

A scenic view of a lake and forest seen through a path in a wooded area. The path is made of gravel and leads towards a large body of water in the distance. The water is surrounded by dense green trees and foliage. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

The Call of the Wild

A historic home provides the perfect setting for communing with nature,
practicing yoga, and connecting with self

by Donna Amrita Davidge

At the beginning of the last century, my great-grandfather, William Windgate Sewall, had been a nature guide for the young, though sickly, Theodore Roosevelt. Their lifelong friendship blossomed due, in large part, to the future president's healthful restoration in the fresh air of Maine's north woods. Sewall was credited with his friend's robust recovery; and eventually, our family home became a landmark and a part of American history. But in the last years of the 20th century, my family legacy was up for grabs: My great-aunt had willed it to her three nephews, who were all in their 80s, and so the house and its contents would have to be sold to the highest bidder.

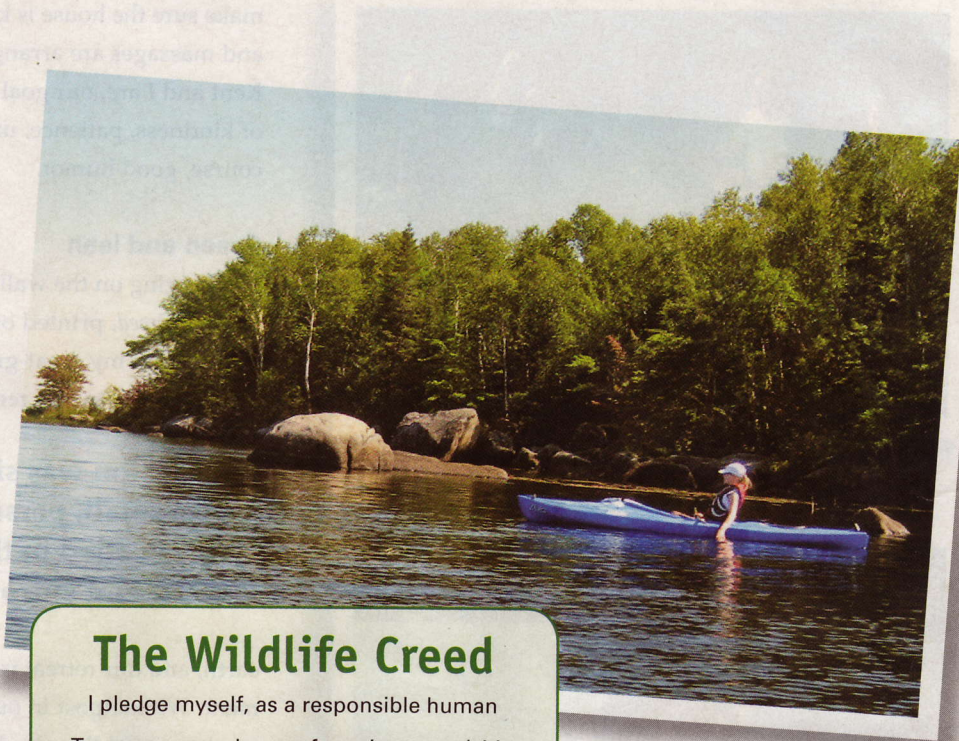
Hopeful heritage

My yoga lineage is Kundalini, led by Yogi Bhajan, who spoke a lot about legacy, especially

the importance of creating one. So, in 1997, I embarked on an adventure that would set the wheels of my own legacy in motion.

Because my years of yoga practice taught me the value of stepping out of my comfort zone, I bravely purchased my great-grandfather's home and all its contents. My vision was simple: I wanted to create a small, personalized yoga retreat nestled in the beauty of nature and surrounded by history.

I soon discovered I had a lot to learn about running a business, about yoga, and about myself. But despite the challenges—and there were plenty—I did not give up. Yogi Bhajan taught us that commitment is the first step toward happiness. So, commit I did, with all my heart and



The Wildlife Creed

I pledge myself, as a responsible human
To assume my shares of man's stewardship
of our natural resources

I will use my share with gratitude,
without greed or waste, I will respect
the rights of others and abide by the law.

I will support the sound management
of the resources we use, the restoration
of the resources we have despoiled,
and the safe keeping of significant resources
for posterity.

I will never forget that life and beauty,
wealth and progress, depend on how wisely
man uses these gifts...

The soil, the water, the air, the minerals,
the plant life, and the wild life.

This is my pledge!

with all the limited resources a yoga teacher could offer. There were no guarantees, and I was honestly afraid. But it was also exciting, and my passion helped me stay focused, and take things one step at a time.

Simple pleasures

We created Sewall House as a yoga and nature retreat, with the motto "Simplicity in a Complex World." As the hosts, my Swedish husband, Kent Bonham (who

is also the chef and resident musician), and I are there to demonstrate the principles of service. Kent often works on home-maintenance and improvement projects when not cooking or playing guitar. And my visiting New York City students are especially surprised to see me baking bread, desserts, and granola; brewing yogi tea; making beds; and hanging laundry.

I rise at 5 or 5:30am, do some kitchen work, then practice asana for an hour followed by 30 minutes of silent meditation, which guests are invited to join. After a morning hatha class from 8:30 to 10am, we serve breakfast, and my duties continue. I make sure the office is running smoothly, answer e-mails, make phone calls, pay bills, check the mail, and arrange upcoming reservations. I also



A retreat at the Sewall House combines yoga, history, and nature.



make sure the house is kept clean and the guest outings and massages are arranged. But no matter how busy Kent and I are, our goal is to be a conscious example of kindness, patience, understanding, service, and, of course, good humor.

Green and lean

Hanging on the wall inside our yoga studio door, *The Wildlife Creed*, printed on a well-worn piece of paper that belonged to my great-grandfather (see sidebar on previous page), serves as a reminder of our commitment to the

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earth, and our retreat is operated in a “green” environment. We compost in our backyard, use green cleaning products, and line-dry laundry from May until October.

Typical stays are five days, but shorter or longer times can be arranged. We use bulk soap and shampoos

to discourage waste, we do not change sheets for shorter stays, we encourage using towels more than once, and we buy organic produce from a nearby Amish community and from other local farmers.

Natural itinerary

Guests usually gather at 2:30pm for mid-day munch unless we are all on a hike or lake outing, in which case we pack lunch or cook it at the lake cabin. Sewall House serves two to eight people at a time, so our service is extremely personalized. We make every effort to help our guests feel cozy and comfortable, from little touches such as small flower bouquets in their rooms to making each yoga practice a nurturing, safe experience, even as we challenge them to progress.

Kundalini yoga begins at 5:30pm, with Kent providing the

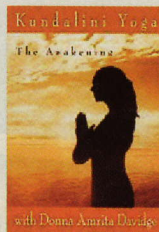


live music for the mantra and relaxation part of the class. After dinner, guests can relax, mingle, and do some quality porch-sitting before heading to bed.

We truly enjoy sharing the embrace of Sewall House. The beauty of the area, along with daily yoga practice, provides each of our guests with a unique communal experience. Just as standing postures root us, a retreat at Sewall House offers a deeper sense of history and of self, and the opportunity to have fun with like-minded people, as we learn and grow together. 🧘

Donna Amrita Davidge, a yogini since 1985, has produced several videos as well as an upcoming cookbook. For information on Sewall House, teacher-trainings, or products please call toll-free 888-235-2395 or e-mail info@sewallhouse.com or amrita@mindspring.com

Sewall House Products and Events



The Awakening (Sewall House Productions; 68 min.)

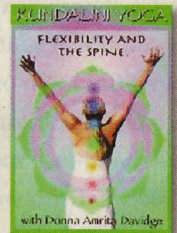
A classic Kundalini yoga DVD set that works the lower and upper energies of the body to help you feel alive and refreshed.

Flexibility and the Spine

(Sewall House Productions; 52 min.)

For any level of practitioner, this Kundalini-based DVD practice teaches

the use of long deep breathing to move the spine in all directions. Three minutes of chanting is also included. A quick pick-me-up that will leave you feeling very positive!



Both DVDs available at sewallhouse.com, yogatech.com, and amazon.com

200-Hour Teacher Training [Yoga Alliance]

October 2009, February 2010, May 2010. Limited to six people, this nine-day training is a nice alternative for those who prefer smaller groups in a residential learning environment.

Belly Dancing and Yoga Women's Retreat: August 6-10; 4-nights; \$842; all-inclusive except for lake tours and massage.

Tuscany Italy: October 27- November 2, 2009; spannocchia.org

Mount Katahdin Climb: Yoga retreat for avid hikers in August.