Outline of Talk for Labor Day

FB has been in this home for 125 years.

But did you know that for 20 years, the Universalists who eventually came here, so our ancestors, had a week at Lake Winnipesaukee in a United Methodist camp? Each week there were other denominations including the northern Baptists who later settled into Ocean Park and the Unitarians who never looked for or established a camp anywhere after their weeks at the United Methodists camp.

We credit Quillen Shinn, as the founder of Ferry Beach as he was the person that led them to this location,

- but he probably was not the original person who led them to Winnipesaukee.
- There is a good chance that the Universalists who first came to Ferry Beach heard about this place from the Baptists who had preceded the Universalists in their week at Winnipesaukee.

That first retreat, in August of 1901 had more than 400 people come to the weekend. Unlike the United Methodist camp that they left, Ferry Beach had no running water, no toilets, no dining room, no organized food. People lodged in neighboring towns and cities including Kennebunk, Portland and Old Orchard.

You may have heard of the Hero's Journey, made famous by the work of Joseph Campbell. If you have ever seen a Disney movie, you know a bit about the mythical story line of the Hero's Journey. The hero takes a journey, slays many imaginary dragons on a trip through the underworld and eventually finds their way back as a changed person.

- Thinking about that metaphor, Ferry Beach as an organization had its own Hero's Journey in establishing this place. The first step in the Hero's journey is to **"hear the call**."
- The Universalists in the northeastern U.S. heard the call to find a place, a permanent home to establish themselves. They probably asked their

friends up the road, who they may have met through their overlapping experiences at the United Methodist camp at Lake Winnipesauke and were led to this spot owned by the railroad.

- Many say these were indigenous lands as well. At the mouth of the Saco River, there were several developments that were inhabited many years prior by indigenous people, including around the Long Pond as well as the river.

Then after that first summer meeting, in August of 1901, they had what Campbell calls in the Hero's Journey, the "refusal of the call." The hero, realizing what they are getting into, may decide to back off from saying "yes" to the journey. The Universalists found this place, but:

> It was rather rough and establishment of a place like this was a bit daunting.
>
> Unlike the Baptists, who had many people buying property in and around the few common buildings,
>
> FB had a campground and one individual, Shinn, who used his own money to buy the Ferry Park hotel near the beach.

Their models were different, perhaps reflecting the energy of the two different beliefs.

- Universalists were ok with creating a camp in the woods, while the Free Will Baptists succeeded in creating a village of homes and families at Ocean Park.
- They too had and still have some community space in the little village we today consider Ocean Park.
- Other religious groups also followed the Baptists to southern Maine: the Catholics founded a Chatauqua and the Salvation Army also had and still has, a place near Ocean Park. Both are close to the area of Ocean Park in Old Orchard but are now considered part of the town of Old Orchard.

Saco, originally owned both the land of Old Orchard and Ocean Park.

- This changed in 1883 only a few years after the Free Will Baptists established themselves in Ocean Park in 1881. The state legislature established Old Orchard from part of the land that was once consider Saco and picked the name because of the apple orchard planted almost 200 years prior by an English settler. It would add the word "beach" to its name about 50 years later.

Meanwhile, in 1901, **the Universalists committed to an idea of a home**, and then, like in the Hero's journey, once they committed to the creation of a space, helpers arrived.

- For the Universalists these were the Women's Aid Society, a variety of people who put their money on a room, or in some way helped build buildings.
- Fundraising for buildings started in earnest after the purchase of the Ferry Park Hotel from the railroad by money Quillen Shinn donated by selling a life insurance policy he had.

Along the way in the Hero's Journey, Campbell points out that every hero experiences **"thresholds"—these markers of change** -- help build character and stamina in the hero or heroes, for Ferry Beach there was:

- First pandemic in 1918
- Losing our 501c3 in 1936—We learned that we can't be a hotel for just any one, we have to have a conference attached to it. The Universalists learned what a not for profit organization was and is and how you maintain it! Even today, some of our members don't get that Ferry Beach is a 501c3 and have to have a mission in order to maintain our tax exempt status.
- WW2 and the support of the war effort in the United States—more about that later.

- Merger with Unitarians (which brought a flood of ministers who took over for a while) in 1962. And which seems to be the only history that anyone knows.
- Several poor leadership choices threatened to take the place to the ground. Ferry Beach kept selling off property to take care of money troubles. As far as I know the endowment was restarted 3 times in the last 30 or 40 years. Also, raided when mismanagement couldn't keep up with bills.
- Another threshold was Leadership---
    - The consistency of people and individual families who can trace generations who have come to Ferry Beach kept this place going. Some of those families include: the Metz family, the DeWolfe family, the Andersons.

    - Other generative thresholds about leadership, the Universalists made connections with the World Affairs Councils and meetings of people who traveled here from other countries to address the challenges of WW2. The United States was reluctant to get into the war, and many people didn't believe what they were hearing from Europe. Gatherings of people from many countries met here at Ferry Beach to discuss these things under the leadership of Bill (William) Metz and others.
    - Many lovely summer conferences that started and remained for more than 50 years: Family and Friends is probably the oldest, also Gayla, Religious Education week, and of course the many church retreats that came and went; some returning each year for more than 40 years. The Newton UU church has in their history the opening and closing of FB buildings each year before the facility remained open throughout the year.

FB struggled with leadership throughout its years but always managed to keep going.

    - There were men/ministers that were abusive, particularly to children and women but also other men in power. Perhaps it was the sign of the times in those years, or maybe just something embedded in the worlds' religious clergy.
    - There were ministers who used the place for their own personal vacation spots.
    - There was a lack of a sustainable business model that worked for the organization long term. Of course, that didn't take away from the feelings of home that many people feel and felt about this place.
    - The different ecology schools over the last 25 years to use the shoulder season's weather was a good idea, the agreements just lacked sustainability and contributed to the overuse and abuse of the property. These schools never pulled their own weight, though did contribute to the income of the facility.
- In all, the FB hero's journey is filled with people, with love, with a sense of place and a community each week that was "standing stone" to use a Melanie Demore phrase, that marked a families' or individual's summer.

- **Acceptance** is a hallmark of Ferry Beach – At Labor Day someone with a special needs daughter saw and felt that we were a place for special needs children and adults. We have carried that through in the off season as several programs for special needs teens and adults come to FB as part of their programming.
    - **The GAYLA conference story is one of acceptance**
    - **As is the tension to always open our hearts and minds to other groups. Christian Religious, Buddhists, Methodists, pagans, etc.**
- Campbell shares that at some point on the hero's journey, you reach the **abyss, a physical place** or a moment in time that shifts the consciousness of the hero which begins to make new ideas possible.

- Our modern day equivalent of that was right before the decision to build the dining room came. Ferry Beach was struggling financially, its buildings were in serious disrepair, and something had to change.
- Paul Provencher, Brad Cohen, and Rick DeWolfe were some of the leaders who believed the "leap of faith" as it were, had to happen. As Paul said to me over Labor Day, we were really struggling with buildings that were hurting, a financial model that wasn't sustainable. We had to build the dining room, even though it was not widely accepted by leadership at the time. Paul said, "I don't think we would be standing here today if we didn't build it."

- So in the model of the Hero's Journey, **the hero has to Slay the dragon,** which is often our own consciousness, overcome the obstacles, climb through or get support and knowledge overcoming thresholds and then begin to find your way back to the overworld….which is what FB has done.

Adrienne Rich wrote a poem called "In the Wake of Home" and in it she writes:

"Anytime you go back…

The kitchen faucet sticks in a way you know,

You have to pull the basement door

In before drawing the bolt

The last porch-step is still loose

The water from the tap is the old drink of water, any time

You go back……"

There are stories, many stories of familiarity, of that porch swing, the tree in the camp site, the carving in the headboard. Of course, over the years those things have changed….as time and wear and tear shift things more quickly.

In a home, the changes happen usually more slowly to the physical structure, while in a place that sees an average of 100 or so people a day for about 5 months of the year, those challenging steps, faucets, gates, must be fixed in a timely manner.

Like home, we are a mix of joy and sorrow, children grow, people age…..we mourn and celebrate the changes in our summer week conferences, what is different, what isn't as fun as it was when we were little.

Beyond the physical, there are family members and friends, staff who bring their own memories, some good, some not so good: the other mother, the best friend, the wonderful family that took you in every summer at Ferry Beach.

As children grow up, and we all age,

- we lose the bagpiper on the beach at 7am,
- the long-time writer,
- the conference coordinator, the musician.
- We change. We struggle, we want to hold on to the things as they were in our minds, and we celebrate the many phases and aspects of our own life and the lives of our friends and family.

Many people tell me that they see FB –as their spiritual home.

> And it is true, FB is a place of spiritual energy, made mention by so many different people who come to Ferry Beach and create their unique experience within the physical structure of the place.

How do we assure another 125 years? We know that it is both a refuge/sanctuary as well as place to do the hard work.

- We are a container which allows us to have the family celebrations, nurture relationships, meet new people, mark a milestone.
- Ferry Beach as a touchstone of our lives will continue to grow and change as we will grow and change.

Adrienne Rich, in her poem about home, says…what if I told you…"your home is this continent of the unhoused, of children….driven from their mother's land, undocumented refugees, underground railroads, trails of tears…."

Home is our planet….and we are the stewards of this place.

Ferry Beach is home, a spiritual home, a container, a physical place, but as any physical place is, it becomes animated and enlivened by the people who come here.

What is the Call that Ferry Beach needs to answer now as the world seems more and more divided?

I personally think **of Bill Metz** and the men of his generation who convened activities here to talk about WW2 and what was being asked of the United States and them as people who were awake to the state of the world.

Bill and others convened a group of people to discuss the reasons the US was not in the war, then, like now, the **rise in fascism** in this country that Rachel Maddow documented so well in books and articles in the last few years.

What will our next 125 years look like? What will be do with this precious gift of 32 acres on the beach in Saco Maine? How will history remember the Ferry Beach story from here on in??

From a poem from a Hopi Elder, written in 2020 and widely circulated begins with the phrase:

"the time of the lone wolf is over……There is a river flowing and there are those who will be afraid….

But…gather yourselves, banish the word struggle from your attitude and vocabulary….

"All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration, for we are the ones we have been waiting for."

And so we are.