

Winter a time to pause, reflect, set goals for spring

New year, new me — that phrase is certainly apropos for me as just three days into 2025 I will find myself retired.

Many may know me as the longtime director of New Jersey Audubon's Nature Center of Cape May. On my final day as an employee, I will have emailed my first submission for my new gig, a bi-weekly nature-themed column for the Cape May Star and Wave.

So, what does the new me look like? When I share that I am retiring, the most common question is, "What will you do?" I reply that I plan to take the first month or two to "winter."

I recently came across a book called "Wintering" by Katherine May. I was so intrigued by the synopsis that I knew it needed to be on my bedside table. What I came to find was "wintering" is when people use the dark, chilly days to refocus and pre-visualize a new desired self. What does all this have to do with the column? A lot, as you will see.

Without even knowing it, I have been naturally "wintering" ever since I started as the Nature Center director. The year has always been busy spring through autumn with school groups, plant sales, family programs, summer camps and fundraisers.

I often cannot catch my breath until after our holiday wreath workshops. I have found that all I want to do in January is withdraw from people and hibernate at home.

This is, in fact, the first lesson of "Wintering": the power of the pause. Just like the flora and fauna that surround us, we need time to rest and replenish.

Unlike many of my neighbors who migrate south, I am fine with facing the cold and darkness of winter by hunkering down in a chilly Cape May. Embracing the darkness both literally and figuratively is the second lesson of "Wintering." We can find resilience and come out stronger by confronting the shadows.

Nature as sanctuary, the third lesson, is something I have always gravitated toward in the winter. Ironically, despite having had a career in the nature field I have spent too much time sitting behind a keyboard.

During the winter is when I most enjoy solitary walks along our plethora of nature trails and quiet beaches in Cape May County. The restorative power of these moments outdoors is undoubtedly a mental health benefit and a source for creativity. My writing of this column will certainly be rewarded by these times spent outside.

The fourth lesson in May's book is a concept that I know I will need to pay close attention to, since it is something in which I struggle — self-care and self-compassion. My own worst crit-



NATURE TALKS

By Gretchen Whitman

ic, perfectionist me will use this time to find ways to nourish my mind, body and spirit and let go of expectations.

The fifth and sixth "Wintering" lessons easily fit into this: slow down to savor the journey and define productivity. I cannot think of a better way to achieve all three of these lessons than by spending time in nature.

The final two lessons embrace the concept of finding comfort in rituals and putting the others into practice. Creating a sense of structure and purpose can help us feel grounded.

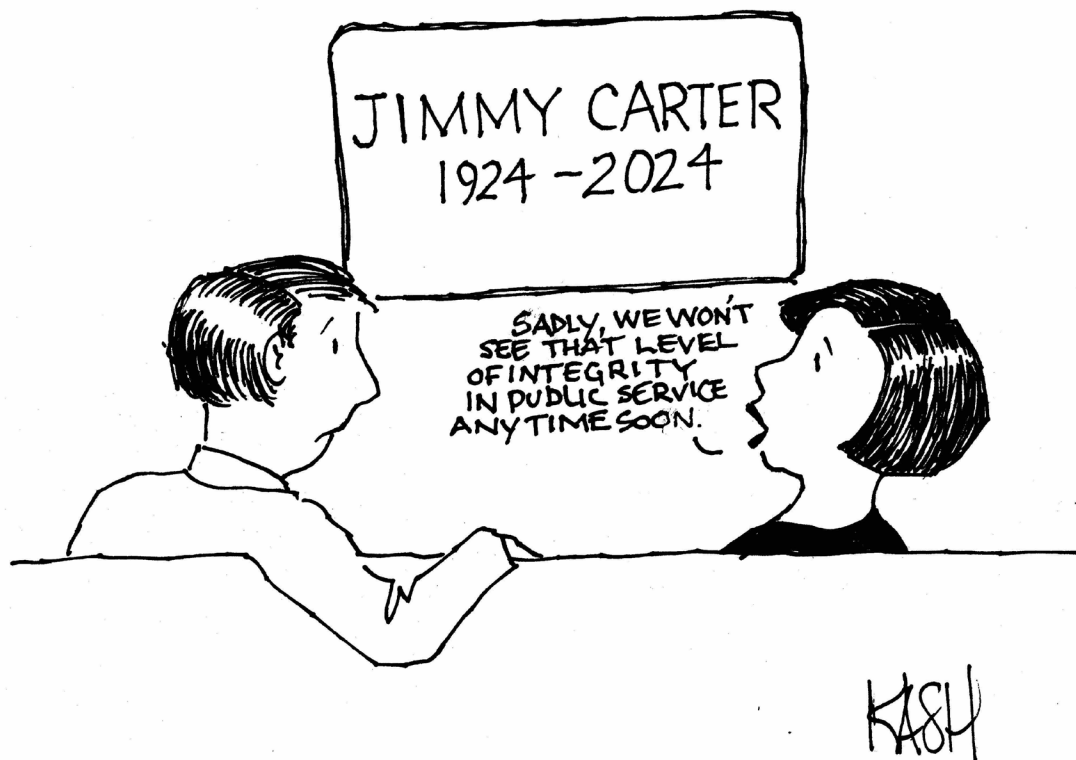
Reading and writing will now be a daily routine for me. I look forward to having the time to read the many nature-themed books lining my shelves that I have not yet had the chance to open. These surely will inspire future topics for this column.

Lastly, the final lesson of "Wintering" is that it reminds us of what is to come, spring — the hope, growth and renewal of what lies ahead.

I look at my retirement not as an ending but rather a commencement toward my senior years. It most certainly will be filled with travel and exploring the great outdoors. Some of it will be in my backyard, in the garden, a walk along the beach. Other adventures lie ahead, such as my birthday trip to Mexico at the end of February to visit the wintering grounds of the monarch butterflies.

My hope is that these explorations inspire stories I will share in future columns. But for now, if you need to find me, I will be reading one of those natural history books in my study, cuddled with my cat or taking a solitary stroll on a frosty morning as I winter away.

Gretchen Whitman is the retired director of the Nature Center of Cape May and 40-year island local.



OTHER SIDE

Column celebrates Cape May Harbor area

By MARK ALLEN

From its inception, the intent of this column has been to present maritime-related topics pertinent to the "other side" of Cape May, which is to say, the harbor side of the Nation's First Seaside Resort.

The column has focused on the harbor, as well as its geography, environment, economy and history. It also highlights the people who live, work and play here on this oft-neglected side of the city.

This is not meant to denigrate the fine work Cape May MAC (Museums + Arts + Culture) has done to showcase the city's Victorian culture and history, but to simply bring awareness to the vital role that the harbor has played in Cape May's maritime history, economy and culture.

Other Side readers have come to learn that there is so much more about Cape May than its fine Victorian heritage, and its maritime legacy is every bit as rich, varied and interesting.

Every great seaport has a museum that houses and relates that city's unique maritime history. New York has its Seaport Museum, Boston the Waterfront Museum. On the West Coast, San Francisco's Maritime National Park is without equal, as is Philadelphia's Independence Seaport Museum on the East Coast.

Unfortunately, Cape May lacks a brick-and-mortar edifice that houses the city's rich and storied nautical past. About as close as it comes to a maritime museum is portrayed in the models, exhibits and photographic images that adorn

the lobby walls of the Lobster House.

I confess that more than once while researching a particular story, I've gleaned relevant information from those very walls.

In a sense, a maritime museum does exist in the form of a particular vessel, the U.S. Coast Guard's Motor Lifeboat 36538. Restored by a group of dedicated and skilled volunteers, MLB 36538 is a legacy vessel that plied the waters between Bay Head and Cape May from 1952 through 1972.

While it is hoped that 36538 will someday be home-ported here on Cape May's Other Side, for now it will be a land-based static display at the Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum in Lower Township.

Until a dedicated museum arrives here on the Other Side, those who are interested will find that coastal New Jersey's rich maritime history has been thoroughly captured and well-recounted at the New Jersey Maritime Museum in Beach Haven.

The underrated museum houses a plethora of interesting exhibits and novel displays including authentic models, uniforms, nautically themed artifacts, hundreds of shipwreck artifacts, navigation equipment, archival records and countless photographs.

Every month, the museum hosts a guest speaker at Buckalew's Tavern in Beach Haven. Situated an hour north at the very southern end of Long Beach Island, the museum is located at 528 Dock Road. More information about the museum can be found at njmaritimemu-

seum.org.

Another aspect of the region's rich maritime history is epitomized by the state's lighthouses. Some, such as the Cape May Lighthouse in Cape May Point, were built to warn mariners about hazardous inlets and other obstructions. Not so familiar are seven other lighthouses in Delaware Bay.

Constructed during the 19th century, these lighthouses were built to identify shoals and mark the main shipping channel, from Harbor of Refuge in the south all the way up to Ship John Shoal near Salem.

Each bay lighthouse has its own unique story, history, style and construction method. Although some are now owned privately, most are suffering from neglect and disrepair.

Twice every summer, the Delaware Bay Lighthouse Keepers and Friends Association organizes guided cruises to the lighthouses. The group meets four times annually at different locations in southern New Jersey. The next meeting is scheduled for Jan. 25 at the Nature Center of Cape May, 1600 Delaware Ave.

The Other Side will host this meeting that commences at 11 a.m. All are welcome and recommended to bring a bagged lunch.

Visit delawarebaylightkeeper-friend.org for more information.

Mark Allen is a retired lieutenant colonel with 27 years' flying experience with the U.S. Marines and Air Force National Guard. The Other Side radio show is broadcast at 1 p.m. Fridays on WCFA-101.5 FM

WAVES FROM THE PAST

Rescuers save immigrants from sinking ship Elizabeth

By KAREN BRUNO
For the Star and Wave

When the sun came up that Friday in May 1864, there was a wrecked ship just off Corson's Inlet bar. The vessel was the Elizabeth, en route from Londonderry to Philadelphia laden with Irish immigrants.

Sadly, it was not uncommon for immigrants to make the long voyage across the Atlantic and lose their lives just off the Jersey coast. The Powhattan wrecked a decade before, killing more than 200 German immigrants, many of whom are buried in a mass grave in Smithville.

Rescuers began rowing to the Elizabeth in conditions that the Cape May Ocean Wave described as a "light wind, and favorable tide."

But as they rowed, the winds increased and monstrous breakers made it difficult for the res-

cue boats. A government boat was swamped. Crews on other boats were too exhausted to continue.

Those who did reach the stranded Elizabeth faced the difficulty of rescuing some and leaving others behind. Men were said to have rushed toward the rescue boats "freely offering gold." But gold was not accepted and the standard "women and children first" was maintained.

When darkness came, the gale increased and the Ocean Wave reported that the "fierce breakers striking the ship, mingled with the cries of more than 260 human beings, was terrific beyond description."

Miraculously, everyone on board was saved. Volunteers assisted government workers for two long days, eventually getting the survivors to a train for the final leg of their journey and then "retired homeward for rest."

ANOTHER VIEW

Many successes but still much to do

By JAY WATSON
New Jersey Conservation Foundation

For the past three years, I have served in the unique capacity of co-executive director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation, most recently alongside my colleague Alison Mitchell.

This is my final time authoring this column, as I transition to a new role to focus more on urban green infrastructure investments in Trenton and around the state, and Mitchell steps forward as the sole executive director.

I feel blessed to have served in this role and wanted to take this opportunity to look back at how much incredible progress has been accomplished in protecting land and natural resources in New Jersey, and what lies ahead.

This state we're in is also blessed with an abundance of permanently protected open spaces, from High Point to Cape May Point. We have amazing parks, forests, natural areas and other undeveloped open spaces that support our people, plants and wildlife.

New Jersey has been forward-thinking in its green investments since the 1960s. The first Green Acres ballot questions set the stage for a strategic agenda to preserve our forests, fields, farmlands and open spaces while also providing resources to improve our parks in just about every community — all of which contributes to a high quality of life.

We are the most densely developed and populated state in the

nation and our people are as diverse as our landscape. Thus far collectively, we have managed to protect nearly 33 percent of our land base — 1.6 million acres of New Jersey's 4.8 million-acre total land mass — and we have much left to do.

The incredible New Jersey Conservation Blueprint tool estimates that we have just 1.4 million acres left that are undeveloped and largely unprotected. That is a little less than the size of Everglades National Park and a little larger than Grand Canyon National Park.

The ultimate decisions about what happens to these lands will be decided over the coming few decades. That means that all land use in New Jersey will be decided; all land stakes claimed.

Fortunately, this state we're in is also blessed with incredible preservation partners that are working hard every day to build on our collective preservation successes in every region of the state.

Nonprofit land conservancies, state, county and local agencies are working together to make sure that we continue preserving those lands that provide critical ecosystem services like stormwater absorption, carbon sequestration and habitat for our many species — from bobcats to bobolinks and bog asphodel to yellow spring beauty. This land also offers our people places to seek respite from the built environment and enjoy time in our wonderful outdoors.

These partners will continue

working in major eco-regions such as the Pinelands, Highlands, Sourlands and Delaware bayshore, while also making sure that we are investing in conservation, recreation and engagement in our cities. Nature for all.

Last year, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, the Nature Conservancy and others brought together many experts, groups and agencies working in conservation and environmental protection in New Jersey to develop a report entitled "Nature for All — A 2050 Vision for New Jersey" to assess what is left in our state and create a collective vision for a future New Jersey that maintains a high-quality existence for many future generations.

That report calls us to preserve half of what is left, with 500,000 acres of the most important lands for ecosystem services, climate and habitat values protected by 2050; and beyond that, an additional 200,000 acres of remaining important lands.

It is an ambitious agenda that will require more motivated, willing conservation sellers, public support and incredible staffing, innovative approaches and bold leadership across our landscapes and partnerships.

I cannot wait to see the good work and bright future for conservation ahead.

To learn more about the New Jersey Conservation Blueprint, visit njmap2.com/blueprint. Check out the "Nature for All — A 2050 Vision for New Jersey" report at njconservation.org/nature-fo-all.

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