



Annie O'Neill, artist and activist, in 2006

ANNIE O'NEILL

By Lewis Eisenberg

Annie O'Neill frequently pulls her short brown hair into pigtails that frame her face. "I'm always doing art," she says to me during our first interview for this story. She squints a little behind oval shaped glasses and smiles when she says this, making her look happy and youthful. "I like learning new things, getting good at whatever it is, and then moving on. There are too many interesting things in life to stay with any one thing too long." She is sitting forward now, her hands opening and shutting rapidly like the wings of a small bird in flight. Her face is turned up to the right, looking at something which might be outside the room. "I am happiest when I am working on some creative project, whether it is making paper, cutting steel, or solving some art project problem."

As I write this in early 2007, the Annie O'Neill I have gotten to know is a woman who is widely known as an artist. But she is better known by most people as an activist for environmental and social justice

causes, and for her enthusiasm for being physically active; hiking, climbing and cross country skiing on the mountain.

I actually met Annie's photographs before I met her. She had a show at Starbucks in New Paltz a couple of years ago and I had wandered in during the opening reception looking for my decaf soy latte fix. Waiting in line, I saw a series of color photos of wedding dresses and children's clothes posed in otherwise empty department store display windows. It was kinky stuff. Some of the photos were overlaid with subtle reflections of cars or people. The work moved me more than I expected. There was a lot going on in a seemingly simple set up: meditations on intimacy, love and loss, the intersection of our lives with cultural rites of passages. Works of art, in other words.

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SEON AND DOROTHY

Annie Felshin was born in 1943 on the Upper West Side of Manhattan to Seon, an attorney, and Dorothy, a teacher in Harlem schools. Her father, one of eight children of a prominent NYC rabbi, had gone to law school at Chapel Hill when he was 16. He had a photographic memory. Her mother was born in what is today East Harlem, but was then a well-to-do Jewish neighborhood. There were rabbis in her family tree dating back to the 17th century including her great great great grandfather, who defended the philosopher Baruch Spinoza in Holland. Both her parents were political activists. "My Dad worked for Marcantonio," Annie said. "He also ran for Congress on the American Labor Party. A lot of my childhood was spent on picket lines with



Seon and Dorothy Felshin traveling in Cuba in 1975
(Photo courtesy Annie O'Neill)

them and going to social justice rallies. My mother's activism stemmed from her reaction to her uncle's ownership of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company." In 1911 the factory was the site of a tragic fire which claimed the lives of 146 young immigrant workers who were subjected to inhumane, and unsafe, working conditions.

In 1945 Seon contracted TB and the experience changed his life. After he was cured, he decided not to practice law anymore. At the same time, Dorothy stopped teaching because she wanted to be in business. She became an expert in textiles and worked as a buyer in New York department stores. Ultimately, the Felshin's bought an existing camp and school supply

business, serving clients throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York

SEAHOLM'S BOARDING HOUSE, GARDINER

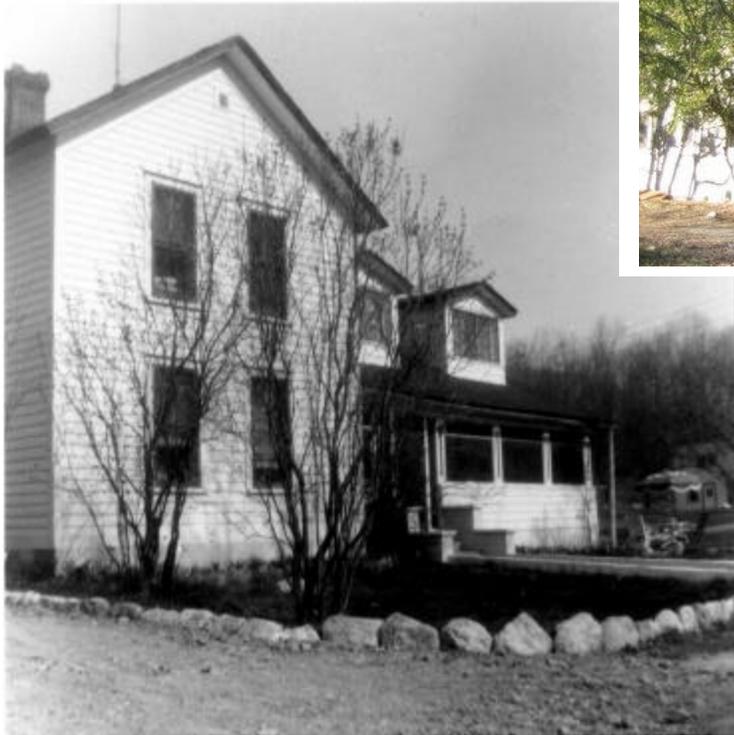
Starting when they were four and five, Annie and her sister Nina, who is 14 months younger, were sent to camps during the summer months. One of these was a favorite with their Upper West Side after school group: Camp Viller Vallen in Gardiner. "It was at the top of Shaft Road in the 50's, at the intersection of North Mountain Road," Annie said. "It was a dirt road at the time. One of my big thrills was when I drove down Mountain Road on my father's lap. It was an unpaved dirt road back then, and pretty bumpy."

"The family stayed at Seaholm's boarding house on North Mountain Road. People sat [on the front porch] even though it was close to the road because there was almost no traffic."

close to the road because there was almost no traffic." That same porch is hardly used today because there are so many cars going by throughout the day.

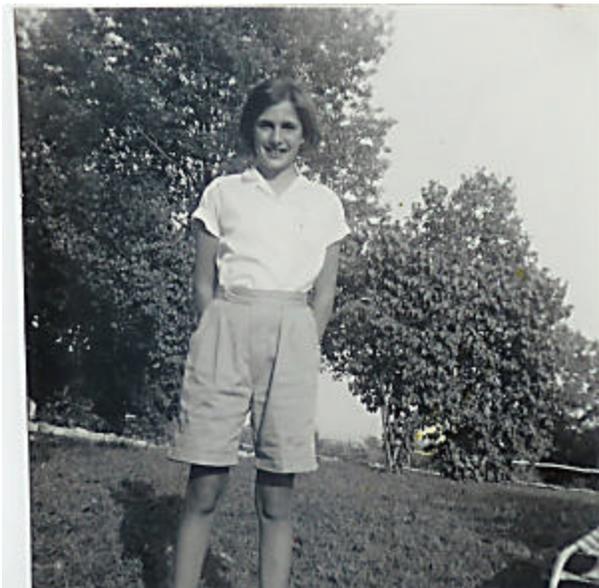
Viller Vallen was a sleep-away camp. When Annie's Mother and Father came to visit, they got their meals at a nearby B&B named Seaholm's. It turned out that they were also the Seaholm's first paying guests. Annie recalled that there were no trees in front of Seaholm's at that time like there are now. There were stones rimming the landscaping to the road, which was still unpaved. "The front porch was set up with tables and chairs," Annie remembered. "It was a lovely place to sit. People sat out there even though it was

"I got my first sun tan when I was at Seaholm's," Annie said, "because they had a hammock set up near the road. I was awed at how I looked since I was so unaware of those things then. Then there were the woods. For a kid from Manhattan, going into the woods around there was truly amazing.



Left: Seaholm's Boarding circa 1955. The gravel area bounded by rocks in the foreground is North Mountain Road, unpaved. **Above:** the house in 2007.

(Photos courtesy Annie O'Neill)



Annie at Seaholm's Boarding House on North Mountain Road in 1953

(Photo courtesy Annie O'Neill)



Jack Seaholm with Annie (right) and her friend with view of Millbrook, circa 1955

(Photo courtesy Annie O'Neill)

“We went horseback riding at a dude ranch called Sunnycroft on Bruynswick Road ... In those days you would always see big lines of people going out for trail rides.”

I loved following the streams back toward the Ridge and thought that would be my future profession. I have memories of my first long walk which was leaving Seaholm’s and going to Shaft Road and then down to Bruynswick and then doing the loop back to North Mountain. It was about five miles and the kids who did it were so proud because we were about eleven and we did it without adults.”

Annie recalls that Amy Seaholm cooked huge, Swedish-style meals. “Their house had two floors, which was another unusual thing for city kids. We stayed for two weeks and had all our meals there. It was great. Amy would print the menu for the entire week and we couldn’t wait for the family-style meals. There were double doors separating the kitchen from the dining area. I had never seen anything like them and never got tired of watching them swing open and shut. There was a very big table in the dining area which is still there today.”

When her parents’ business kept them busy during Easter break or other brief school holidays, Annie and Nina stayed at Seaholm’s by themselves. They were put on the bus at the Port Authority with a group of friends and the Seaholm’s picked them up at Benton Corners and brought them to their boarding house. . “Stopping at the Red Apple Restaurant near Harriman was a big highlight of the trip,” Annie said.

SUNNYCROFT AND THE BATHTUB

In the 1950’s there was a very large pile of shale on the parcel adjacent to the current Town of Gardiner Highway on South Mountain Road. This pile and others like it in Gardiner mark the location of construction shafts used to build the Delaware and Catskill Aqueducts almost one hundred years ago.

The construction process was crude but effective: workmen removed blasted shale from the ever deepening shaft (down hundreds of feet in some places) and hauled it to the surface, dumping it nearby. The Catskill Aqueduct also transits Gardiner; it crosses the Delaware Aqueduct somewhere near Route 208 as both make their way south to New York City. Mary Beth Majestic, current president of the Gardiner Historical Society, says her grandfather worked on the aqueduct projects, as did other local residents.



Annie (right), a friend, and her sister Nina in the shale pile on South Mountain Road circa 1954 (Photo courtesy Annie O’Neill)

Of course, none of this history would have meant anything to the Annie O'Neill of 1954. What was important to her was that she and her sister enjoyed climbing up that mountain of shale and then sliding down. The Felshin sisters also enjoyed hiking near the talus at the foot of the Millbrook escarpment. Jack Seaholm would take them uphill from the house, although he terrified them by saying they would disappear into the holes between the rocks. "To this day I am cautious when rock scrambling because of his admonitions," Annie says.

"We went horseback riding at a dude ranch called Sunnycroft on Bruynswick Road," Annie recalled. "We went there to ride on what we thought of as exceptionally large horses. In those days you would always see big lines of people going out for trail rides." Sunnycroft closed in the 1970s. Today it is a Jehovah's Witness church.

"We also went swimming at the "bathtub" (now called Split Rock). There was a beat up shack there at the time inhabited by an old Native American who, we were told, had 'squatter's rights.'"

MINNEWASKA

When Annie was 11 years old, she and her family started going to Minnewaska for a vacation after summer camp ended. "There were two mountain houses at Minnewaska in the 1950's, Wildmere and Cliff House," Annie remembered. "Most of the people who went there were really old. Hardly anyone went swimming except our family. The water at Minnewaska was freezing cold and this is where I developed my love of very cold water. We were allowed to swim out to the rocks rimming the lake."

The Minnewaska Cliff House, was built in 1879 overlooking Lake Minnewaska; it could accommodate 225 guests. Wildmere, built in 1887, accommodated 350 guests. Lake Minnewaska was considered a Christian resort in the 1950's; the Felshin's were among the very few Jews who vacationed there. It was very spartan and clean, Annie recalled, and there was no alcohol and no smoking. But there was a game room with a pool table and a ping-pong table where Annie and Nina spent many happy hours. "I loved the dining room," Annie told me. "There were white tablecloths. You could get anything off the menu you wanted at any time during the meal. My favorite thing was to order hot cereal with ice cream. They made delicious concoctions made from Jell-O. The whole experience was wonderful for me. We didn't go to Mohonk, which was thought to be more exclusive. I didn't really know much about it until I went to a wedding there in 1969."



Seon Felshin climbing at The Bathtub (without a lot of gear)
Circa 1953 (Photo courtesy Annie O'Neill)

“The Cliff House ... overlooking Lake Minnewaska was very spartan and clean and there was no alcohol and no smoking. But there was a game room with a pool table and a ping-pong table ... My favorite thing was to order hot cereal with ice cream.”

because it was the first long walk I had done and it was a great adventure for us to go with our mom and dad.”

There was a Quaker religious service at Cliff House every morning, and every day the staff prepared a mimeographed sheet with all the daily activities. There was a groomed putting course encircling the entrance. “People dressed beautifully to play there,” Annie recalled. “They wore real golf shoes and dressed in golf outfits. There was a wonderful library at Wildmere, with a fireplace and very long tables where guests could sit and read or play board games. It was carpeted and quiet and quite large as I remember. We enjoyed evening activities. There was a Minnewaska theater troupe at the time. My favorite was a man who could do bird calls.”

HARDCORE TOMBOY

Throughout her childhood, Annie attended PS 9 on West End Avenue and 82nd Street. Although her father was not an athletic man, he trained Annie and Nina to be athletic. “We went to Riverside Park on weekends, practicing hand-eye coordination. We played baseball. My father got us state-of-the-art gloves. We played tennis a lot, too, and I got pretty good at it. All throughout high school I seriously trained to play in tournaments and we were coached by Althea Gibson’s coach, Sidney Llewellyn. We played each summer on the Eastern Junior Circuit and I was ranked 2nd in the East in doubles for one or two years and 7th in Singles, under 18. I stopped playing tennis in college because I just felt I had spent so much of my life at it. What was interesting was that my sister and I were among the very few kids on the circuit who came from public tennis courts and not exclusive country clubs.”

Annie’s first exposure to rock scrambling came at Riverside Park with her father. “They had some rock outcrops there,” Annie recalled. “They weren’t that big but that’s where it all started. My mother was terrified that I’d fall. I was a hardcore tomboy.”

Annie remembered that Wildmere’s lobby had a giant map of the mountain trails and European guests would stand around it planning their next day’s hikes. Many visitors found the lake landscape the closest thing to Swiss lakes and resorts. Annie and her sister never thought about following trails to get places. After dinner, they liked walking out to Beacon Hill. “Once our entire family did a long hike to Millbrook which ended up in a swarm of bees,” Annie said. “But it was memorable



Annie, in her 40s, rock climbing in the Gunks
(Photo courtesy Annie O'Neill)

Annie was very close to her mother. She describes her as “feisty, out there, a feminist before there were any. She was radical in her beliefs, especially about women’s health and opportunities. She related everything to politics, everything. I didn’t understand all the tumult around feminism when it happened during the ‘60’s because I felt like I had already been there for a long time.”

Dorothy was the driving force behind the Felshin’s business. “My father was more laid back,” Annie said. “He would have been happy reading a newspaper all day. My mother was the more adventurous of the two. She was a free spirit, very open. People really loved her.”

MISS HUMPHRIES’ GROUP



Annie at PS 9 in 1955
(Photo courtesy Annie O'Neill)

During the week, Annie and Nina were regulars at an after school play group called Miss Humphries’. Annie remembered that she “loved art from a very young age. I was one of three first graders who had a piece in a school wide art show. I do not remember it exactly, but I still have all my old report cards and papers. I spent a lot of time doing crafts and drawing when I was little.” Camp Viller Vallen in Gardiner was a favorite summer vacation spot for students in Ms. Humphries’ group.

Annie recalled that her mother was artistic but would never call herself an artist. She decorated pillows and clothing and could never leave anything without her alterations. “Because she was the daughter of an expert seamstress,” Annie said, “she hated fittings and completely rejected the world of fashion. But she always looked wonderful.”

Annie was accepted as a student at Manhattan’s High School of Music and Art. After graduation, she attended Sarah Lawrence College, a small liberal arts college located in Bronxville, NY noted for its emphasis on the creative and performing arts as the core of a liberal arts education.

MEXICAN FOLK ART GALLERY

“I met Bill Truesdale ... in Mexico when he and his family were taking a year there.” Bill was the father of noted Gardiner photographer Hardie Truesdale, who was about 12 at the time.

After college, wondering what to do next, Annie opened a loft gallery on the same floor as her parents’ store on 56th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. She was interested in the work of young Mexican artists. “I absorbed doing business from my parents. It was different then, easier in some ways,” she says. Over time, her business evolved out of that building and into a Mexican folk art gallery down the street.

Annie began spending larger blocks of time in Mexico and developed what has become a life long affinity for Mexican folk artists and their lives. “Mexico was lying dormant in my spirit,” she told me. “I met Bill Truesdale through Mexican connections, or maybe I actually met him in Mexico in 1966 or ‘67 when he and his family were spending a year there.” Bill was the father of

noted Gardiner photographer Hardie Truesdale, who was about 12 at the time. He was also a contemporary poet and professor who had started his own small press called *New Rivers*.

In 1966 Annie published a suite of ten lithographs, called *El Hombre y La Guerra*, by a Mexican artist with accompanying poems by William Truesdale. She went on to do some covers for Bill Truesdale's various *New Rivers* publications. One of her many odd jobs during that period of her life of these involved making 100 bark paintings of *Los Tres Reyes* for the president of the advertising giant McCann Erickson; it was his corporate gift. "I also made jewelry for a while, but was mostly self-taught, still a kid really. But I sold pieces to Nelson Rockefeller, Arthur Krim, Christian Herter's wife and others."

NELSON ROCKEFELLER

Nelson Rockefeller visited Annie's store in 1968 and he and Annie developed a warm relationship. He had first visited Mexico in 1933 and become an avid collector of Mexican folk art. At various times over the next few years, he dispatched her to Mexico to buy folk art for him. Then he decided to write books on his various art collections, including his Mexican folk art. Rockefeller made Annie coordinator for that project in 1977-78. She proposed a field trip to Oaxaca to buy art from that region to round out the collection. Carl Fox, Ann Rockefeller and Nelson all accompanied Annie on that trip. "This was not my usual trip to Mexico," Annie recalled. "We started off meeting with the governor of Oaxaca. Nelson was much loved in Latin America."

Rockefeller died just after the book was started but it was eventually published. Annie did the captions. Later, she was in charge of finding a home for Rockefeller's Mexican collection. Ultimately, the bulk of the collection went to art museums in San Antonio and San Francisco. "Before Nelson died, we had talked about my coordinating all the objects and materials of his Mexican collection for this ranch he was planning to build in Texas."

MICHAEL O'NEILL

Around this time she met Michael O'Neill, a professional still life photographer in New York City. "Michael was the one who introduced me to backpacking and snorkeling," said Annie. "We liked to do many of the same things, a rare combination of cultural and outdoor activities." They were married in Manhattan in 1968. Michael adored her parents and thought of them as his parents. Annie's father was very supportive of Michael's starting his own studio.



Annie in 1975 (Photo courtesy Annie o'Neill)

Michael's parents, Nena and George, are the authors of the *Open Marriage* book series. The 'swinging' implications of the title notwithstanding, these books addressed the question of growing with a partner while retaining individuality and separateness within a relationship of honesty, trust and openness. Annie and Michael's marriage is mentioned in one of the books.

"I liked Nena," Annie recalled, "and thought she was a pretty free spirit. I liked their house and decorations. We had similar interests; I liked how she dressed, since she loved ethnic clothing. But I didn't enjoy their

parties and how childish we thought they acted for 'old people'. Of course, at the time they were probably in their forties and we were really pretty conventional about relationships."

Annie and Michael lived on the Upper West Side. "We wanted a very protective sacred kind of relationship," Annie said. "I am very good at being a partner. I've always modeled my life after my parents and they were inseparable. They did everything together, politics, business, everything. It can be a drawback trying to emulate that model"

Annie and Michael spent a lot of time with her parents both in Manhattan and Gardiner. In 1971, they gave her parents a weekend at Mohonk and loaned their Saab to them so they could visit the Seaholms. During their visit, Seon broke the key off in the ignition and had wait for the repairman to come and fix the problem. In the course of spending extra time there, Seon and Dorothy learned that the Seaholms wanted to sell their property, a place all the Felshin's had known and liked for many years. A week later, Annie and Michael purchased the Seaholm property as a weekend home. "But we ended up spending too much time cleaning things up," Annie remembered. "The house had 52 windows that had been handmade by "pops" Seaholm, Jack's Scandinavian carpenter father. It was so much work maintaining a big old rebuilt farmhouse. By the time we owned it, the chicken coop had been converted into a garage and the old fireplaces were long gone. When we did any renovations we would find newspaper from the 40s and 50s scrunched up as insulation in the walls. The kitchen was once a summer kitchen and is probably un-insulated. Exploring the woods surrounding the house was an adventure. We reaped many old bottles and pieces of farm implements. An old car in the back finally rusted away a few years ago. There's an old spring still back in the woods, but it's been long abandoned."

"The Seaholm's always wanted to retire to Florida and buy a Cadillac." Annie remembered. "They were able to do that after they sold us the house, but Amy Seaholm always missed the country. She came to visit us in later years. I still have the sign saying Seaholm's that hung on the road."

EVERYTHING WE WANTED RIGHT IN THE MOUNTAINS

In the 70s, swimming in Tilson Lake became one of Annie's favorite activities. "There was a big gazebo there with food and a dock. The whole lake front was dotted with people lying on blankets in the grass. It was an incredibly wonderful place. It would be great if it could revert to that again. I don't ever remember going to the hamlet of Gardiner. We had everything we wanted right in the mountains."

During this period, Hardie Truesdale introduced Annie to the Undercliff/Overcliff carriage road, the Preserve's most popular walk. "Hardie was still in high school then. He took us cross country skiing up there," she said. "It was the funniest activity I had ever done. I kept falling no matter what I did. Then we would slide down the talus slope to his house! "

Hardie later worked as an apprentice in Michael's photography studio and it was there that he was introduced to working with large format cameras.

"There was a big gazebo [at Tilson lake] with food and a dock. The whole lake front was dotted with people lying on blankets in the grass. It was an incredibly wonderful place. It would be great if it could revert to that again."

Subsequently, Hardie built an international career taking large format nature photographs all over Gardiner and the Hudson Valley.

Annie and Michael loved Minnewaska and visited it often. "We stayed at Cliff House once before it closed for the winter," Annie said. "We may have been the last guests, in fact. It felt spooky since we were among the only guests and had a lake view room and the winds were howling." Cliff House was abandoned in 1972 due to maintenance costs; it burned to the ground in 1978 in the middle of a raging snowstorm. Wildmere closed in 1979 and burned to the ground in 1986. Annie and Michael split up in 1974. Their Gardiner weekend house was sold to Annie's parents who later moved up to Gardiner full time.

IVAN REZUCHA

In 1976 Annie spent most of the year living in Mexico City and traveling all over Mexico with a friend who was director of Museo Nacional de Artes y Industrias Populares. During that year she did a lot of photography, including photographs for a Mexican publication on lacquerware. She also collected folk art for the store and had many adventures in remote markets and villages. Her photos appeared in a Mexican folk art story in Better Homes and Gardens. In 1980, Annie met Ivan Rezuca, a long-time rock climber and computer programmer, a man she remained with for 18 years. He introduced her to climbing and to 'serious' bike riding. They went on long rides down McKinstry Road and Burnt Meadow Road, both of which were undeveloped at the time. "There were the most beautiful views then," Annie said. "You could travel forever and not see a house. Then more and more houses appeared. It is lucky that people didn't build on fragile slopes like in California. We still have farms on these roads and there are still some unobstructed views of Millbrook."

Annie closed her store in New York City and moved to Gardiner where she lived in the upstairs portion of the former Seaholm house; her parents lived downstairs. Annie's parents later passed the house on to her since they had all shared it; she still lives there today. Her sister, who is now an independent art curator, writer and critic, stayed in New York and still lives in the same apartment her family inhabited during high school. She and Annie speak regularly but Nina does not visit Gardiner very often.

In 1985, after getting married, Annie and Ivan took an eight month trip around the world. "We tramped in New Zealand and trekked the Anapurna circuit in Nepal," she recalled. "We did many first ascents of new rock climbing routes in the Gunks and there is one well known climb called AnnieOh, named after me." They canoed in Canada and did bike touring trips in the Pyrenees, Provence and Germany. They split up in 1998 when Ivan moved back to Boulder, CO where he had gone to graduate school.

SAVE THE RIDGE

"Annie is a bright, dedicated and impassioned environmentalist."

Pauline Alexander, a former Lord & Taylor executive now residing in Gardiner, recalls browsing Annie's "very eclectic shop" in New York City. She also recalls the Seaholm B&B where she and her husband used to have friends stay when they ran out of room in their house. "Annie is a

bright, dedicated and impassioned environmentalist," said Pauline. She was among the most

outspoken members of a group of outspoken people called Save the Ridge. The group formed in 2003 in opposition to a proposed 400 house development called Awosting Reserve which was to be built on 2,600 largely pristine acres on the Ridge. As a direct result of Save the Ridge's opposition, the project was abandoned and the land is now part of Minnewaska State Park.

The Awosting Reserve project stimulated a tremendous amount of conservationist activity in Gardiner and surrounding towns. In Gardiner, a process began to make comprehensive changes in the Ridge zoning in order to protect steep slopes and cliffs and fragile habitats. The Gardiner Town Board passed a moratorium on Ridge development until the zoning could be finished. The town's Environmental Conservation Commission took the lead on creating an Open Space Plan to provide a similar level of environmental protection in the valley, which is roughly 80% of the town's total acreage.

As co-chair of the Open Space Planning Committee, I asked people in Save the Ridge who they would nominate to serve on my committee. Several people said Annie O'Neill, so I called her. She was known for being passionate about protecting the Ridge for many years before Awosting Reserve and had been on the board of Friends of the Shawangunks since 1988 and editor of their publications, *Shawangunk Watch*.

Annie told me that her interest was really in the Ridge, not the valley, and that she was already involved in a large number of other volunteer projects. "I don't think I can give it the time it requires," she told me. I respected her integrity. People often agree to serve on a committee without considering whether they can actually live up to the commitment they've accepted.

Ultimately, Annie agreed to give OSPC a test drive. She and Pauline Alexander, another committee member, met with me to discuss ways to raise public consciousness about the beautiful land surrounding us. We brainstormed how and where to have nature walks and other public education programs. We also talked about starting an Open Space Fund in Gardiner. We started planning an event in celebration of the return of a mated pair of peregrine falcons that can be viewed from Pauline's backyard in the spring. All great ideas. Unfortunately, none of these things came to pass. After two committee meetings, Annie withdrew from active participation in OSPC. I think our work was too focused on the Valley for someone with such strong connections to the Ridge. To my surprise, she was frequent presence at myriad public meeting and planning sessions, and was front and center down the stretch at public hearings on the Plan. She also publicly supported the successful bond referendum that provided start-up funding for the Open Space Plan

FINDING THINGS NO ONE ELSE WOULD HAVE NOTICED

Annie has been an active hiker for many years. Susan Scher, a potter and President of Unison Arts and Learning Center in New Paltz, goes on many walks with Annie in the Preserve, Mohonk and Minnewaska. Susan says that Annie is the most physically active person she knows. "She walks with other people and also alone. She hardly ever gets tired. She probably walks every day that the weather permits.

“When we walk, she is often picking up small rocks and other interesting things like crystals, fossils or pieces of wood. My job is to put them in her backpack. I often laugh at her because her backpack can get quite heavy. She can not resist something interesting on the ground. She finds things I would never have noticed because she is always on the look out for natural objects to turn into sculptures.”



Annie working on one of her bird sculptures in 1983
(Photo courtesy Annie O'Neill)

Susan and her husband Norman hiked with Annie in Mallorca for two weeks in 2006.

Susan says that Annie has an unusual “friendliness and willingness to walk up to total strangers and engage them in conversation. This leads to many interesting encounters and experiences. She knows an incredible number of people because she is so outgoing.”

Annie visited Corsica recently for a long distance backpacking trip. “I love traveling,” Annie said. “But at this stage of my life, I find it it’s harder to find friends to travel with who like to do the kinds of trips I enjoy.”

DOROTHY

Annie and her mother traveled together to Mexico until Dorothy was 70. “She could go all day long,” Annie recalled. “We had lots of fun. My mom wanted to live in the present moment and didn’t give much thought to the past.”

Annie’s father, Seon, died in 1995 of congestive heart failure in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. “They didn’t really like Myrtle Beach that much,” Annie recalled, “but it was warmer than Gardiner for the winter, and they loved walking on the beach. My mom and dad were mainly responsible for the Preserve creating handicapped walking at the steel bridge area since they were active on the trails into their eighties.” Seon and Dorothy had been spending the winters in Oaxaca, Mexico until health issues made that trip too arduous. Annie and Nina took their mother back to Oaxaca again until she was 87.

Dorothy moved in with Annie in 1998 and lived with her until she died in 2000. She told us that she wanted to die in the country. “She was a tough lady in many ways. Very opinionated,” Annie said. “I thought she was going to be difficult to take care of but she turned out to be a sweetheart, very appreciative and grateful. I spoke to her almost every day of my life.”

MY OWN THREE-DIMENSIONAL SCRAPBOOK

In wrapping up this story, I visit Annie at her home, the former Seaholm B&B she stayed in as a child. It is an old, remodeled farmhouse tucked beautifully up against a leaf-carpeted slope of the Ridge. The front of the house faces the Ridge, away from the road. As I get out of my car, a

herd of a dozen steel sculpted animals stare at me from their moorings around the yard. Annie created all of them. A sculpted wild turkey spreads its wings wide, taking flight.

Inside, the house is country comfortable, with wide planked wooden floors and many windows. Most available surfaces are populated with Mexican art objects of all sizes, styles and colors, in wood, clay and fabric. There are Mexican paintings and textiles on the walls. Some of the art looks like contemporary interpretations of Aztec, Toltec and Mayan themes. Some are animated, amiable, quirky in a yellow submarine kind of way. Some are more classically beautiful, graceful and sensitive with hints of African, Southeast Asian and Indian influences. Sitting with Annie in front of an enormous window looking out at the Ridge, I feel like I am in a very friendly, eclectic museum, one woman's greatest hits collection of Mexican art.

In her essay in the book, "Living Traditions: Mexican Popular Arts" (SUNY 1992), Annie wrote: "My collection is very personal –a reflection of things in which I delighted, and the objects and artisans that intrigued me as I collected. It was not premeditated... it was always an adventure ... for that moment of discovery that kindles the quest."

"the evening before what became the Blizzard of 2007 Annie said, "I've got my snow shovel out." She seemed very excited, happy, ready for whatever was going to happen next.

"When I look around me at home," she wrote, "I have my own three-dimensional scrapbook ... of special pieces that cannot always be understood through just the eyes — the heart and imagination must be at work, too."

Annie loves Gardiner and is excited at the changes that are making the town such a delightful place to visit. She loves the library and is really looking forward to the new one. She feels

that Gardiner is becoming more vibrant yearly, and that it is attracting people who really care about their town.

When it's time for me to go, she walks me out and looks at the darkening sky. It's the evening before what became the Blizzard of 2007, our first real storm of the 2007 winter. "I've got my snow shovel out," Annie said. She seemed very excited, happy, ready for whatever was going to happen next.

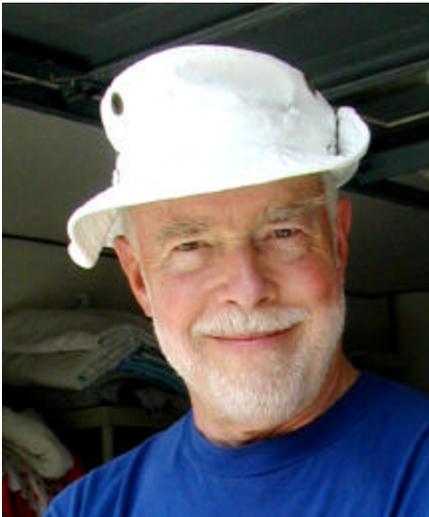


Lew Eisenberg

Writer

Lewis Eisenberg has been a Gardiner resident since late in the last century. By day, he is a marketing and public relations consultant. Before the day starts, he is often a visual artist with an affinity for the surreal and the mythic. His essays have been featured on National Public Radio and been published in the Wall Street Journal and other publications. He has written speeches for James Earl Jones and many CEO's.

Prior to moving to Gardiner, Lew was executive director of a national Jewish men's organization and Clearwater, an environmental organization founded by Pete Seeger. He has served Gardiner as chairman of the Open Space Planning Committee and chair of the Environmental Conservation Committee. He is married to Myrna Socol, his childhood sweetheart.



Raymond D. Smith, Jr.

Editor

Ray Smith, author of the Dot Decker story and Editor of the Betty Moran, Annie O'Neill, and Vivian Beatty stories for the *Hudson Valley History Project Gardiner*, spent 37 years as an international banker and credit officer at Bankers Trust Company in New York City and London. He retired twelve years ago. Ray and his wife, Anne Allbright Smith, moved to Gardiner three years ago.

Ray was an English major in college and during his undergraduate years was, at one time or another, either editor or managing editor of every student publication on campus except the yearbook. He is an avid reader and enjoys writing.