



Kate Leigh: Our own Celia Thaxter

By Tammi Truax

Posted Mar 5, 2015 at 2:01 AM in Seacoast Online

This interview marked the first time in all my years of writing Tea for Two that I was served moon tea; a special blend of seven healing plants designed by my interviewee. Katherine Leigh has been a friend of mine since we both read our poems at a RiverRun book launch years ago.

She was born in Boston in 1951, the first of four children, and raised in Littleton, Mass., a small town that she recalls as “all apple orchards and dairy farms.” She describes her childhood there as confusing and complicated. Understandable as those were confusing and complicated times, and her atheist father was employed applying behaviorist psychology principles in the new field of computer programming, and her Christian mother was a writer. Her parents eventually found compromise in raising their kids in the Unitarian Church, and Kate began making annual treks to Star Island for religious conferences, and the island became a part of who she is.

The family also frequently visited her maternal grandparents, who lived in the area as her grandfather was the head of the English Literature Department at Phillips Exeter Academy, and his wife was also an accomplished writer. When the children would visit they would be sent out to play until late afternoon, when they would have to recite poetry for the adults, an activity Kate enjoyed. Poetry would always be a part of family life. Later her mother moved north, joined the Poetry Society of New Hampshire and married another member.

High school bored Kate and she did not want to go to college, but her parents insisted. She chose Antioch College in Ohio but, as did more than half of the Class of 1969, she dropped out and relentlessly pursued her own manifest destiny, to go to California. She hitchhiked alone by way of the Trans Canadian Highway, which was then often just a dirt road. Camping along the way, events unfolded that set her on a course of a serious study of Buddhism, and in due time she became one of the founding members of a commune in Los Angeles. It was a happy time of her life where she gained job skills, and ultimately took a husband and had two daughters.

With the demise of that marriage she returned east, and has made moves back and forth across the country many times since, though all subsequent journeys have been by car or plane. A second marriage gave her two more daughters, and that was when she became a professional massage therapist. Later, time spent in California involved an apprenticeship and training first in herbalism, then in essential oils, and led to becoming an aromatherapist.

Kate is still very committed to alternative modes of natural healing, has a practice in downtown called Midheaven (and on Star Island in season), and also teaches classes, while she continues learning “to remain at the top of my field.”

Still, in a life of many changes, some turbulent, Kate says that it is writing that has been the one constant. Throughout all of those years of moving, child raising, and career development, she was always reading and writing. Of it she says, “In my beautiful old age, my own personal healing comes through writing. Poetry is my favored genre. I love my experiences in the Portsmouth community as a writer. I love my Portsmouth life.”

She maintains a disciplined daily writing habit while still working full time.