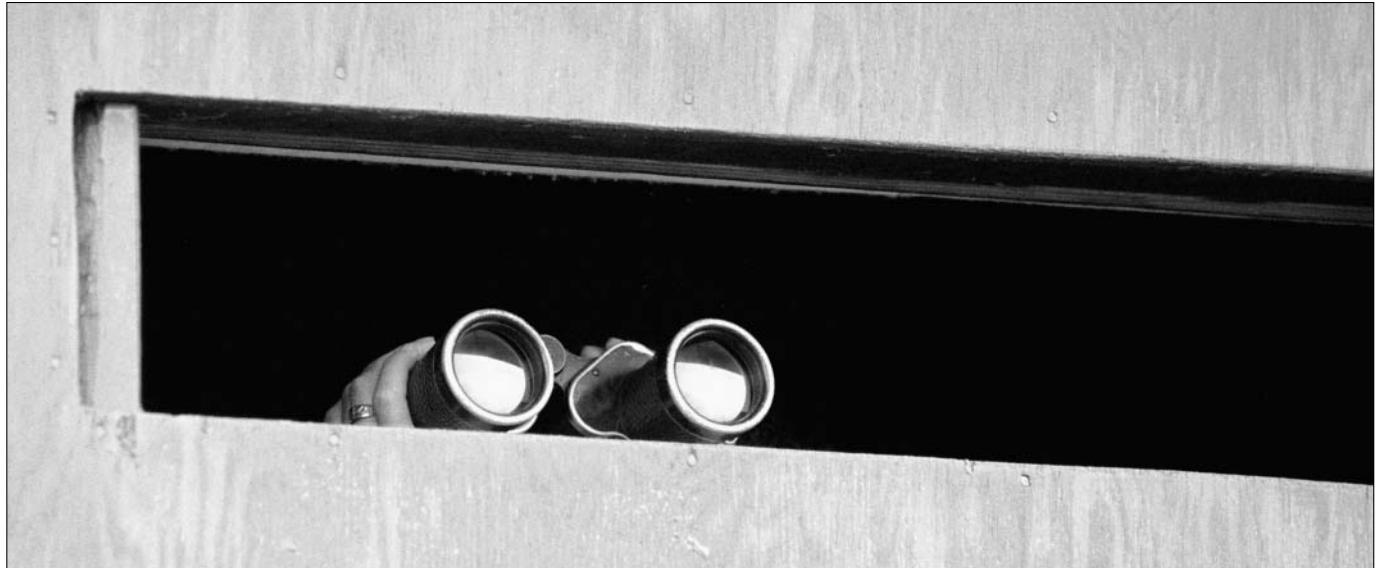


# Portfolio

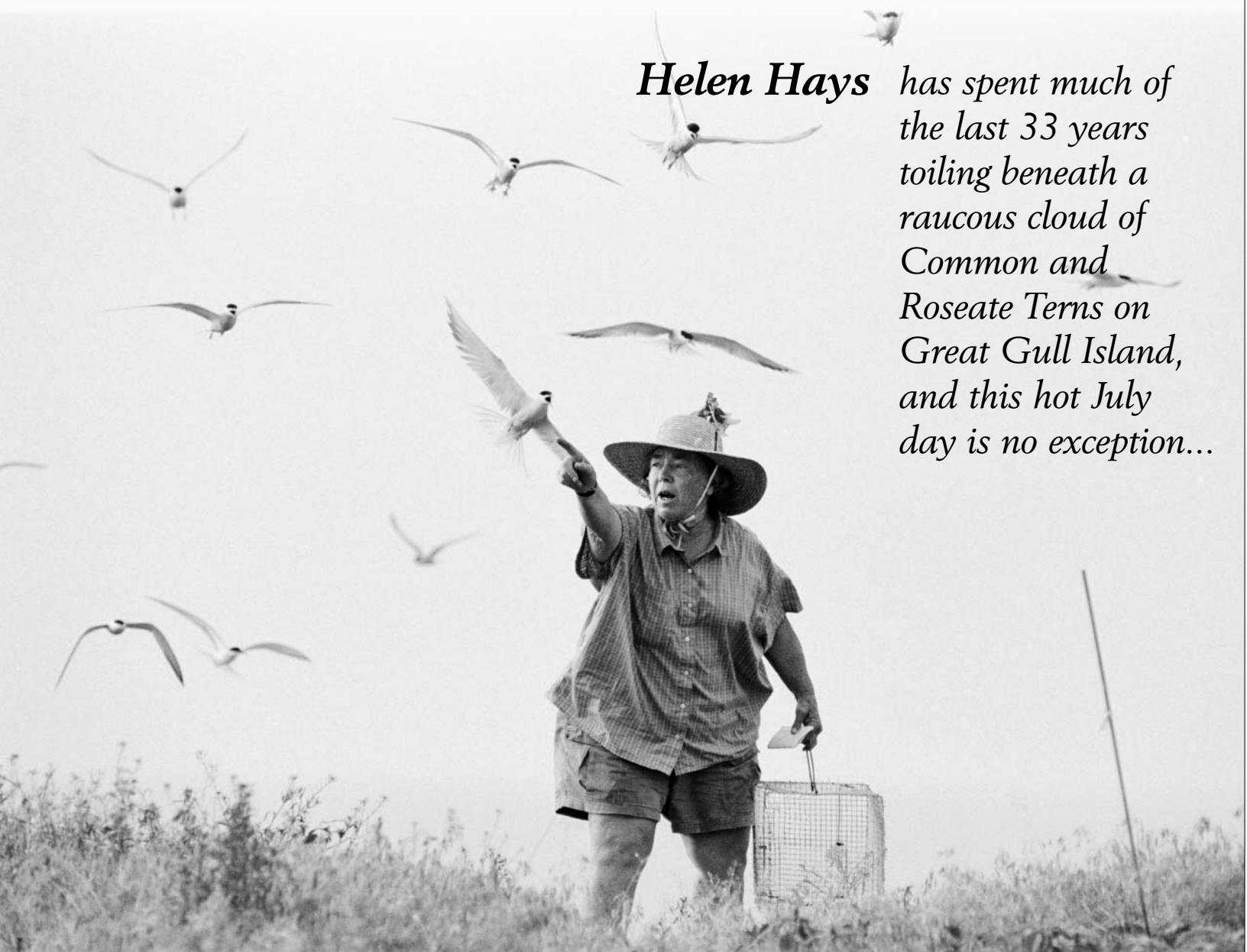


## *Article and Photographs by Greig Cranna*

*Greig Cranna, QLF's photojournalist, has been documenting QLF programs and people for 25 years.*

*During that time he has witnessed many changes at QLF. The following vignettes are not just a look back, but an attempt to explain the present and anticipate the future.*

A portfolio should show where you're going, not where you've been, an art director once told me. It was advice I tried hard to embrace at the time, but as smart as it sounded, it seemed to marginalize all the hard steps I'd labored up to reach my current state of being. Twenty-five years into my relationship with QLF, I was asked to look back at those years for this article and found myself balking at the idea. Invoking the art director's line, I felt it was more important to look forward, but as I sat down to write, it quickly became obvious that where we're going can easily be seen by viewing the past. In the photographs from those years I began to see a continuum rather than just moments in time. The programs of the last 25 years started to look like QLF's portfolio, and like my own portfolio, offered glimpses into the stages that formed the present. Looking back I see signposts that I missed along the way, for in many of these pictures and vignettes there are hints of changes to come.



**Helen Hays** has spent much of the last 33 years toiling beneath a raucous cloud of Common and Roseate Terns on Great Gull Island, and this hot July day is no exception...

With her dedicated cadre of volunteers she has trapped and banded thousands of birds on this island in Long Island Sound, vastly expanding the understanding of these two species. Today, I stand under my own cloud of bird noise and motion, with the smell of guano almost visible on the dense July air, once again watching Helen at work. To be in a seabird colony is just about my favorite thing, and I've been lucky to be in a lot of the world's great ones. It's a non-stop, near-riot of natural history activity, with birds in the air, at your feet, and often in your face. But, sometimes, in the midst of the continuous noise and relentless attacks at your head you'll be taken in by some unfolding vignette of colony life, and the chaos will

dial down to a distant hum. Today, my attention drifts from the big picture as, with little fanfare, a two-day-old chick shuffles into my foot's shadow seeking relief from the unrelenting sun. Each time I move or change my stance it carefully repositions itself and calmly sits back down. It's such an endearing little maneuver that I can't stop myself from moving my feet to watch it do it again (and again). Entranced by this little subplot, my attention drifts away from Helen, and on to the last time I was here.

Epiphanies are hard to come by these days, but as close as I've come was right here on this island two summers ago. After years of questioning QLF's slide into international programs I watched as a jubilant Argentinian volunteer held a

freshly trapped bird aloft and yelled, "It's one of ours!" Here was a bird that had been banded in Argentina during the winter vacation 5,000 miles away, and was now a living bond between two different groups in two different countries.

Since its inception on the Quebec North Shore decades ago, QLF has been about people and spinning a web that connects their different cultures. Now, continuing that tradition, QLF, through a Sounds Conservancy grant, had enabled these Argentinians to come work with Helen and "their" birds. That day, in the flash of a tern's wing, another strand was added to the web and it all began to make sense.

## Dave Ransom

*slipped the line from the dock's cleat, and with a push sent us out into the densest fog I'd ever seen...*



**N**ot fifteen feet from me in the boat, he was ghostlike, nearly lost at the tiller. Minutes earlier we had practically waded through the fog, pushing it aside as we carefully picked our way down the nearly invisible boardwalk to the pier in Harrington Harbour.

Now, under way, with the throb of the old one-lunger bouncing off the wall of fog, my brain began scrolling through disaster newsreels. You know, boats sliced in half by unseen freighters, ghost ships lost forever to wander in legendary fog banks, far from any shipping lanes. All of these scenarios seemed possible as we left the Quebec coast and began the two hour trip, radarless in a small boat, to St. Mary's Island. Greater Shearwaters and Northern Fulmars appeared from nowhere, skimmed past the boat and dissolved soundlessly into the fog. Occasionally, an invisible whale would exhale and a giant cloud of fishy breath would blanket us, hanging there as we passed through. Finding anything, even

something as big as an island seemed absurd. Using a big brass compass balanced on a case of canned goods, Dave seemed unruffled by the fog or the six or seven kids who began vomiting over the side not long after we entered the big swells.

By the time the form of the island mercifully (and miraculously) appeared two hours later, seabirds were all around us, the kids were raring to go, my fears had lifted with the fog, and I was hooked for life. Our destination this day, The Marine Bird Conservation Program, was one of a number of environmental education programs QLF was running at the time and everything about this endeavor clicked for me. Seabirds, education in an outdoor environment, incredible photographic possibilities on a remote island; a perfect package.

It was 1978, and this was my introduction to QLF and a part of the world I would see a lot of in the next 25 years. Unbeknownst to me as a

newcomer, though, was that QLF's objectives had already started to change. For over a decade, QLF had been running more traditional programs throughout the region, providing summer recreation opportunities to kids, and quietly building a large network of like-minded people. But things were changing fast in the world, and as resource and environmental issues were raising their ugly little heads even here, a change of focus seemed to be called for. QLF began bringing local kids to a camp-like education program in several locations and though "results" were hard to quantify it seemed like an obvious way to connect with the future of these often remote communities. With such a deep base of relationships in so many places, QLF found itself in a perfect position to get these programs sited, staffed, and filled with campers who would take these lessons home.



*This was the model I came to believe in, because it seemed to make so much sense...*

**I**t was hard to argue with a plan in which the very core revolved around connecting with young people early, and by instilling a deep appreciation and understanding for their surroundings, influence their decision making with the hope they will become young leaders in conservation. It was a model that would be followed well into the 80s, but even then there was change afoot.

The following summer I eased my kayak off a sandbar in Fort Kent, Maine, and with the current of the Saint John River nagging at me stroked quickly to join the three canoes already in the middle. For the next six weeks, the interns powering those boats would travel from the headwaters in Maine through Reversing Falls into Saint John Harbour, New Brunswick. None of us knew to give it a thought, but this little adventure would herald the explosive growth of internships that powered many QLF endeavors for the next 24 years.

With no staff person present, and only periodic phone check-ins, they paddled their way down the river using the canoes and their experience as a floating classroom. With them

for three weeks, I watched them work out personal and personnel problems, endure the hardships of living outdoors, and struggle to find the core ideas for their final reports. They cast a wide net that summer, going ashore regularly to track down local historians, scientists, Native Americans, fishermen, and forest workers. The river is the international border for much of its course, and we crossed between countries and cultures dozens of times, looking for information, stories, and the characters who brought them to life. The river gave up its secrets in stages, and the farther we went down, the better our understanding of it and the lives beyond its banks became. Not quite the "Poseidon Adventure," it was, nonetheless, a physically and mentally grueling trip, and just as QLF interns would find for years to come, the lessons learned were not necessarily the ones they came for. Often bent on changing the world, it seems that many interns emerged from these experiences realizing that the biggest changes were in themselves.

**H**e managed the Micmac Lodge that housed the program and left a mark on everyone who met him. Yes, there were many other people who played important roles in keeping this thing working, but Clive's was one that no understudy could step in and fill. Sure, groceries, firewood, and river transportation could be supplied by anyone, but that was just part of what Clive was. As we all went about the business of environmental education at this New Brunswick camp, Clive moved among us like an artifact from the past. He was our conduit to an earlier time, a walking classroom, giving us glimpses into the resource economy of an older New Brunswick. As New Brunswick entered the world of chain stores, malls, and fast food, Clive still relied on subsistence activities to augment the cash he earned running the Micmac Lodge. He cut pulp, hauled it with workhorses, fished for smelt under the ice, slaughtered his own beef and heated with wood. When I met Clive in 1979, these activities were fast disappearing from much of New Brunswick and I, like many other QLF people, gravitated towards him like an ethnologist would towards a dwindling tribe.

We became smoking buddies that summer, banished to the front steps of the lodge with our cigarettes to swat mosquitoes and trade stories. We spent hours that way, our conversations punctuated by the appearance of an eagle, a splash of a fish, or a boat passing below us on the lazy current. I was the eager acolyte and Clive the unwitting mentor, totally oblivious to the fascination we all felt for him. One morning I fixed the freezer door for him, and days later at his place in town he took me outside and around back to the barn. As he swung open the doors I was floored by what was, literally, a mound of well-worn hand-carved

## *Clive Wishart*

*was the heart,  
and maybe the soul*

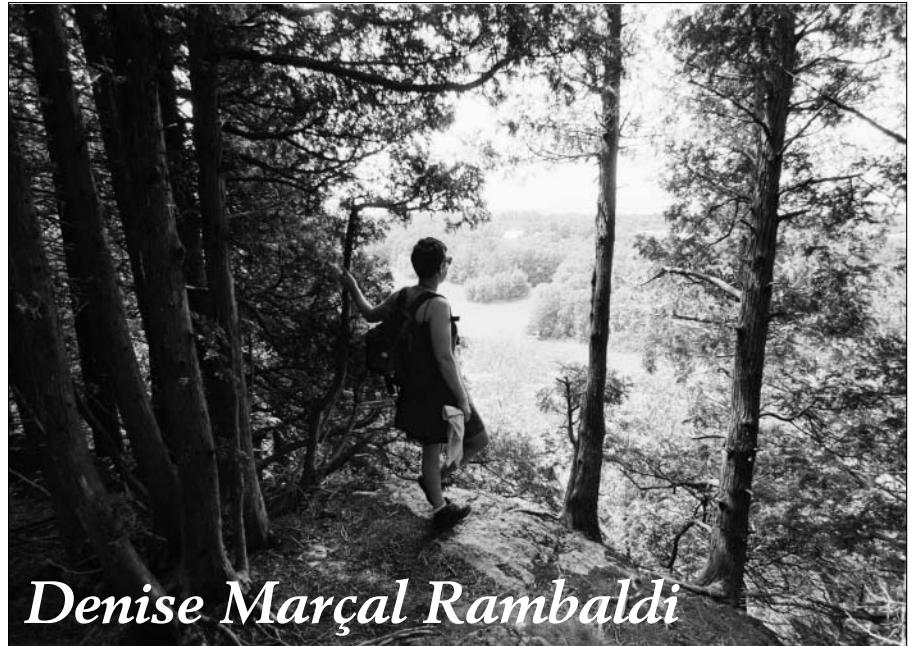
*as well, of the  
Living Rivers  
Program in the  
1970s and 80s...*



decoys. Almost aglow in the light from the door were hundreds of geese and ducks, carved over decades by his father George. The Tabusintac estuary had long been an important waterfowl stopover, and this forgotten pile spoke volumes about their importance to the local economy. But Clive wasn't giving me a history lesson, he was merely, in his own way, paying a debt. I was stunned when he turned to me and said, "Pick two for fixing the freezer." No amount of protest would dissuade him, and all these years later I see Clive when I look up at the goose above my china cabinet.

Anyone who knew Clive would have to wonder what was going on here and why I would choose this picture. Clive was not a paperwork kind of guy, as uncomfortable indoors as a trapped bird, and this picture, more than any, perhaps, signals a big sea change for QLF. It was the summer of 1986 and a devastating forest fire had just ravaged much of the Tabusintac River's watershed, laying waste to thousands of acres of timber and razing dozens of private camps. All that remained of Clive's beloved Micmac Lodge was the melted down woodstove and a pile of bricks. So, suddenly Clive had a lot of time on his hands, and was forced indoors to make sense of the business end of disaster.

For QLF it meant a temporary home for the summer at another camp, followed by the agonizing decision not to continue the program. Times were changing, and a more dynamic approach was needed. The fixed location camps like Living Rivers, and Ocean Horizons in Newfoundland, were becoming difficult to run, and were being nudged aside by movable programs and internships. Communities were increasingly wanting to run their own programs, and with the deepest Rolodex in the region, QLF had the expertise to help make them happen. This ability to connect with different cultures did not go unnoticed, and it wasn't long before they were being asked to develop similar relationships with other regions.



## *Denise Marçal Rambaldi*

*was staring through an opening  
in the trees, high on a bluff,  
when I caught up with her...*

Gazing out over the steaming marsh below, in her heavily accented English she practically whispered, "It's so quiet. It's like there's no life here at all." I was taken aback, and almost felt like I had to come to the defense of our North American ecosystem. An hour earlier, as we began to hike around this Quebec refuge, my eyes and ears were picking up action everywhere. A Virginia Rail had casually strolled across the boardwalk in front of us, a Common Yellowthroat sang and scolded from the low bushes beside us, and Marsh Wrens chattered incessantly from deep within the reeds. It was a typical day of summer birding in Southern Quebec with plenty of birds to be seen and heard by a sharp observer. But there was the difference. Denise was from Brazil, and she and her Latin American colleagues with us were used to a much bigger, flashier wildlife presence. That nearly silent American Redstart flitting high in the trees was no match for a rowdy gang of parrots blasting through the canopy, and that quietly foraging squirrel sure couldn't compete with a big cat or sloth for biomass excitement. Reptiles were nowhere to be seen, except for a couple of turtles lazily basking on a log in the marsh.

It was the first time I had ever thought about our lack of biodiversity, but it was the kind of moment I had come to expect and enjoy from these international exchanges. Our forests were like a desert to this group from Latin America, but claustrophobic to groups from the Mideast. "Too many trees," the Mideast people

cried as I took them looking for moose in Maine. They felt hemmed in by the forests, unable to see around them, but marvelled endlessly at the fresh water that seemed to be everywhere.

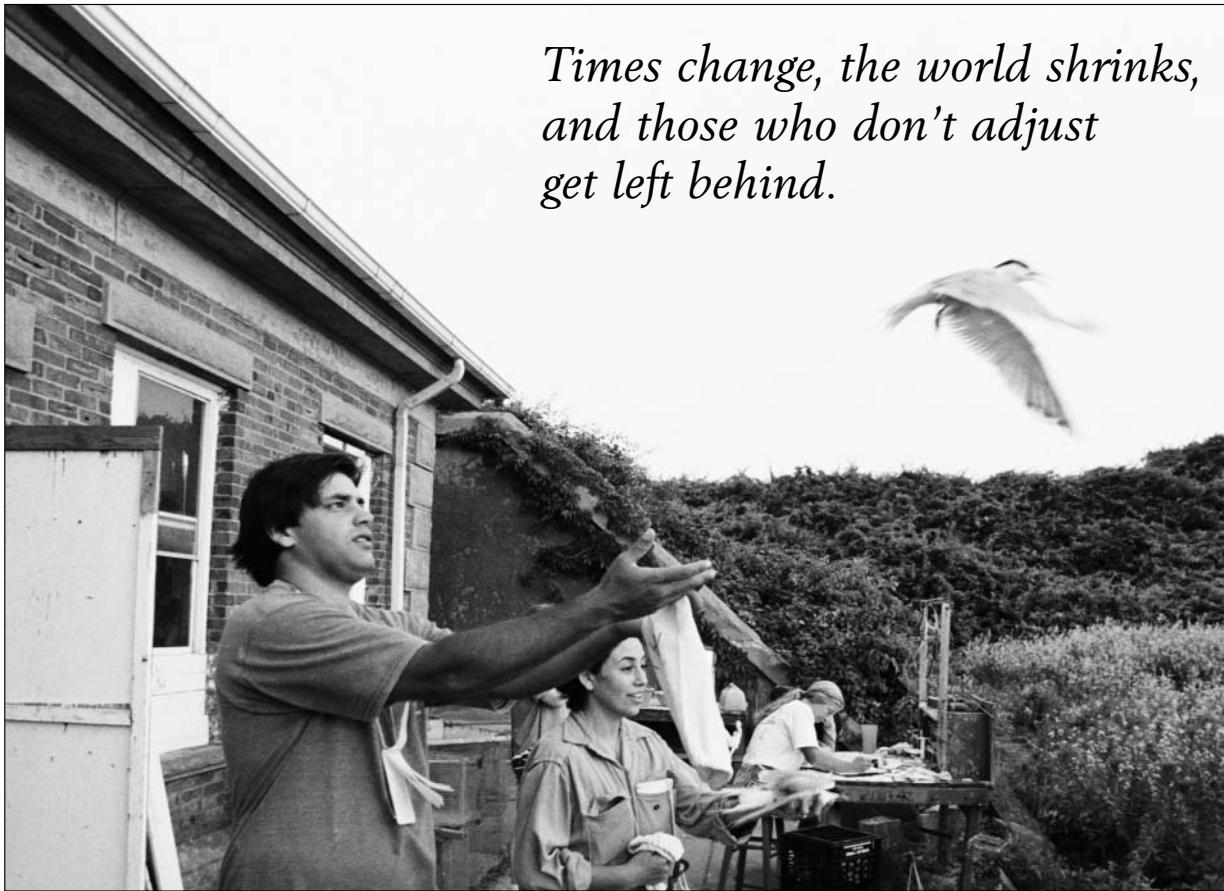
It can be difficult keeping politics out of these exchanges, and it's a testament to the dedication and professionalism of these participants that they strive to find common ground, not dissension. One Mother's Day in northern New Hampshire, our breakfast descended into an emotional, tear stained affair as Mideast politics was allowed, ever so briefly, to sit at the table. Later, a subdued group made its way up a barely used trail and emerged from the woods into a tiny hidden gorge. The noise from a long cascading plume of water made it difficult to talk, and people quietly settled down to contemplate the place in peace.

Earlier I had felt oddly privileged to be party to the real-life intensity of that breakfast, but that experience was no match for what was to come. A large patch of leftover snow lay like a temptress under

the rock overhangs, and one by one people found themselves drawn out of their reveries to it. Suddenly, in a scripted-for-TV moment, a snowball fight broke out, with Arabs, Israelis, and Americans happily pummeling each other like kids. Believe me, the ironies of that moment were lost on no one.

And speaking of ironies, here I am 25 years later, back in a seabird colony, only this time it's because of a QLF International Program. For many years I was one of the naysayers that couldn't shake the old model and questioned QLF's straying away from the Atlantic Region. But I've seen the programs up close, and I've finally come around. The great thinker Yogi Berra nailed it when he said, "The future ain't what it used to be." QLF still stands because it has been able to bob and weave and reinvent itself time after time. I still have trouble defining it, and usually have to tell people where we've been to make sense of where we're going, but with a portfolio this deep, it's a pretty easy sell. ▶

*Times change, the world shrinks,  
and those who don't adjust  
get left behind.*



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