

Half Hell and Half Heaven

by Suzy Hopkins

Summer vacations were dismal or joyous. The bad half was having to spend a month on my father's yacht going either North up the New England coast to Maine or South down to Rhode Island from Boston Harbor. I got seasick every day.

The wonderful half was spending a month at an all girls' riding camp on Orr's Island in ruggedly beautiful Casco Bay, Maine. I rode a horse every day. His name was Harrison and he was sick of being a lesson horse. He made a better rider of me because he was so difficult to get to do what I wanted. The camp counselors sometimes took us to the beach on the horses and on overnight camping trips where we slept next to the horses. Every day was busy with various craft projects, tennis lessons, nature walks, etc. The different cabins put on plays at night for the whole camp (100 girls) after having "s-mores" at the big campfire. The campers came from all over the U.S. We slept in small cabins and wore cute uniforms. We swam in the F-R-E-E-E-ZING water daily from the shore to the dock in between the ice bergs (just kidding). I worked hard and earned my Girl Scout badges in solo canoeing and horsemanship. As grooms we rode in the huge horse trailers, hauling the camp's show horses, to the first class horse shows in Boston for the competitions by the best riders at camp. I groomed a horse named Riyadh who was the rare color of a mink with tiny white specks scattered randomly over his huge body. I still dream about that horse. The food was the best including Maine Lobster, fresh fish chowder and steamed clams. The tastiest food I've ever had in America. The final year I attended, at age 14, I grew three inches taller from all the excellent food and activities.

What beautiful memories I have of this exhilarating part of my summer vacations.