well by understanding and responding to their particular needs. However, in the past few years, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has become a real commitment on the part of Chewonki Foundation and the Maine Coast Semester.

The idea of member schools served MCS well in the beginning; however, there were problems with it eventually. Although the single-time \$6000 membership fee was relatively inexpensive in the grand scheme, it was usually negotiated with the heads of schools, rather than the business managers, so issues like tuition, and especially financial aid for Chewonki-bound students, often became sore points. In some schools, heads would see MCS as a net gain for their students; business managers would see it as a net loss for their school’s budget. In addition, as school administrations changed, so did the understandings that had previously been worked out. It was not unusual to have to make individual arrangements with certain schools, which unfortunately was fundamentally unfair to other member schools.

By the time, I came on board, Tim had negotiated commitments with a number of member schools, including The Westminster Schools in Atlanta, Noble & Greenough in Dedham, MA, Shady Side Academy in Pittsburgh, Waynflete in Portland, and the Packer-Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn, NY. Many of these schools had had a previous relationship with Chewonki. One point of contrast with the Mountain School was that our member schools would be located throughout the United States rather than concentrated in large east-coast urban areas. When the Mountain School started, it had approached organizations like the independent school association of New York City (or Boston or Baltimore), so that spaces would be saved from students from a number of private schools in that area. Since the major urban independent schools were already Mountain School members, we tended to search out schools that were scattered around the country. This would prove to be a real boon for MCS. As just one example, for years we regularly received several wonderful students, and as many as 15 applications from Westminster in Atlanta (for a total of four spots). Coming from the South, the Westminster students often had a very different outlook on life, as compared to the many students who attended MCS from New York, Boston and Maine. They contributed enormously to every Maine Coast Semester community of which they were a part. Students also came regularly from Havergal College in Toronto, as well as from various schools in California, such as Midland, Crossroads, and the University School in San Francisco. By 1998, ten years after we opened, students from 147 schools, 40 states, and 6 foreign countries had attended the Maine Coast Semester.

One of our first visits was to the Taft School in Watertown, CT. The Mountain School was having difficulty even taking all the students it was obligated to accept, leaving very few spaces for students outside their membership (Taft was not a member), and headmaster Lance Odden wanted his students to be able to take advantage of the type of experience that the Maine Coast Semester was hoping to offer. Lance liked what he saw and I believe that he felt confident that we would provide a quality experience for Taft students. He very much wanted other schools to join our membership and used his influence to make that happen. He sent us immediately to Miss Porter's just down the road in Farmington, CT, and was instrumental in getting the Thacher School in Ojai, CA (with which Taft had a long and very close relationship), and eventually schools such as Deerfield (which was just about to go co-educational), Hotchkiss, Phillips Academy, and Princeton Day School. Lance even hosted a gathering for us at the Princeton Club in New York City.

Lance Odden would eventually serve on our first Board of Advisors and his encouragement was extremely valuable and very much welcomed. It was Lance who turned us away from building more traditional dormitories, such as Hilltop, toward fully embracing our small, simple, wood-heated cabins. He also gave us 'permission' to avoid teaching typical 11th grade courses like

physics and chemistry. He encouraged us to follow our own traditions and educational philosophy. “Don’t be afraid to be different,” he said.

Lance was a very progressive headmaster, but was also very much a part of the traditional independent school world. He believed that “one is known by the company he keeps.” To Lance that meant urging similar boarding schools to become associated with the Maine Coast Semester. Of course, it helped that Tim Ellis was very well known in that world, having attended the Rivers School, Bowdoin College, and Tufts, having taught in Switzerland, Austria, and at the Hyde School, and of course having had relationships with dozens and dozens of schools through Camp Chewonki and the EE programs. And in my case, Lance had known my father, who had been a fellow headmaster at the Collegiate School in New York City. I would like to think that Lance would have embraced the Maine Coast Semester no matter who Tim and I were, but frankly the connections didn’t hurt as MCS was trying to get off the ground. Thirty-five years later, this sounds elitist and a bit hard-to-swallow, but nevertheless, I believe it was a fact at that time.

By the spring of 1988, we had most of our member schools in place, though we would add a few



others in the first few years.

CHAPTER 6: GETTING READY

Back in the office, I worked on producing our first view book in black and white. The problem, of course, was that we didn't yet have students, so we ended up posing young staff members Dick Thomas, Greg Shute, and Rebecca May as 'students,' supposedly perusing books in the library, or gazing wistfully out at Montsweag Bay from The Point. It all felt a bit sketchy, but what choice did we have?

Later that fall, we began to visit schools, giving assemblies to tenth grade students. At the same time, we started to build relationships with key member school faculty who would be willing to act as "agents" for the program, doing the work of setting up assemblies and approaching students who might be interested. In day schools, such as Charlotte Country Day School and The Westminster Schools, we would often give presentations to both students and their parents. The fact that some students would be living in unsupervised, wood-heated cabins without bathrooms, raised some parental eyebrows. We hoped to have 30 students per semester.

The curriculum included the following courses:

- English: Literature and the Land
- Environmental Issues and Ethics
- The Natural History of the Maine Coast
- Art and the Natural World
- A.P. United States History
- French and Spanish, III - A.P.
- Pre-Calculus, Trigonometry, AB and BC Calculus

Students would be required to take five courses, two of which—English and Environmental Issues—were mandatory, considered to be core courses.

Many other decisions also needed to be made: finalizing the school calendar, developing admissions procedures, figuring out scholarship guidelines, tuition and billing, developing sample daily and weekly schedules, developing standards regarding curriculum such as grading and reports, and finalizing our expectations and rules.

Meanwhile, we were beginning to hire faculty. As I started to put the word out, I thought back to what had brought me to teaching in the first place. My parents were both educators, my

mother being a tutor and learning specialist and my father a history teacher and headmaster. I remember sitting at the edge of our living room listening to Collegiate faculty members engaging in lively, energetic, and passionate discussions about teaching and education. I realized at an early age that teachers were extraordinary people, willing to dedicate themselves in service to their students. I would learn later at Stoneleigh-Burnham that they had to be expert in their particular subject, and had to pass on their passion for the subject to their students, as well as coach a sport and live in a dorm. At the Maine Coast Semester, they would also need to be expert community builders, comfortable in the woods, and willing to work, live, study, and play alongside the students. They would also have to meet the academic needs of students from many different schools, no easy or small task.

The Maine Coast Semester's first math teacher, Margaret Mathis, was a woman in her mid-50s who had taught at a number of schools in the U.S., as well as at the Mountain School for a semester and the Swiss Semester in Zermatt (eventually, Margaret would leave MCS to take a permanent position at the Swiss Semester). I can remember her walking down the stairs from her apartment in the Allen Center, her arms full of a stack of math texts, a different one for each student in her class, and finally her knitting on top of it all. She often would teach and knit at the same time, and started many a student on their first knitting project.

I would teach U.S. history in addition to directing the program, and Sue would teach Art and the Natural World and Environmental Issues and Ethics. Don Hudson would, of course, teach Natural Science. Tim suggested approaching Amy Rogers, a woman who had been on an Allagash River canoe trip that he had led. She had previously taught English at the Gilman School in Baltimore and was currently teaching at Hopkins School in New Haven. She turned us down initially, but later in the spring wrote asking to be reconsidered. Tim had noted that Amy was a very good canoeist and also had a beautiful singing voice, very important qualifications for teaching at the Maine Coast Semester. We hired Tom Gordon to run the farm, and Margy DiVece, who had cooked for summer camp, stayed on after camp as our first cook. Tim's wife, Margaret, served as our nurse. Margaret was raised on Herm in the Channel Islands and was charmingly British. She was also no-nonsense when it came to keeping us healthy and safe, and we loved her funny, endearing personality.

As the weeks rolled along I was getting pretty nervous, but in the end it all came together when late in the summer, we hired our first language teacher, a young man and accomplished pianist from Lewiston named Matthew Pilot, who would teach both French and Spanish. The next problem was where they would all live.

As the first applications from students began to arrive in the spring, it became clear that we would not meet our projected numbers. Although it wasn't our preference, we really had no option but to accept students on a rolling basis, at least in the first couple of years. The Mountain School proved tremendously helpful. Then in its fourth year, they were overwhelmed with applications and were willing to write to the students they had been unable to accept telling them about a new program in Maine. That first year we ended up getting some of our strongest students with the help of the Mountain School. I believe that we ended up with 29 students in the first semester, one shy of our initial goal.



CHAPTER 7: THE FIRST TWO SEMESTERS

In late August, 1988, we welcomed our first students. For reasons I cannot remember, the very first Maine Coast Semester student, a girl from Staples High School in Connecticut, arrived the day before and helped us to welcome the rest of her semester. The faculty had been on campus for two weeks or so, going over every detail of the semester that we could anticipate. We had spent time cleaning cabins and classrooms, labeling cubbies, ordering supplies, and even spent a night in tents on Ideal Point to get to know one another better and to begin to build our own faculty community. I remember sitting round a campfire, chatting and discussing the upcoming semester, while a very persistent raccoon repeatedly kept trying to join our evening meeting. Don Hudson, finally got up and ‘invited’ our furry friend to go elsewhere.

As the first students arrived, either by car with their parents or by plane, the outline of the first few days was much the same as it is today, with lots of meetings stressing the expectations (rules) and building a shared vision for what we hoped the semester would become. At the same time, we taught students how to wash dishes, set tables, mop floors, do morning chores. We spent time at the waterfront doing canoe-over-canoe rescues and giving swim tests.

I do not remember if we circled up for our first school meeting on the floor of the Ellis room, or outside on the quad, but sitting in a big circle established a tradition that still continues. Sadly, I remember resorting to using a chair for orientation and school meetings during the final years of my time at MCS. Several years later, reflecting on the intervening years, I wrote about the first few days of every semester, and the last few at the end:

For twenty semesters, on opening day, I've sat on the floor of the Ellis room to share some of my hopes for the coming semester. As the weeks have moved along, you've added your own ideas... You have heard me speak about trust and honesty being the heart and soul of any community, about approaching our daily life with a sense of excellence and about developing ownership for the place. You have shared my hope for a strong intellectual spirit, for relationships between students and teachers that are genuine and deep, for the need to confront tough issues as they come up, and for the need to embrace all members of the community.

Although we usually come close, it's comforting to me that we never quite achieve our vision. There is always something more to strive for, to get better at. I relish the challenge of building a new community each semester...I love the tension between all aspects of the experience. And I would hate to think that we would ever become complacent...It is hard work to be here for faculty and for students. And that's the way it should be – as long as it's tempered with large doses of fun.

The first evening, as we gathered for our first meal together, we began to establish a tradition that would become a vital part of every semester for many years. We stood around the tables and the faculty began to sing *Simple Gifts*, or a similar song. Many students knew the Shaker hymn and joined in; others began to learn it. Music grew to define the community. Visitors—teachers and school visitors, parents, and guests—would often point to the dining hall experience as their clearest tangible image of the strength and power of the Maine Coast Semester community.

The first students hailed from boarding and day schools, private and public, throughout the United States. They came from Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Georgia, Oregon, Washington, California, and Puerto Rico. They were true pioneers (as were their parents) and they put an enormous amount of trust in us. At the time, only two cabins, Ranch House and Binnacle, were insulated, so students lived in the two upstairs rooms in the Allen Center that were designed as classrooms, as well as one of the rooms downstairs underneath the Dining Hall.

As for faculty, Sue and I had moved into the Farmhouse apartment, and Margaret Mathis lived in the apartment across the hall from the Allen Center classrooms that we had vacated. Amy Rogers and Mathew Pilot lived in the two small apartments across from the downstairs bathrooms in the Wallace Center. Don Hudson lived off campus, and Tom Gordon and his large family lived in the Gatehouse. The following August we began doing what would become a nearly annual shuffle as many of the faculty shifted housing. Sue and I moved to Hilltop, and Amy moved into the Farmhouse apartment. Matthew had moved on and I believe that Cindy Kaplan, who took over for him, lived in one of the rooms under the dining hall.

I was often asked by students in later semesters what the students in the first couple of years were like. Or, put another way, “Were they as good as us?” On the surface, of course, their clothes were a bit different, as well as their taste in music; the boys often wore their hair a bit longer, and of course since there were no cell phones or computers, they were not wedded to

their devices, but by and large, the first few semester students were quite independent, experimental, and individualistic—after all, they were the pioneers. They were strongly environmentally-minded and hard-working for the most part. They were as academically capable as all other MCS students have been, but mostly, they were absolutely dedicated to making the experiment successful. Many of them have remained just as enthusiastic to this day.

There were a few glitches as I worked to schedule classes. Since the Maine Coast Semester was very small, and because students taking languages or math had very particular needs, the variables necessary for scheduling were quite challenging. Of course, computer programs for a tiny school like the Maine Coast Semester simply didn't exist, or were much too expensive for us to purchase. Later, Margaret Mathis, who had been in charge of the academic schedule at one of her previous schools, came up with a 'mechanical' way of solving the problem by creating a metal and wooden template in the shop, printing blank schedules on card stock, using a drill press to punch holes in the schedules, and finally using knitting needles to separate out individual schedules. I used this device for the class schedule until I stepped down as director 16 years later.

Classes were held six days a week, until lunch on Saturdays. Over time, Saturday morning double history classes followed by "Double Dr. Don" science classes almost became institutions, although they were not necessarily *loved* by all students. However, the six day schedule allowed us to schedule more afternoon work programs.

The classrooms used during the first year were science and art in the lower level of Allen, math in the Ellis room, English in the Social Room in the Wallace Center, and I taught history in the Farmhouse living room. I believe that Matthew taught Spanish and French in the library.

Two weeks into the semester, we went on our first wilderness trip, this time to Tim's camp on the New Hampshire side of Lake Umbagog near Errol. It was a great trip, full of adventure, challenge, and some misadventure, and it established the canoe trip as the primary wilderness experience. For many years, we continued to go as a single large group, usually to Castle Island in Hockomock Bay. Eventually, the Maine Island Trail Association would urge a maximum number on the size of each encampment, forcing us to split up and use neighboring Berry and Ram Islands, as well as Castle, in addition to Spectacle island, on the far side of the Sheepscot River, from time to time. At the time, just Don, Sue, and I had trip leader training, and only Don's credentials were up-to-date. It wouldn't be until Willard Morgan's and then

Ann Carson's tenures as heads of school that MCS would begin to go on various kinds of trips throughout the state, including winter trips early in the spring semester. These expanded trips became possible in part because Chewonki, particularly Greg Shute, made a commitment to using the trained trip leader/EE instructors for the MCS trips. But always, from the very first semester, all students had an outdoor experience in the woods and on the waters of Maine. A huge benefit of the trips was that students valued the relationships they developed with the leaders to such an extent that many of them would return to Chewonki over the years as outdoor educators, camp counselors, and wilderness trip leaders, attracted by the inspiring outdoor leaders they had met when they were at the Maine Coast Semester.

Likewise, every semester, the students went on a 2-night solo. The first semester was a bit of an anomaly. We put two students on Oak Island, which turned out to be a poor idea because that particular weekend Maine welcomed the first Nor'easter of the season. Once we made the decision to pull the two students off the island, we then had to take several trips in the Boston Whaler with a volunteer group of staff and faculty, plunging through the waves, wind, and rain. We found the first girl easily, but the boy was not at his solo site and we were forced to conduct searches of the entire island before finding him—dry and comfy—hunkered down in a cave. Apparently, he couldn't hear our whistles and airhorns over the noise of the wind and rain. Needless to say, we never used Oak Island again, although we placed a couple of students across Montsweag Brook on at least one occasion; I think the semester still does this occasionally. The solo always marked an important milestone of each semester; for some students, it was a welcome break from close community living; for some, it was meditative; for others, it was a terrifying experience. But all the students would come back to campus full of stories about the wildlife they had seen (including deer, coyotes, mink, and at least one moose), and the adventures they'd had. Always, they arrived back having learned to be a bit more resilient.

Work program that first semester was varied. The students and teachers worked together to do everything from cleaning and painting, to construction and maintenance. We worked on the farm and in the woodlot. Students learned to use splitting mauls and a hydraulic splitter, and spent lots of time moving and stacking wood. We learned to re-cane the dining hall chairs and this was an on-going chore for many years. On the farm, the garden was large, but we had not yet developed a good composting system. Livestock included chickens, pigs, sheep and long-haired, long-horned Scottish Highland cattle. We did not have horses at that time, depending instead on an old Farmall tractor, nor did we have milk cows. Of course, the usual seasonal tasks were attended to, like hauling the docks and the boats. Very early on, Sue and Zoe Richards

introduced students to spinning and weaving, eventually with Chewonki-grown wool, and they, along with Amy, and especially Margaret Mathis, introduced knitting. Soon, virtually every student would spend their time knitting during school meetings, to the extent that we had to pass a 'no-knitting' rule when we had guest speakers. Otherwise, too many heads were looking down, rather than up at the speaker.

As the Thanksgiving break neared, and the parents arrived for a fall harvest dinner, we had created a very powerful experience, and when the end came in mid-December, the hugs and tears that would come to characterize the last day of every future semester, flowed freely. I always marveled at the extraordinary patience of the parents who often had to wait hours before the student would finally agree to get in the car to go home.



CHAPTER 8: WRESTLING WITH IDEAS & ISSUES

During the first few years, as the program continued to build and become successful, we wrestled with a number of challenging issues. Although the Maine Coast Semester inherited the essence of a number of earlier programs including Maine Reach and the Mountain School, we were charting our own direction and to that end the faculty had many exciting and challenging meetings and end-of-semester retreats. Indeed, with such a small faculty, and one accustomed to hashing out differences before reaching some sort of consensus, it became the norm to spend a day or two, or longer, usually in late May to review, in depth, the year and to develop new ideas to try. Some traditions were set in stone, but never in the first thirty or more semesters did we sit back and assume we had gotten it right.

The bedrock academic principle of the Maine Coast Semester was what we called ‘Intellectual Spirit.’ Although this was aspirational, it was extremely important and we worked very hard to impart that importance to the students. It meant much more than merely completing homework or allowing other students to do their work without interference; rather it meant embracing the academic opportunities that we were offering to students—the hands-on experiences, the extraordinary 400-acre saltwater peninsula, the outdoors, the interdisciplinary learning. Ideally, it also meant worrying less about grades and more about process and progress. In my own class, it meant learning to live with papers and essays returned with extensive comments, but without grades. To be told the grade, the student had to be able to fully explain my comments, criticisms, and suggestions. In Sue’s class, it meant learning to critique artwork, and in turn to willingly receive criticism. It meant doing draft after draft of a drawing or painting, to push beyond the first or even the second iteration. In Literature and the Land it might mean learning to write in the voice of Faulkner or Wallace Stegner or Annie Dillard. In Tom McKeon’s math class, interdisciplinary learning meant taking the concepts they were learning in trigonometry and pre-calculus, and applying them to the construction of a bridge over a stream that ran between the pack-out building and the farm, across a path that students walked every day. If a student was in that particular math section, he or she would be assigned ‘bridge-work’ for work program.

It was no accident that when the Clarence E. Allen Natural History was built in the mid-1980s, the science lab and the art room were placed next door to each other. This design came about in part from the long tradition at Chewonki of studying the natural world largely through close observation, by sketching and drawing, and by sometimes merely sitting still. Chewonki was a

leader in nature study and had been since world-renowned ornithologist, natural historian, and artist, Roger Tory Peterson, led the nature program at Camp Chewonki in the 1930s. Peterson was hired by fellow birder, headmaster, and Chewonki founder, Clarence E. Allen. Since then, many campers, and now MCS students, have gone on to become well-known natural scientists, environmentalists, ornithologists, botanists, and ecologists, including Don Hudson, our science teacher for many years. Don's doctorate was in botany, and he had studied with, and had been mentored by, David Barrington, head of the University of Vermont's Pringle Herbarium and the developer of Chewonki's Eco-Week Programs for families. Don was also an accomplished birder. For many years, every Maine Coast Semester student would learn some 120 bird songs and calls (as well as the classic features of plumage, size, and shape)—something they would nervously take on in the beginning, and end up being so proud of by the end of their semester. This alone made MCS truly unique; there was no other semester program that did anything even close to it. Don's end-of-semester bird quiz was legendary—and scary—to students who only later realized that Don mostly hoped that they would get into the spirit of the exercise, and eventually become as excited about the natural world as he was. Perhaps it's just coincidental, but there are all sorts of stories about Peterson's legendary natural history explorations around Chewonki Neck in the 30s, usually with campers in tow. Peterson was clearly single-minded when in search of a bird or animal; he was gifted and brilliant; he was a bit eccentric. But he was also a pied piper when it came to exciting the campers about nature. Every time I hear one of these stories, it reminds me a bit of Don. A number of years later, I heard from one returning alumnus that while being rushed by a Dartmouth fraternity, he was driven blindfolded out into the woods and left in the car. At first, silence; then all of a sudden, the car's tape player began playing: "*hoohoo-hoohoo, hoohoo-hoohooaw*"—the call of a barred owl. It turned out that the mysterious bird call recordings were orchestrated as a sort of inside joke by another former MCS student. If there was one thing that connected all Maine Coast Semester students across all semesters and years, it was learning bird songs.

Don's approach to teaching was also to look at the natural world systemically. Students would learn ecological principles and sampling techniques, but they would also learn species and how they interacted with each other in every habitat surrounding Chewonki Neck. Students would go once a week on long field trips to the forests, fields, bogs, marshes, beaches, and rocky shores either on or close to our peninsula, doing all sorts of exercises, from quadrat sampling studies to determining the 'diameter (at) breast height' of trees. To heighten their observational skills, art teacher, Sue, and naturalist, Lynne Flaccus, would spend a few science classes teaching students how to do pencil sketches for their field notebooks.

One of the first decisions we made, at the end of the first year, was to make Natural History of the Maine Coast a core course. We had envisioned Environmental Issues and Ethics being one of the two mandatory courses, in part because of its legacy as the academic heart of Maine Reach. We quickly found, however, that it was logistically difficult for all students and faculty to maintain similar excellent standards. Each faculty member was expected to take a group of students and work on an environmental project of the group's choosing, but this wasn't necessarily a strength of every teacher so some groups were more productive and successful than others. More importantly, however, we questioned—with student help—whether it made more sense to understand more about the natural world before tackling its problems. Of course, Don was great at teaching natural science and the students who chose to take it as an elective during the first year, loved his course, so it was a relatively easy decision to make.

The decision to make Environmental Issues elective actually helped to make it flourish because of the smaller class size. For many years it was taught by Sue with eventual help from a young graduate from Middlebury, Dave Liebmann. Students in the class would identify a current environmental problem or issue in Maine, research it extensively, and then *do* something about it. They created posters; designed environmental games for the tray liners at a local Arby's restaurant; and testified before the State legislature. Although we could not guarantee a trip to Augusta every semester, since that would ultimately depend on what issue was being studied, this type of genuine learning became very exciting and powerful, and served to attract students to the program. One memorable project was the result of a request by the Maine Department of Natural Resources, which asked our students to study the sea urchin population that it feared was in jeopardy due to over-harvesting as a result of high prices in the Asian markets. Students went out on an urchin diver's boat; they measured urchins, and weighed the roe, called experts in Alaska who had dealt with a similar problem, and finally testified before a legislative committee. Although the new legislation passed, it was not passed in time, and the urchin population quickly crashed. This, though, was also a good lesson for the students. When Dave eventually became my assistant and began doing many of the recruiting trips, he emphasized the idea that learning at the Maine Coast Semester would ideally be as real as we could make it.

To our surprise, many more girls applied to the program than boys. Often, there might be only a single boys cabin alongside four girls cabins. Although the reasons for this can be debated, it actually had little effect on the Maine Coast Semester community in most ways. However, it did have implications for the Foundation as a whole.

From 1918 to the early 1970s, Chewonki was simply a summer camp for boys, with very limited staff positions open to women. The few coeducational programs that did exist, such as the environmental education programs and Maine Reach, were relatively small and had a limited impact on staffing.

When the MCS program began, many of the girls pushed for ways to return to Chewonki during the summer months as wilderness trippers (and eventually leaders), and camp staffers. When former campers visited camp in the 1990s, they were often surprised to see so many women in what was, and still is, a boys camp. It's hard to recognize the Chewonki of the late 70s and the Chewonki that exists today. To a significant extent, real progress was made in providing opportunities for both girls and boys, and men and women, because of the Maine Coast Semester.

Although the male/female ratio didn't affect the day-to-day life of the Maine Coast Semester, on the farm and during work program, there was a decided bias towards the boys as certain jobs were assigned. Mostly, though not always, boys were given the responsibility of driving the truck and tractor, or using the heavy equipment. This was an equity issue that we had to fight in the first couple of years. I made it clear to maintenance and farm staff that they must assign jobs equally. What they discovered, of course, is that there was no difference at all between the abilities of the students to do the work; all students were eager to do challenging jobs, regardless of their gender.

During the Maine Reach years, students were responsible for much of the running of the semester, and Tim, in particular, hoped to see that continue with the Maine Coast Semester. Of course, with younger students, this would prove to be a bit more difficult, but it was an important goal in the first few years, even though more responsibilities meant less time for the students to choose their own direction as well as to spend on the schoolwork.

During the first semester, we discussed forming small groups of students and teachers to take responsibility for everything from composting, to recycling, to keeping the buildings clean and orderly, to even keeping track of the budget as Maine Reach students had done. Some of these ideas never took flight (budgeting, for instance), others did, although in ways not completely anticipated; and still other ideas came about more spontaneously. For example, for many years, student and faculty volunteers read all the applications for admission and met to make decisions as to who would be accepted into the program the following year. Although I had veto-power,

I rarely used it; the students took their responsibility—including the necessity for confidentiality—very, very seriously.

One idea that did not work was something we nicknamed ‘check-in/check-out.’ Check-in to the cabins was initially 11:00 pm and 1:00 am on Saturdays!! (Now that *was* a bad idea!). Once checked-in, students were expected to remain in their cabins, except to use the bathrooms. But what if they still had work to do? At some point in the first year, students asked in a school meeting if they could leave their cabins to do schoolwork as long as they returned by a specified period of time. Really wishing to give them responsibility, we agreed. Needless to say, some students did follow the rules as expected, but too many did not. For a few, check-in/check-out was just a social occasion, and that became quite clear as some students started showing up later and later for morning chores or were droopy-eyed in classes.

Study time was a similar dilemma, but one we wrestled with for far longer. The original rules for study hours were rather simple: the campus would be quiet for at least two hours after dinner, and it was expected that no-one would ever be prevented or distracted from doing their school work. The hope was that classroom expectations would drive compliance, and that if school work was not getting done, the consequences would follow naturally. We also believed that the students themselves should make it work. If a student was being distracted, that student should feel empowered to speak up. These philosophical points were argued strongly for years in countless faculty and school meetings. Most students did get their work done; they took study hours seriously, and they completed the enormous amount of work we were giving them. Others, of course, were less mature, less serious, and there were always a small few for whom schoolwork was a low priority. Still, we hung on to the idea because it was at the heart of what we thought the Maine Coast Semester could, and *should* be, and because the alternative was more policing. None of the faculty wished to enforce quiet space and time. We hoped and believed that the students could largely live up to their responsibilities. From the faculty’s point of view, study hours exemplified Intellectual Spirit.

Unfortunately, but understandably, my experience is that the longer a program goes on, the more the leadership tends to develop rules that make everything run more smoothly and more efficiently. Mistakes and problems are not tolerated as they might have been earlier. It may just be human nature, but this tendency needs to be guarded against. For lots of reasons— many of them for the better—the Maine Coast Semester today has many more rules, expectations, and procedures than was the case in the late 80s and early 90s. The program is probably better, safer, and more responsible in many ways, but that has also come at a cost of student independence and responsibility, and the spirit and spontaneity of earlier years.

Just as the natural tendency is to create more rules and systems over time for the efficient running of communities, an accompanying tendency is to add more and more cool, fun, amazing experiences for the students to enjoy. Originally, Saturday afternoons were for students to relax, study, nap, take walks, or simply have fun.

Of course we also felt obligated to offer various activities—trips to the beach, hikes, waterfront activities, trips to town, etc. At some point, we began offering what we called (for no good reason) ‘activities,’ usually on Wednesday afternoons. Based on the particular interests of the faculty, activities were offered to students in small groups. Eventually taking the place of one work program per week, activities ranged from mountain biking to woodcraft, from letter-writing to fly tying and casting, from unicycling to knitting and weaving, just to name a few. Usually, activities would switch half-way through the semester and new groups would form. These were great fun and tremendously successful; we all, students and teachers, looked forward to them. Activities also further enhanced close relationships between students and teachers, since, depending on the activity, conversations were wide-ranging and often very compelling.

In faculty meetings, we would discuss setting aside time to talk with students about sexuality, about college and career choices, about relations with their parents, and, inevitably, about issues surrounding technology. We also began having a regular speaker series. However, since we were not asking any less of the students in terms of their academic workload, everything we added in addition to work program, chore responsibilities, and classes, while fun and worthwhile, also tended to squeeze them for time. In faculty meetings, I worried about MCS trying to be all things to all students, but often got voted down. At one point, Andy Barker decided to quantify exactly how much time students had for doing homework. It turned out that they had more responsibilities and were expected to do more homework than there were hours in a day.

This tendency to add more “stuff” also affected faculty. We believed that it was important to spend as much time as possible with the students, not just teaching, mentoring, meeting with advisees, planning school meetings and Saturday evening activities, but also simply having fun, *playing* with students. From our point of view, this wasn’t frivolous, it was part and parcel of building a good community. So, knitting, playing card games and music, taking walks, doing special art projects, going canoeing or kayaking at the waterfront, were all vital to do with students. Over time, however, it was exhausting for teachers. I remember one time during a faculty dish crew, one teacher saying something like: “If you can’t continue to put the time into playing with students, it’s time to leave.” It was absolutely true.

I had not forgotten David Grant’s answer to my question about discipline in 1986. After some painful incidents when I was Dean of Students at Stoneleigh-Burnham, I really wanted to believe

that students would read the brochure and accompanying materials, absolutely believe what they were reading, and completely “buy into” the expectations, as Tim would say. Well, that was not quite the reality. We did have students who broke expectations, some fairly minor, some quite serious, and we did sometimes separate students from the community, either temporarily or permanently if warranted. This was so very hard in a small, intimate community, but sadly was sometimes necessary.

At the start of each semester, we would have several long, serious meetings about the major expectations, most of which were exactly what students were accustomed to at their home schools. However, more than half of the students in any given semester did not come from a boarding program, and may never have had to follow expectations like check-in or cabin visiting rules. Day students were used to having more freedom than boarding students. Every new semester, we would emphasize over and over the need for honesty at all times. We talked at length about students and teachers always being on the ‘same page,’ about being able to look into each others’ eyes with complete trust. We refused to play ‘gotcha’ games. We warned students that we would never sweep an issue under the rug. Looking back, it seems as if 3-4 weeks into almost every semester, cabin or check-in rules would be broken. This would result in long, very powerful school meetings, the result being that the students finally began to develop a deeper understanding of why strong expectations are vital to a strong community.

So, when serious disciplinary events occurred, I expected students to tell me the truth, without the hope that that would necessarily mitigate the consequences. With disciplinary cases, the faculty would convene to decide what to do. We would then meet with the individual students, call parents, and then meet with the entire school, or even occasionally with the entire Chewonki community. Teachers spoke very personally and forcefully in these meetings. There was often lots of anger and tears, but we always tried hard to separate actions from the character of the student, and we would *never* hold it against the student were they to be allowed to return to the community. We believed that everyone makes mistakes, and that mistakes—even serious ones—do not always define the individual. However, they do have consequences for the larger community. I remember one semester in which a fair number of students broke one of the major expectations. When I discovered what had happened, I made an announcement at lunch saying that I expected anyone involved to see me in my office. By the time I returned to my desk, there was a line of students at the door. Some of them were asked to leave the semester, in the end, but I have never been more proud of the character of Maine Coast Semester students. Many adults never display half as much integrity. More than one student told me over the years that they used a disciplinary event at the Maine Coast Semester and the consequences they suffered, as the basis for one of their college essays.

It is important to emphasize that at the time, it was the faculty, working together, that handled discipline. As director, I had the final word, but using the entire faculty team was important; we couldn't have imagined a dean of students role in those days. In my years at Stoneleigh-Burnham, we used a student-faculty disciplinary committee, and the Mountain School used one at the time, but I felt strongly that our program was much too small and intimate to put the burden of potentially expelling a fellow student on a small sub-set of students.

One final comment on this: In the early years of the Maine Coast Semester, there was an expectation, especially within parents were to trust school the issue. In fact, MCS supportive of our decisions might not have liked the and trusted that we had made not believe that this is the case quicker to rush to the defense decisions for them, to hover threaten legal action.



the private school world, that administrators, no matter what parents were almost always very about disciplinary events. They outcome, but they understood it the best decision possible. I do any longer. Parents are now of their kids, to make all inappropriately, and, sadly, to

CHAPTER 9: STUDENT & FACULTY HOUSING

Housing for students was a persistent, though not insurmountable challenge at the Maine Coast Semester in the early years. By the second semester, the plan was to build a traditional dormitory attached to Hilltop. A building crew, with some help from students during work program, began to insulate and renovate the main house and to build an attached open-plan annex. By the second year of the program, students lived in the annex and they would do so for many years.

At the same time, though, some of the Chewonki Foundation and Maine Coast Semester Advisors, like Lance Odden, were beginning to urge that we winterize summer camp cabins, so beginning with Orchard House, which students, faculty, and staff re-built on top of its original footprint, and continuing with South Hall, Pete Gillies, and finally Gordy Hall (which had originally been attached to the Farmhouse and used as the library and dining hall for Maine Reach), the trend was to build wood-heated cabins. The open floor plan of the cabins seemed to foster increased cabin bonding, so at some point early on, the decision was taken to give all students a similar living experience, and phase Hilltop out some years later. By the fall of 1997, all students were living in cabins. We never looked back once the decision was made.

Partly because of the need for new cabins, work program was pretty exciting for many years. Not only did we do it more often, but in addition, much of the work was necessarily building construction in the 1990's. The maintenance staff, under Bob Jackson, and then Don Lamson, led most of the cabin-building projects. They were outstanding teachers. The students not only relished the chance to swing a hammer, learn how to put up shingles, or lay down roofing; they also loved working with Bob and Don and the rest of the maintenance crew. When students return to campus, one of the first places they visit on the Neck is some project that they helped build. At its best, work program teaches new skills, but also gives students the feeling that the work they are doing is useful. Apart from the simple need for new cabins, the skills that the students learned would have a profound and lasting impact.

This is a mistake that boarding schools often make. In most, students are expected to do some chores—cleaning their rooms, social areas, even bathrooms—but all too often that work is followed up by professional cleaners. To the students, this merely demonstrates that their work isn't valued or needed. Their efforts, in other words, aren't really necessary. And, all too often,

faculty members are not working alongside the students, which would actually increase student investment in the work. The ethic of doing good work is ultimately derived from faculty investment, enthusiasm, and leadership.

By the second year of the program, students were no longer living in the Wallace Center. The Allen Center classrooms were still dorms, but with Orchard House, and then South Hall, we finally began to have enough living space to use the classrooms for their intended use.

Housing was much more difficult for faculty, and it caused tensions within the greater Chewonki community. The problem stemmed from two opposing needs. Not too many years previously almost all buildings had been uninsulated. Every summer, senior camp staff would arrive in May or June and move into cabins like Chateau, Juniper Dell, Pinecone, Meadows, Last Resort, and Hilltop. It was sometimes crowded, but it worked. And then, along came the Maine Coast Semester, with very different needs. All of a sudden, heated spaces with year-round running water were needed for new residential faculty. Additionally, it was critical that we attract high-caliber teachers, willing to live on campus in residential housing. We needed to compete in terms of compensation and housing with boarding schools that had many more resources. Although most MCS faculty were willing to make these sacrifices because they were passionate about the program, there were limits. What about families? What about pets? Unlike the seasonal environmental education instructors, who tended on average to be younger and did not necessarily expect to live on campus through the winter months, MCS faculty were often a bit older, sometimes had families, often had pets, and generally expected to *live* in their quarters year-round, not merely reside temporarily.

For many years, we struggled with this problem and it became a bit of a chess game, with faculty needing to move frequently as spaces opened up or closed down. By my count, beginning when Sue and I returned to Chewonki in 1987 until we finally moved off campus in about 2012, we lived in at least seven different places, including several years in the Wallace Center basement, with a baby, no kitchen, and sharing the public bathrooms. For years, most MCS teachers were expected to vacate their housing for the summer. This made it extremely difficult to find faculty. Potential teachers would get excited about the Maine Coast Semester, and then we would have the painful discussion about where they would be living, or about the fact that they could not bring their dog or cat. For me, this became the single most unpleasant and stressful part of being director, and it was the main reason Sue and I moved to the rather bleak rooms beneath the dining hall; it was simply too painful to ask other teachers to live there. I knew that in the end they simply wouldn't stay for more than a year.

Overall, salary for Maine Coast Semester faculty was not as important as housing, in my opinion, although some of our member schools worried that we had faculty members who were exceptionally young, the result, they believed, of being underpaid. While this may or may not have been true, it was the perception. However, no faculty member ever told me that they were moving on to other opportunities because of compensation, and only a very few in my years as director ever said that they couldn't accept a position because the salary was too low.

This is not to say that Chewonki didn't continually work to improve the situation (both housing



and salary), but as new spaces became available, the numbers of teachers and staff in all Chewonki programs needing housing kept increasing exponentially in the 1990s. And the fact that MCS faculty was often better paid than the Environmental Educators, who were at this time still considered 'seasonal workers,' did not help the situation. It was tough and took many years for Chewonki to begin to find the balance between programs, resources, housing, and more. Perhaps this was part of what Tim was anticipating way back in the mid-1980s when he noted that "there were legitimate concerns" about starting a new program. It may be interesting to note that when I first arrived at Chewonki in 1978, the year-round staff totaled fewer than 15. By the time Maine Coast Semester opened its doors ten years later, I would imagine that the number had grown to well over 30 or so, and in 2004, when I stepped down as director, the number listed in that spring's *Chronicle* was just shy of 70. Although many staff lived off-campus, quite a few positions required staff to live on campus, so the burden of providing housing was clearly enormous and difficult to achieve.

CHAPTER 10: CHEWONKI'S SALT MARSH FARM

Historically, Chewonki Neck had been home to a typical saltwater sheep farm. In 1917, when Clarence Allen first visited the Neck and snowshoed on the snowy peninsula, much of the forest had been cleared for hay and sheep as was the case in much of New England. By the time I arrived in 1978, the original farm fields were overgrown. Tim Ellis brought in goats and Scottish Highland cattle to browse the brush. Pigs were also in residence and would often escape, especially (and oddly, it seemed) during staff meetings, when everyone would then have to adjourn to help with the roundup. Margaret Ellis had a large organic garden in which summer campers would help out.

The farm was run by Tom Gordon for the first two years of the Maine Coast Semester. He left after the 4th semester and a former MCS II student from Taft, Sarah Kirby (now Mitchell) offered to return to run the farm the next fall. With help from a young man named Arthur Cady, Sarah kept everything moving until we eventually hired Mark and Ingrid Albee to run the farm and healthcare departments respectively. With their two sons, Hans and Peter, Mark and Ingrid were the semester program's parent figures: Ingrid keeping us well and safe, and Mark keeping us philosophically on track.

Mark set the standard that is still seen today. He designed the first true compost systems; began the long process of removing the brush and scrub from the pastures; brought in milking cows and turkeys to join the pigs, chickens, and sheep; and eventually began experimenting with draft horses. Mark was a stickler for orderliness and organization. The farm began to look 'kept up' and well-organized. Students were gently, but forcefully, expected to be on time to morning farm chores and afternoon work programs on the farm, and to work steadily and hard. Not that good conversation and fun were discouraged, but the work always came first. Mark is a true philosopher, a lover of farmer/poet Wendell Berry, among others; he imbued Salt Marsh Farm with joy and seriousness, a sense of purpose and duty, and a love for the work. We began talking about Maine Coast Semester as a place where, together, we learned to use our "head, hands, and heart" in equal measures. In addition to Chewonki meat and vegetables, the farm produced milk, yogurt, and cheese, as well as fiber, and of course firewood and lumber.

Mark also started a tradition that lasted many years: The Farm Olympics were held during the final days of the semester. Contests ranged from races and obstacle courses, to tests of the skills learned during the semester, to feats of strength, like the truck/tractor pull up the rise from

the Gatehouse to the maintenance area. He would begin each ‘farm olympiad’ with the Olympics theme song played—comically—on his trumpet.

One very specific way to measure the success of the farm because of Mark’s efforts is to simply list the products during his last year at MCS:

VEGETABLES

Basil	53 (pounds—all amounts)
Beans	95
Beets	220
Broccoli	322
Cabbage	400
Carrots	600
Cauliflower	65
Chard	31
Cucumbers	457
Garlic	161
Kale	50
Lettuce	1,200
Melons	609
Onions	1,139
Peas	20
Peppers	310
Potatoes	800
Spinach	228
Summer squash	271
Tomatoes	1,118
<u>Winter squash</u>	<u>1,325</u>
TOTAL	9,474

MEAT, DAIRY, FIBER

Pork	1,000
Beef	500
Lamb	500
Chicken	400
Turkey	100
Eggs	1,095
Milk	1,200
Wool (raw fleece)	100

WOOD

Firewood	20 cords
Lumber	1,000 board feet

Note: A substantial amount of the work needed for the production of the crops listed above, was accomplished using natural horsepower.

Beginning with Mark Albee, continuing with Margaret Youngs, Brad Johnson, and now with Megan Phillips, farm talks became part of the weekly schedule, almost like a mini class. These were attempts to prep students for what they might be doing on the farm for the coming week, to provide background and context, or even to provide historical perspective for farming in general. Along the same lines, Pete Sniffen (science) later taught ‘energy systems’ as a companion mini class.

Increasingly, especially because of the skills and interest of Sue, Amy Rogers, Zoe Richards, and others, the wool harvested from Chewonki sheep became the heart of a strong ‘sheep to shawl’ program in spinning and weaving that virtually all students experienced to some extent. The woven blankets, pillows, and bags would be raffled-off at reunions.

Over time, the decision was made to eat not just organically, but also locally as much as possible in the dining hall. Most of the food now comes from the farm, not just during the semester, but also during the camp season.

When Mark and Ingrid left Chewonki in 2004, Willard Morgan described Mark’s last Farm Talk, which took place in the barn, in an issue of the *Chewonki Chronicle*. I think Mark’s remarks that day are emblematic of our beloved farmer-philosopher and are worth quoting in their entirety:

“...To me...it’s really about one word: *connection*...I have a little example for you” [Mark walked over and retrieved two jackets hanging on the barn wall; he held up a synthetic ‘fleece’ jacket]. “Have you ever seen a petroleum to fleece demonstration?” [Mark went on to explain that he knew little about how the jacket was made or where it came from.]

[He put the synthetic fleece down and picked up a mottled wool sweater.]
“Let me contrast the fleece jacket with this sweater to demonstrate what I mean by *connection*. Ingrid knit this sweater for me from yarn spun from the

wool of Henry, one of our rams....Of all the sheep we have had here...only one does not have Henry blood...I am *connected* to these sheep and I am *connected* to this wool and I am *connected* to this sweater.”

“...And in the far corner of this barn, stacked up in the loft, are boards that were cut by many of you. You are *connected* to those boards. I can return some day in the future and see those boards in use here. That is what I mean by *connection*.”

In ways that I cannot completely describe, Saltmarsh Farm, as Mark ran it, became



the philosophical center of the Maine Coast Semester.

CHAPTER 11: THE SEMESTER BEGINS TO MATURE

We were feeling pretty good as the first year ended. Both inaugural semesters had been very successful. There had clearly been challenges, and certainly we were feeling our way in the dark from time to time, but the students in both semesters had had powerful experiences, as evidenced by the fact that many of those students are still devoted to Chewonki and the program, and have wonderful memories of their time at MCS. One student from MCS IV told me a few years ago that his life was transformed as a result of his time at MCS, particularly as a result of Don's science class. It informed his college choices, and he still uses the systemic approach to the natural world that he learned at MCS in his daily work as a scientist.

By the third semester, one new faculty member came on board, but the core consisting of Sue, Don, Margaret, Amy, and myself remained the same. In addition, a couple of new schools were considering joining the membership as word began to get around.

However, with MCS III (fall '89) we received quite a shock. As applications began to arrive, we realized that we were going to be seriously under-enrolled. This time we didn't get help from the Mountain School. Only twenty-three students showed up on opening day. The spring semester was almost full, but that fall put a serious dent in the budget. This only happened one time, and for a number of years thereafter, we had many more applications than we could handle, and were often forced to turn away too many very good students. Eventually, though, as more semester schools were founded and began to compete with MCS, and as students and their parents became a bit more conservative during the 'back to basics' Reagan and Bush years, fewer students applied. It really just meant that we had to work a bit harder and become more creative. We did not notice any change in the quality of the applications we received; the students who applied were just as interesting and academically capable.

It would also be in the following few years that I began to make changes to my own job description. Having a full-time teaching load, as well as all the responsibilities as director, was beginning to be difficult. It was especially hard to be on the road recruiting throughout January, while at the same time preparing for the upcoming semester. I would arrive at my motel after a day giving presentations, only to have to break out the knitting needles and fiddle with the class schedule. Although parents often invited me to stay with them, it was hard to be as sociable as I wished, when I often had to excuse myself to do prep work for the new semester. As the size

of the program increased incrementally, as things like class and advisor comments got longer and longer (and I read every single one of them every semester), as the schedule grew more complex, it was simply becoming harder to get it all done. Eventually, I began to look for a bit of help and found it in Dave Liebmann, who essentially took on much of the admissions piece and was especially good at recruiting. Dave is naturally very friendly and outgoing, and he made contacts with schools quite easily. Dave was also very good at figuring out how to creatively paint a compelling picture of the Maine Coast Semester for prospective students. During his presentations to 10th grade students, Dave would often ask students to think about what *their* design for a school might be. It was no surprise that when the slides of the Maine Coast Semester flashed on the screen, they were seeing a school very close to what they had just imagined.

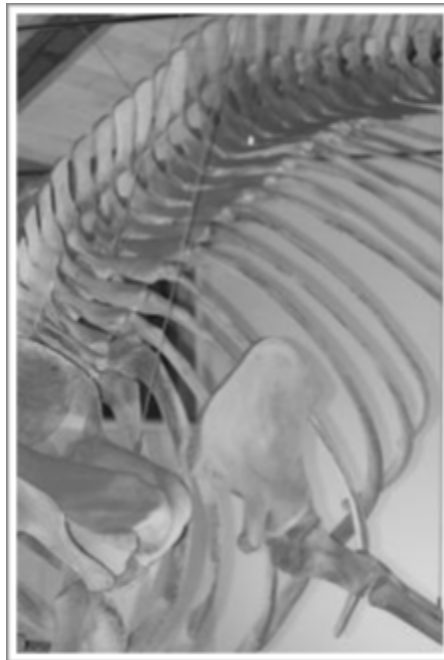
Also in the next few years, a new group of young faculty members were hired: Zoe Richards (science) and Josh Brown (English), Andy Barker (history/ farm) and his brother Ed (French). Andy, by the way, had been taught by Amy at Gilman and both Barkers were long-time Chewonki campers. Sarah Glass arrived to teach French, and Tom McKeon would teach math for many years after Margaret Mathis decided to accept a permanent position at the Swiss Semester. Finally, Brad Johnson was hired to replace Dave when he moved on, and then would replace Mark on the farm when Mark and Ingrid eventually decided to leave.

By and large, these were young, creative, energetic teachers, who, although they may have lacked some classroom experience, more than made up for it with a stunning ability to connect with students, and demonstrate, as Tim would say, “a joy for living.” And they quickly became outstanding teachers. I know that many professionally-trained educators would disagree, but I often found in my years as director, that teachers who were personable, hard-working, enthusiastic, and well-educated in the liberal arts, often provided a better experience for the students than many teachers who had more impressive academic credentials, but who were somehow a bit awkward or uncomfortable with the students, especially with the relaxed atmosphere of the Maine Coast Semester. The kind of student-faculty relationship that we tried to foster demanded energy and humility. It demanded a sort of playfulness, a sense of humor, patience, and a willingness to be on a first name basis with the students. This was sometimes quite difficult for some teachers who were more set in their ways. Tom McKeon put it this way:

The nature of our student faculty relationship is one of the subtlest and richest parts of the entire experience, but it also offers a difficult task: to forge a relationship that remains professional and appropriate, but that also somehow

manages to break down the barriers that often exist between students and teachers in regular schools...The time we spend outside of class on work program, at meals or on trips, is...important time in which we can deepen and strengthen the personal bond that can happen here. (*The Maine Coast Semester Ten Year Directory*)

I recently read an old *New Yorker* article (Dec, 2008) by Malcolm Gladwell, which seems to support what I suspected and often witnessed: “Educational reform efforts typically start with a push for higher standards for teachers — that is, for the academic and cognitive requirements for entering the profession to be as stiff as possible, but...[he goes on to explain]...Test scores, graduate degrees, and certifications...turn out to be about as useful in predicting success as having a [prospective] quarterback throw footballs into a bunch of [stationary] garbage cans.”



I am not suggesting that advanced degrees in teaching and education are not valuable; they certainly can help hone a good teacher into a great one; they can also spark deeper knowledge and understanding, and more complex thinking. I am suggesting, though, that many of the best teachers I hired—for this particular program—did not have those credentials. Those young educators were often fabulous, not just in the classroom, but also were terrific mentors for the students.

CHAPTER 12: NEW IDEAS, CHALLENGES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE 1990s

Nine years into the Maine Coast Semester, as we began to plan our ten-year reunion, it seemed like a good time to assess our strengths, weaknesses, and progress. Some 575 extraordinary students had attended the program. We had received great praise from students, their parents, and fellow educators. The Maine Coast Semester had been the focus of a segment on the Lifetime Cable TV Channel, which profiled science teacher Zoe Richards (we dubbed it ZTV), and MCS had been the subject of a cover article in *Independent School Magazine*. One of our English teachers, Josh Brown, had delivered a paper at an English symposium in New York City, and Don Hudson had delivered a number of them at meetings and conferences. We had welcomed speakers as varied as poet Gary Lawless, Amory Lovins, acclaimed Maine chef Sam Hayward, Bill McKibben, Maine artists Alan Magee and Robert Shetterly, and parent Daniel Ellsberg to campus.

Despite the inevitable changes in the program since the fall of 1988, the values that underlay the Maine Coast Semester had remained constant—a commitment to an ethic of hard work, be it in the classroom, work program, or even at a contentious school meeting. We remained dedicated to building a unique, close-knit community in which the relationship between students and teachers was based on trust and honesty, and we remained anchored to the place: the Maine Coast and our 400-acre saltwater peninsula.

Nevertheless, as the Maine Coast Semester moved into the mid-1990s, we constantly wrestled with new ideas and challenges:

THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM and FACULTY DEVELOPMENT: When I think back to my personal goals for MCS in 1987-8, the one that most readily comes to mind was of marrying the traditional, rigorous academic experience that I had had growing up in New York City, to the powerful social experience that I had learned to value so much while at Chewonki.

Thus, the classwork at the Maine Coast Semester was demanding by design. We were attempting to combine the warm, intimate community that Chewonki traditionally fostered, with a challenging academic program similar to that which students would find in their home schools. At the same time, we looked for ways to make the learning as hands-on or experiential as possible, and we continued to use the outdoors as much as we could. For example, in addition to

the weekly hours-long field trips, a new science teacher, Bill Zuehlke (Don was now president and had finally had to give up teaching, save for teaching about birds) developed a full-day final exam held at Reid State Park, in which students working in small groups would use their combined knowledge and skills to answer questions in the varied ecosystems found at Reid.

We also attempted to make our classes as interdisciplinary as possible. In the early years of the program, it wasn't unusual for English and history teachers to assign parts of the same texts, and I always loved it when a student would comment that she couldn't remember in what class she'd learned about a particular topic. Environmental Issues continued to be project-based, even though that was not always possible. Classes were still often taught outdoors. I even remember holding a history class in the loft of the barn while waiting for a lamb to be born. And I remember giving a test by candle-light one night when the power was out. Not exactly interdisciplinary, but certainly memorable and in the spirit of the Maine Coast Semester.

We also added some new courses: A philosophy class taught by Paul Arthur, as part of the English curriculum, as well as more languages, taught by people living in the area, including, Chinese, Latin, Russian, and sometimes ancient Greek.

Despite these successes, one of our weaknesses was an effective faculty evaluation system. This was not something that was a resounding success when I was director, although it began to improve when Don Hudson became executive director. Under his leadership, all senior staff, for instance, were asked to write self-assessments at least once a year, which included input from colleagues. I personally found these to be time-consuming, but also very helpful. In the Maine Coast Semester, I found it difficult to visit classes as often as needed to observe teachers, and although we did have a system in place, it was not as formal or rigorous as it could have been, and with such a small faculty, it was actually pretty hard to find the time to sit in on a colleague's class. Schedules might never match up. Our evaluation system did not serve teachers as well as it should have, but over time, we began to finally make improvements.

FINANCIAL AID: Another problem that would become increasingly difficult was how to meet the financial needs of the students whose families simply could not afford the tuition, which, although in line with other private boarding schools, was very steep. Our original plan was for our private member schools to forward any financial aid one of their students was receiving to the Maine Coast Semester. As I wrote earlier, this allowed us to take applicants from public schools and from non-member schools that did not have arrangements with MCS. However, by the mid-1990s, some schools - even Taft, our 'lead school,' - were beginning to balk at sending their financial aid. Although this was a very challenging situation, to Chewonki's credit, the

Foundation never wavered in its commitment to fund diverse MCS communities.

TEACHER VISITS: At some point in the mid-1990s, we began to formally invite teachers from our member schools to visit. They had always been welcome to stop by in the past, and often did, but now we sent out specific invitations. I think Dave Liebmann was the first to suggest doing this, at first as a way to spread the word about the program, and then to ‘educate’ our member school contacts. It wasn’t unusual for schools to assume that the Maine Coast Semester was ‘just the right’ program for students who were struggling emotionally at their home schools. I can remember some school leaders saying that they encouraged a particular student to apply because “Chewonki will do wonders for him.” This is not the population that the Maine Coast Semester was intended to serve, so inviting teachers to visit classes, share a meal or two, and attend a faculty meeting or special event was invaluable. Over the years, a great many ‘friends of MCS’ came to enjoy their trips to Chewonki Neck. One such faculty member who visited every semester, year after year, is now on the Chewonki Foundation Board of Trustees.

WORK PROGRAM: This continued to be a hugely varied experience for students. During the winter months, students worked in the woodlot hauling, splitting, and stacking, with a few students being lucky enough to learn how to drive the horse to twitch the downed trees. A small number of students were also given the opportunity to use chainsaws, under strict supervision, of course. Students cleaned living spaces, repaired and built buildings, raked lots of leaves, pruned apple trees, pulled boats and docks, helped to wash and service vans, and did repair work on the wooden boats. They also had the chance to install solar panels, winterize buildings, tap maple trees and boil the sap, press apples into cider, and “brew” bio-diesel fuel. In later semesters, early in the fall, students would often head to math teacher Bill Hinckley’s Red House Farm in Waldoboro to harvest organic blueberries. In rotating crews, students would rake the berries, cut birches encroaching on the fields, and finally winnow the berries with an old-fashioned, but still working, mechanical winnower. One of the great benefits of work program was the relationship students developed with non-teaching staff who were experts in their fields, and who were also great teachers in their own right. Students loved being assigned to the Outreach program, and learned to handle and feed and clean the cages for the owls, the lizards and turtles, and other reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Likewise, the Renewable Energy folks were superstars in the eyes of many of the students. Working with Peter Arnold, Tom Twist, and others was a real treat for them.

THE COMMUNITY: The cabin living experience, which at first was by necessity and eventually became the norm, lies at the heart of the Maine Coast Semester. Unlike traditional dormitories, though, students at the Maine Coast Semester are forced to interact with each other every day. They simply don't have the option of going into their own room and shutting the door, thereby ignoring conflict. At MCS, students learn 'give and take' in the cabin, to be respectful of every other cabin member's needs, and to talk honestly and openly. They also learn to light and tend the wood stove, and they discover, through experience, what happens if they don't do it well or consistently. Of course, it doesn't always go well; it can often be a real struggle. More than one cabin has turned out to be pretty dysfunctional, even after lots of faculty mentoring. While not dismissing these issues, cabin living has proved to be very important for most Maine Coast Semester students, and many teachers have valued their experience as cabin parents.

Along with the cabin, community is built in the dining hall, on wilderness trips, in school meetings, and on Saturday nights when students put on special activities from coffee houses to skits to scavenger hunts to game nights, and more. For many years, music was an extremely important part of every semester. Students would arrive with everything from guitars and mandolins, to violas and cellos, French horns and clarinets, bagpipes and accordions, and even a full-sized concert harp. Every semester, the faculty band, Cowpie and the Buffalo Chips, would play 'organically grown' rock 'n roll. And Amy Rogers, who impressed Tim on that Allagash trip long ago, led a student-faculty-staff *a cappella* group named by Mark Albee appropriately enough, the Decomposers. Tom McKeon, an accomplished illustrator as well as musician and math teacher, designed a wonderful Decomposers logo with musical notes wafting from a bucket of compost. The Decomposers performed for the celebratory gatherings with parents every semester.

SPEAKERS: Over the years, the program was fortunate to have many contacts throughout Maine, a result of previous programs like Maine Reach, as well as the personal contacts of Tim Ellis, Don Hudson, Greg Shute, Sue West, and others. One of our first speaker evenings was a debate about solid waste, an important issue in Maine at the time, between a staff member of the Natural Resources Council of Maine and Tom Sawyer, a businessman who owned a major landfill in Bangor. It was riveting. Many others—artists, environmentalists, activists, naturalists, adventurers—stopped by to speak to the students over the years. Although most of the speakers had an environmental focus, we also invited others, including parents.

Sometimes, the speakers themselves sparked new ideas. Bill McKibben visited shortly after writing *The Age of Missing Information* (1992). As a result of his talk, we developed 'McKibben

Days' for a few semesters, in which half the students would watch television in silence for a few hours in a faculty house, while the other half would go on silent hikes, and then the groups would flip. The next day we met to discuss the experience. The idea was to contrast real experiences in nature with the artificial experience provided by TV.

COLLEGE ADVISING: During the spring semesters, given that the students were juniors, we began inviting a number of our sending schools' college counselors, including deans of admission from Bates, Bowdoin, and Colby to visit campus, give a talk on Friday night, and then meet briefly with each individual student. Their goal was to diminish the anxiety surrounding college admissions, as well as to suggest how to convey the power of the MCS experience to college admissions committees. The annual visit to MCS was a highpoint for the counselors and deans. Maine Coast Semester students from public schools, often appreciated the personal attention from expert admissions counselors that was sometimes lacking in large public schools.

OPPORTUNITIES for Students, Teachers, Parents, and Schools: As MCS developed, there was some interest in trying to provide opportunities for students and alums from mixed semesters. As all schools do, we held reunions every few years. In fact, at the first reunion, following the fourth semester, three semester alums created a scholarship fund, initially designed for students from Maine, and the fund has grown substantially over the years. Although large reunions were intensive in terms of faculty energy and time, and sometime difficult to schedule with camp and other programs competing for space, they did bring students back to campus to begin the process of involving them in the future of the Chewonki Foundation.

Also, for many years, in addition to faculty retreats in order to assess the program and develop new ideas, we would go together on faculty trips down the Allagash River or to Baxter State Park. Sometimes, we used the trips to discuss program issues, and sometimes we would just use the time to relax and enjoy each others' company.

During the summer months, faculty would often take advantage of various opportunities to further their education. Funds for faculty development were used for summer courses, including help with graduate study tuitions. Of course, some of us would take the time to relax, read, enjoy the outdoors. Two faculty members paddled a tandem kayak north from Lake Champlain, down the St. Lawrence, around the Gaspé and Cape Breton, and down the coast to New York City, recreating a trip a grandparent had made in the 1920s. Another faculty member drove his ancient Land Rover from Maine to Alaska, and then down to Patagonia.

One of the most interesting and rewarding experiences took place one summer. We dubbed it ‘MCS for Parents.’ For years, many parents had said how much they wished they could have the same experience their students were enjoying. As a result, we decided to give it a go. We invited parents for a five-day program, during which they lived in cabins and took short courses in Natural Science, Literature and the Land, and Environmental Issues. The dozen parents who decided to take advantage of the opportunity also washed dishes, worked on the farm, and spent hours getting to know one another and us. We also asked them to write a letter to their child about their MCS experience, which they seemed to really enjoy. Finally, they left with an assignment: they promised to do a project that they had developed at Chewonki that would benefit others in their local communities. One parent who was active in her local Habitat for Humanity organization planned to include a small organic garden and compost system at every Habitat home built in her city.

Finally, during the summer months, programs were offered to former students, ranging from wilderness expeditions to the George River in northeastern Quebec, to a trip in Tuscany and a bicycle trip in France, and to a proposed trip to Thomas Hardy’s Wessex, in England. These opportunities mostly began under Willard Morgan’s tenure.



CHAPTER 13: STUDENTS ARRIVING; STUDENTS GOING HOME

[For this chapter, I'll mostly write in the present tense since I'm quite sure that current students experience things in much the same way as students in the first few semesters did.]

After the first couple of years of the program, I came to realize that there are three separate, but interconnected, phases to every semester: the arrival and orientation phase, the living and experiencing phase, and the leaving and settling-in back home phase. Each of these is critical to the student's experience. The first phase is full of excitement; everything is "great," everything is magical. We used to call it the honeymoon period. But the students' energies are not yet focused and the community has not yet come together in a meaningful way.

I wrote earlier about students arriving and of sharing my vision for the community with them. They arrive wide-eyed, sometimes a little scared, certainly nervous, as well as hopeful and excited, with questions swirling: What is it going to be like? Will I make friends in my cabin? Will I like my teachers? Can I do the physical work? I'm sure that for some students, the almost mile-long drive to campus, with the white pines lining and hemming in the road, must be overwhelming. Of course, their worries are no different than any new boarding school student's, but there are naturally many more unknowns. The stakes are perhaps a bit higher. Amy Rogers described opening day this way:

Each August and January, you arrive as predictably as the shortening and lengthening days, carrying trunks and lamps, and Crazy Creeks, excited and nervous. Skeptically or eagerly, you eye Gillies or Orchard or Hilltop or Ranch or Binnacle or South Hall, calculating which creaky iron bed seems the likeliest. I know that within a day or two the place will look as if you had always lived there—but [you] never know just what lies ahead that semester. The parts are familiar, but the whole is full of surprises, different—and exhilarating—every time. *(The Maine Coast Semester Ten Year Directory)*

The early meetings during the first days are so important as the students meet their advisors, learn the routine and the expectations, and begin to settle in. The first afternoon, after parents are (gently) asked to leave, teachers and students circle up for the first time, and after doing a few get-to-know-you games, head to Wallace for the first meal (for which place cards are used in order to remove the nervousness about where to sit). In the spring semester, some faculty wash the dishes the first night so that others can meet the students in their cabins to teach them how to

light and tend the wood stove, and how to stay safe with it. Finally, after a few more games and introductions in the Ellis Room, we break into advisory groups of three to four students to talk about morning chores and the class schedule. At an earlier than normal check-in time that first night, the cabin parents arrive for the first cabin meeting.

(I would often try to imagine what the students were thinking that first night as they settled down to bed, with so much excitement, anticipation, and with absolute exhaustion.)

The next few days are purposely busy with morning chores, the first work program (usually stocking the Dumont room with wood in the spring semester, or harvesting crops on the farm in the fall semester), tours of the campus, learning names, and attending endless school meetings to build the vision and go over the expectations. The students learn to wipe down and set a table, to mop a floor and plunge a toilet, to tend the wood furnace, to wash dishes, to gather the days' news and weather data. In the spring semester, they learn how to get to the farm at 6:00 am, in the February cold and dark. The first Saturday morning, they usually experience their first Polar Bear plunge into Montsweag Brook.

In the fall semester, after about 10 to 15 days of classes, the students go on a wilderness trip, which provides an opportunity for adventure and to further build the community. The fall canoe trip is very much part of the beginning phase of the Maine Coast Semester. It tends to shake up the cliques that are naturally forming by this point in the semester, but which we always try to guard against for the sake of the larger community. In the first few years, since the spring semester canoe trip came near the end of the semester, the rhythm of the fall and spring semester was a bit different, but currently, with students going on winter trips, they are more similar.

And then the living experience phase of the semester begins for the next 14 or so weeks. Although the routine of classes, chores, and work program without a break can become a grind, it is perhaps the richest part of the semester, where fast friends are made, where new ideas are hatched and tested, where they find their voices and develop self-reliance, independence, and joy. By the end of the semester, the community is almost always at its strongest and most vibrant.

The final phase of every semester—the leaving and settling-in back home—is just as important as the beginning and the middle, but is often more challenging and more difficult for the students to navigate. The final few days of the semester are such a blur of tears, raw emotions, and anticipation, that it is often very hard for students to put the experience into perspective. It takes time for the Maine Coast Semester experience to sink in, sometimes months or even years.

It is not uncommon for students to feel sad for a period of time when they arrive home; this is not at all surprising given all the re-adjustments they have to make with parents, friends, and their schools and communities. Often, the returning students are sure—even to the point of obnoxiousness—that they have all ‘the answers,’ that everything was better at Chewonki, that nothing else can possibly measure up. Sometimes, they actually lose friends who simply can’t understand what their returning friend has just experienced, or who have heard way too much about the semester program. Often, returning students have matured quite a bit, while their peers are pretty much the same as they were four months earlier; old friends are sometimes dropped as a result, and new ones are taken up.

We often hear from parents: “He’s washing the dishes and taking out the trash without being asked!” “She seems more interested and hard-working.” “We’ve become better friends.” “He’s grown up so much!” In the end, students usually come to understand more about themselves, their newfound interests and friends. Invariably, they usually go on to have a terrific senior year and then a successful college or university experience.

More students and parents than I can possibly count have told me that the Maine Coast Semester experience was “transformational” or “life-changing.” The overwhelming anecdotal evidence bears this out. Andy Barker spoke eloquently about this phase in the Ten Year Directory:



Perhaps it is not going too far to say that our work here at MCS is a work of transformation, built on change itself, and calling forth change. In this regard, MCS is truly a ‘program,’ not a ‘product,’ an almost-recipe made again and again with slightly different ingredients each time. This view embraces change in that it asks students and faculty to be producers, not merely consumers: making compost, analyzing Chewonki’s electricity use, building new staff cabins in work program, and even selecting the students...who will follow...MCS is a sourdough starter kit, turning out a new loaf twice a year, a growing living mold of a program...

CHAPTER 14: TIM ELLIS RETIRES;

DON HUDSON TAKES THE HELM

In spring 1991, after six semesters of the Maine Coast Semester, Tim Ellis made the decision to retire from Chewonki. It was a momentous decision for Tim, of course, but also more broadly for Chewonki. For so many of us, Tim had been larger than life, a mentor, an inspiration, and it was simply hard to imagine Chewonki without him. Of course, typical of Tim, this was not to be a sit-back-with-the-feet-up kind of retirement; he would go on to do some consulting for various educational endeavors, but also to found GlobalQuest, a semester program in Thailand. The first semester of this new venture was designed for gap-year students and the second semester was for high-school juniors. Tim had always been interested in international education from his time teaching in Switzerland. For years, he had worked to form partnerships with programs in other parts of the world, the Komi Region of what was the Soviet Union at the time, for example. With the program in Thailand, he would get his chance.

A search was conducted for the new Executive Director and in the end, Don Hudson was chosen to succeed Tim. A new era began.

With his new responsibilities, Don had a tough time fully committing to his natural science course. He certainly tried his best, but he was frequently called away just as he was about to head off for a field trip with a van full of waiting students. To help him, another science teacher, Zoe Richards, was hired, followed by Suzie Bird when Zoe moved on. Suzie eventually took over the Natural Science course. Don tried very hard to maintain his relationship with MCS, and was always involved, leading bird walks and giving weekly bird quizzes, for instance. One of Don's legacies is that to this day, the Natural History of the Maine Coast is essentially the course he developed.

Once Don became President, Chewonki experienced tremendous growth, both physically, with new construction, and in terms of additional staff. New faculty houses were built during this period, but also, and most importantly, the Center for Environmental Education was constructed. This building contained much-needed indoor classrooms for the Environmental Education program (now used mostly for the Chewonki Elementary and Middle School), a permanent home for Outreach, and a large indoor space that could be used for presentations. MCS would often

use this space ‘under the whale’ for parents nights, speakers, the art show, contradances, and sometimes evening coffeehouses. At the same time, there was an inevitable fracturing of the tight-knit staff community as some offices were relocated from the original campus cluster of buildings around the quad.

Under Don’s leadership, Chewonki greatly expanded its satellite properties: coastal islands, the campground at the Big Eddy on the West Branch of the Penobscot river, the Wood Cove property near Jackman, and eventually the camps on Fourth Debsconeag Lake. These would all prove to be useful and fabulous destinations for Maine Coast Semester trips, as increasingly, MCS students got to see more of Maine.



Don also increased Chewonki’s presence in Maine, something that had started with Tim, of course. Don served on a number of boards, and was an advisor to various interest and stewardship groups, from the Allagash River to Baxter State Park, and he became involved with the International Appalachian Trail. Don also served on the Maine Yankee decommissioning committee, and was instrumental in getting the Montsweag Brook dam removed, thus restoring fish migration to the stream that borders the west side of Chewonki Neck. He and Greg Shute expanded Chewonki trips to include Labrador and the Arctic. Under Don, Chewonki experienced its greatest period of growth.

CHAPTER 15: SCOTT STEPS DOWN

In the spring of 2004, after 32 semesters leading the Maine Coast Semester, I stepped down as director. I was still fully immersed in and rewarded by my teaching, but the administrative and leadership responsibilities as director had become more routine and a bit less challenging. It had been an exhausting 17 years and I needed a change. Also, I had begun to think that it was time for someone new to take over, someone who would bring fresh energy, imagination, and commitment to the program.

So what to do? I was still attached to the Maine Coast Semester emotionally and intellectually, and I loved the students and my classes. I wanted to see MCS continue to succeed. Also, I wished to eventually finish my career in the classroom; teaching was always closest to my heart. My hope was that I would be able to stay on as the U.S. history teacher and a full faculty member, but that would be a bit unusual, and it would be understandable if Chewonki chose not to go that route.

At some point that year, Don and I sat down to discuss my future. Don was very supportive and I remember him saying, “We’ll make it work.” A subsequent issue of the *Chewonki Chronicle*, stated: “Leave it to Chewonki president and chief optimist Don Hudson to have seen the advantages right from the start: ‘We lose a director...but we retain a master of his art, and we get him back in the classroom full-time!’” I am greatly appreciative that he took the risk of having the founding director remain on the faculty.

Shortly thereafter, Chewonki launched a search for a new Director. Appropriately, I was not involved in the search. At the same time, Chewonki used the opportunity of my stepping down to start a faculty development fund in my name. Meanwhile, I worked to leave the position in good shape.

The Maine Coast Semester was well established and most aspects ran smoothly. It was still fresh in many ways. However, there were things in need of particular attention. The first was to achieve some sort of accreditation. Some years earlier, we had applied to become accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, but had been turned down because, as a semester school, MCS simply didn’t meet all the requirements. I seem to remember that at the time the NEASC by-laws stated that schools must have at least a two-year program and ‘graduate’ students.

NEASC, though, was encouraging and urged us to keep in touch; the organization was in the process of reviewing its rules, and with more semester programs coming on-line, and with other semester programs having already been accepted by their regional accrediting organizations, it was really just a matter of time. I was not convinced that becoming accredited would make any great difference practically; it was a very rare school that refused to accept the MCS transcript. Nevertheless, it was still something to work toward. Three years later, MCS finally achieved accreditation.

A second problem was admissions. The first few years of the program were perhaps misleading, when the number of tenth graders applying was really quite overwhelming. Some years almost 200 applications arrived for 72 or so spots. This caused public relations problems with parents, and with students who had looked forward to attending the program. We did want to be selective, but for several years it was a bit too much. However, at some point, probably beginning in the mid-to-late 1990s, applications began to slip, and by the time I stepped down, we were receiving just about the number applications needed to fill each semester while maintaining a short waiting list. As I wrote earlier, while one might expect the quality of applicants to have diminished, that was not the case; I saw no difference in terms of academic ability between the bumper crop years and later semesters. Indeed, only students who really wanted the experience, and who were naturally a bit more mature, tended to apply. On the other hand, we held our breath every February as applications began to arrive, and they didn't always arrive at the deadline. So this was a problem that would need to be worked on.

As to why applications diminished, some of the answers were fairly obvious. MCS was no longer the shiny new program it had once been. By then, more semester schools had opened their doors, providing more competition. Also, MCS and a couple of other programs had clearly demonstrated that semester school students tended to return to their home schools academically well-prepared, thus making programs that were a bit less traditional than the Maine Coast Semester and the Mountain School, like the Island School and the Rocky Mountain Semester, safe options for students, and thus increasing competition between all programs. Also, member schools were no longer as important as they once had been. Some of them had essentially stopped sending students, so we had to travel more widely. Of course, that meant that we served more schools and were geographically more broad, but recruiting was tougher. We experimented with new ways to get the word out, and perhaps we could have done better in this area. After I stepped down, MCS finally hired its first full-time admissions director. Still, applications were never again as numerous as they once had been.

A number of candidates applied to become the new Director, and eventually, Willard Morgan was chosen to become the Maine Coast Semester's second director. I would continue to teach for another nine years, finally retiring in 2014 after 54 semesters, and 36 years total as an employee of the Chewonki Foundation.

The transition to full-time teaching was hard at first. I was so used to being in the center of planning and the development of new ideas that it was disorientating at first to not be in the loop. But on the other hand, it was wonderful to finally have the time to really concentrate on my classes. I tried hard to stay out of Willard's way, to let him chart his own path, to make his own mistakes and create his own successes. I'm sure I was not always successful, but for the most part I was able and happy to settle into my new role.



FINAL THOUGHTS

A bit earlier this past fall, a large group of former Maine Coast Semester faculty gathered together at Mark and Ingrid Albee's house in New Hampshire. Most of us had worked together in the early and mid-1990s in what with some hubris we sometimes think of as the Maine Coast Semester's halcyon days. All of us who worked together at that time have wonderful memories of those days.

We gathered that beautiful sunny day for a pot-luck meal, followed, of course, by music. Many of us brought musical instruments, and I had put together a binder full of the old songs we used to sing. Of course, we started off, at Mark's suggestion, by standing in a circle around a table loaded with good food, holding hands, and singing *Simple Gifts*.

Whether this period of time in the life of the Maine Coast Semester was somehow more special than any other time would be an entirely subjective judgment of course, and in the end it doesn't really matter. Those days are long past; we are now much older—wiser perhaps?—and our lives have certainly changed. However, I'm quite sure that those of us who gathered at Mark and Ingrid's feel pretty good about our work and the time we spent at the Maine Coast Semester. We know that we created something unique and important; we know that we positively influenced our students. I am very proud of what we accomplished.

I've been retired about 10 years now and rarely get over to Chewonki. I still miss my teaching and have substituted the desire to teach by becoming a tour guide and docent at the Maine Maritime Museum. I look back on my days at Chewonki with amazement. In many ways, as the song *I Knew This Place* suggests, Chewonki is where I grew up. It's where I learned to take responsibility not just for myself, but for others. It's where "I learned to use my hands and hear my heart." Chewonki, and Tim specifically, encouraged this; he gave me (us) permission to experiment, to make mistakes, to live every day to the fullest. Sue and I often remark to each other that we had the best job in the world. Every day was a challenge; every day was different; most days were great fun. Where else could we have met such wonderful colleagues and fabulous students? Where else would we have had so many varied experiences? Where else could we have done such consistently *important* work? In almost three and a half decades, I cannot remember a single day that I regretted having to go to work.

Not long ago, Sue and I were asked to speak to the current students (semester 67) about the early days of the program. As we took questions at the end, one student asked: "What did you learn

from the students?” It took me a moment to gather my thoughts: What an amazingly perceptive and challenging question! Of course, I learned all sorts of specific things from students: a new song, a different fly pattern, a mountain biking technique (when I was *much* younger), how to set up and tune my bagpipes. But the larger lessons are harder to list because they are so intertwined over so many semesters and with so many students. Perhaps, though, the very question illustrates what I learned—how intelligent and curious these students are; how much they crave being given responsibility; how capable they are; how hopeful and optimistic, and how strong they are.

I’d like to end with an ancient Sanskrit blessing by the poet Kalidasa that I first learned shortly after arriving at Chewonki in 1978. Tim Ellis would always recite it at Sunday Service under the Pine Tree during camp, and would also deliver it at the fall Harvest dinner and the spring semester Celebratory dinner. When Tim left, Don took up the tradition. For some reason, though, it never quite caught on at the Maine Coast Semester to the extent I would have liked. Still, it was always meaningful to me and many others, and it speaks to my own experience and about what I learned about how to approach life as a leader, teacher, and participant at the Maine Coast Semester:

Look to this day, for it is life,
The very life of life.
In its brief course lie all the realities and verities of existence:
The bliss of growth, the glory of action, the splendor of beauty.
For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision,
But today, well-lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness,
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to *this* day.

TIME-LINE

1982	Maine Reach ends
1983-6	Chewonki's first capital fund drive; new facilities constructed
1986	Semester program approved the Chewonki staff and Board; Scott and Sue invited to consider returning to run the program
1987	Scott returns to ramp-up the new Maine Coast Semester
1988, Fall	MCS I students arrive, 29 students, 8 faculty; First faculty: Scott, Sue, Amy Rogers, Margaret Mathis, Matthew Pilot, Tom Gordon, Don Hudson, Tim and Margaret Ellis.
1989, Spring	MCS II students arrive, Hilltop Dorm completed.
1990, Spring	MCS Scholarship Fund established.
1991, Spring	MCS VI; Tim and Margaret Ellis retire from Chewonki; Don Hudson becomes new Executive Director.
1994	Duke, the first draft horse, arrived.
1995, Spring	The "Great Stranding." On the way to Castle Island for the Spring Semester canoe trip, fierce winds blew all groups to Oak Island, where we were marooned for three days, unable to leave; Article about MCS in <i>Independent School</i> magazine.
1996, Spring - 1997, Fall	South Hall & Pete Gillies cabins, and the maintenance pole barn built; All students in wood-heated cabins for the first time.
1999	Full-day science exam at Reid State Park developed.
2001, Fall	Many students from New York City and surrounding area affected by the attack on the World Trade Center; by the end of the day, every student had been able to speak to their parents.
2004, Fall	Scott Andrews steps aside as director; Willard Morgan becomes new director.
2005, Spring	Winter trips are added to the program.
2006, Fall - 2007, Fall	Students build Gordy Hall cabin.
2007, Fall	MCS is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the third semester school in the country to be accredited; Teaching Fellows program started; Sustainability lessons formally added to curriculum.

2008, August	More than 300 alumni and former faculty gather for a 20 year reunion.
2009, Fall	Maine Coast Semester changes its name to Chewonki Semester School.
2010, Spring	Don Hudson retires; Willard Morgan becomes new president; Math teacher Bill Hinkley becomes Interim Head of School.
2011, Fall	Ann Carson becomes new Head of School.
2012, Fall	A new milk room ensures fresh milk, yogurt, and cheese from the farm.
2013, Spring	As semester 50 concludes, alumni now number 1,740.
2014, Spring	Scott retires.
2021, Spring	Sue retires.

FACULTY

MCS I - MCS XX

Scott Andrews	Director, History	Fall '88, MCS I
Tim Ellis	Executive Director	
Margaret Ellis	Head of Health Care	
Tom Gordon	Farm Manager	
Don Hudson	Natural Science	
Margaret Mathis	Mathematics	
Matthew Pilot	French and Spanish	
Amy Rogers	English	
Sue West	Art, Environmental Issues	
Cindy Kaplan	French	Fall '89, MCS III
Lucille Meltz	Spanish	
Chris Beattie	Farm Intern	Spring '90, MCS IV
Arthur Cady	Farm	Fall '90, MCS V
Ted Heavenrich	Mathematics	
Sarah Kirby	Farm	
Mark Albee	Farm Manager	Spring '91, MCS VI
Ingrid Albee	Head of Health Care	
Sarah Glass	French, Ceramics	Fall '91, MCS VII
Dave Liebmann	Administration, EI	
Tom McKeon	Mathematics	
Zoe Richards	Natural Science	
Lisette Robinson	Farm	
Josh Brown	English	Fall '92, MCS IX
Mitch Levesque	Intern	
Jen Williams	Spanish	
Andy Barker	Farm, History	Fall '93, MCS XI
Karol Clark	Spanish	
Ed Barker	French Teacher	Fall '94, MCS XIII
Brandon Stafford	Intern, Mathematics	Fall '96, MCS XV
Danielle Gustafson	Spanish	Spring '96, MCS XVI
Heidi Dixon	Mathematics	Fall '96, MCS XVII
Suzie Bird	Science	
Dan Dostie	Farm Intern	
Brad Johnson	Administration, EI, Farm, Farm Manager	
Torrey McMillan	Administration	Spring '97, MCS XVIII

Emily LeVan
Jennifer Sanders
Don Schuman

Spanish
French
English

Fall '97, MCS XIX

ADDENDA

Since I wrote this history of the Maine Coast Semester, memories keep flooding back, especially after talking with some of the people to whom I gave copies. At the very least, writing I Knew This Place has been a great exercise in memory recall. The following notes are an attempt to rectify the omissions.

RELATIONSHIPS: As we developed the initial expectations for MCS, the first iteration was obvious; all of them had to do with health, safety, academic honesty, and adhering to the laws of the State of Maine. Other than some check-in and cabin visiting rules, they were really no different than what would be found in any school.

Two students forming an exclusive relationship or friendship would prove to have implications for the community that we simply never anticipated. I am not talking about sexual activity, which was not permitted, but more about tight friendships developing within the context of such a small community. During the first canoe trip two students began to form a relationship. We didn't really know quite how to handle it, but the incident gave the faculty an inkling that the issue was something that we would have to figure out how to confront. Not long after we returned to campus, a high school-aged group that was traveling throughout the Northeast stopped by Chewonki a for a day or two. What was quickly obvious was that every student in the group was in an exclusive relationship. During those few days, we almost never saw their entire group together as a community; they were always in couples sitting off by themselves. Even at such an early stage of their MCS experience, as they were just beginning to form their own community, the students were repelled by that program's complete lack of community.

So, we began to realize that this was potentially a pretty big issue, and it was thorny. As a result we began to develop expectations surrounding exclusive relationships. What we meant by this was the fact that if we allowed cliques or even exclusive friendships to develop, it could negatively affect the community by making other students feel awkward, and the exclusiveness would also rob the 'couple' of the benefits of being fully invested members of the MCS community. This is a pretty tough concept to get across to a bunch of 16-year old students, so we worked on it very hard in countless school meetings. We didn't address 'violations' through disciplinary intervention, but rather through advisor/advisee chats. Naturally, there were students who did form close relationships, but who learned how to be open to the entire community, and not exclusive in any way; no one ever felt awkward around them.

MORNING CHORES and MORNING MEETING: In the first few years of the Maine Coast Semester, morning chores did not begin with a 'gather.' That tradition would be established later. Chores took place every morning except Sundays (including Saturdays in the early semesters), for about 15-20 minutes before breakfast. Students would show up at their chore on the first day to receive instruction. The idea was that students would be well-taught by the faculty and eventually learn to complete the work on their own during the two-week block, but also that faculty would work together with the students as their schedules permitted. Chores included cleaning the bathrooms, sweeping and setting the dining room tables, firing the wood furnace, cleaning the classrooms and social spaces, emptying trash and recycling, collecting the day's news and weather, and sometimes gardening or snow shoveling, depending on the season. Farm chores were the most critical morning chore, of course, and started 15 minutes earlier than other chores. Was the system problem-free? Oh no. Students were sometimes late to their chores and sometimes the chores were poorly done. In general, though, the system worked pretty well, and the students grew more and more accomplished; even more importantly, the students gained more and more pride in doing a good job as the semester went on. By the last week of every semester, when we would carry out what would eventually be called 'super chores' to completely clean the MCS facilities, the students largely took on the responsibility themselves and did an outstanding job.

A short morning meeting took place every morning immediately following breakfast. It was an informal affair sitting (or piled) around the Flintstone couches, and it allowed us to get the day started. The Plato of the day would call the meeting to order, usually starting with a thought or quotation. Whomever was responsible for news and weather gave the report and then it was time for announcements. Sometimes there might be music, a skit, or demonstrations about how to plunge a toilet or dress for winter weather, work program, or science field trip. In my opinion, the best morning meetings were when students made the majority of announcements because it showed how they were beginning to take responsibility for their experience; the worst were when the faculty did most of the talking.

GRADUATION, HARVEST DINNER, CELEBRATION DINNER: During the years I was at MCS, the final week of every semester was a whirlwind of meetings, final chores and cleaning, packing, Farm Olympics, and other special events. The 'graduation' ceremony was always held two nights before the students left. The reason for this was because the ceremony was quite intimate and personal, often long and teary, and not appropriate for friends or family to attend. At the end of the ceremony, the faculty would often sing *I Knew This Place*, and 'diplomas' would be handed out by every student's advisor. The Phine Ewing stippled pen and ink drawing of the heron that is on the cover of this history, was on the diploma certificate.

In the fall, parents would arrive for a Harvest dinner just before the Thanksgiving break and a number of activities designed to illustrate and show off the students' experience would be held during the day and in the evening before the students would leave the next morning. The activities might begin with a polar bear plunge, which parents were invited to join. They were also invited to join a dish crew and many took us up on that. There were usually workshops and activities of various kinds run by the students, which they had been planning for weeks in advance. To my mind, these family weekends were an important part of the 'leaving/settling-in at home' part of the MCS experience. Sue West always put up an art show for parents. Even non-art students and faculty could submit their own work, such as knitting, science field notebooks, carvings, tied fishing flies, and more. After dinner and dish crew, everyone would gather for a slide show (in the Wallace in the earliest years), a farm talk about everything that the students had accomplished during the semester, readings from student journals, and a performance by the Decomposers. In contrast with the fall, when parents generally did not return at the end of the semester because of the Thanksgiving break three weeks earlier, we had a Celebratory Weekend at the end of the semester; in most respects it was identical to the fall.

SCHOOL MEETINGS: From the first semester, we made sure to set aside an hour each week for an all-school meeting to talk about how our community was doing, using the Quaker meeting model. Usually, we would sit in a circle on the floor of the Ellis room, although sometimes we'd pile into the Social Room or meet outside. The topics were often about study hours, the amount of homework teachers were assigning, community expectations (and the breaking of those expectations), cabin issues, cliques, the student-faculty relationship, or students feeling left out from the community. One school meeting was always about the upcoming solo, another about wilderness trips, and another about the parents' weekends. Although at first the faculty generated the agenda and led the meetings, early on we began to help students take ownership for them. We found, though, that sometimes it was hard for some students to speak up on their own, especially if their ideas ran counter to what the most vocal students were expressing (not wanting to be disturbed during study hours, for example), so we began to plan ahead, to create a more specific agenda, asking what issues were important to the students, and coming up with questions to jumpstart the conversation. Sue and a number of other teachers over the years, put huge amounts of energy into the school meetings, and were especially involved with helping students to craft the meetings, often meeting over lunch to plan them. When advisors heard about conflicts or concerns, they could sometimes coach a student to join with others to bravely bring up an issue at the school meeting. Sometimes, just putting a concern into the spotlight would be enough to resolve it; other times, we had to revisit the issue and work more creatively.

Faculty often spoke from the heart, about why honesty or trust mattered to them and why they chose to work at MCS, where a stronger, more respectful relationship was possible between faculty and students. Students also spoke of their anger, disappointment, or other feelings, often directed pointedly at faculty or administrators, but sometimes bravely toward other students who may have caused harm. The faculty worked hard to absorb and respect students' anger, helping them to process strong feelings with respectful dialogue. This often helped the community move forward and build stronger bonds and more respect.

To me, the tenor or spirit of the meeting was what was important and most interesting. Learning to wait until someone had something to bring up—not being afraid of the silence—was important, as was allowing the conversation to flow naturally or sometimes meander. We had to learn to gently guide the discussion, and especially the outcomes, and to accept that we could not always come to an agreement or resolve a conflict. We had to learn how to protect the community at large from what I sometimes thought of as ‘the tyranny of the minority,’ those students who were particularly vocal and self-confident, but not always sensitive to the (more silent) majority. And we had to learn to support the few voices who were brave enough to name a problem that the majority wanted to sweep under the rug. Students (and faculty) reacted in various ways to the meetings. Some loved them and saw them as vital to building the community; others found them frustrating.

To me, school meeting was a hugely important time each week, and I did not mind that it was



sometimes messy and frustrating. When they worked well, school meetings were vital to the strength of the Maine Coast Semester community.