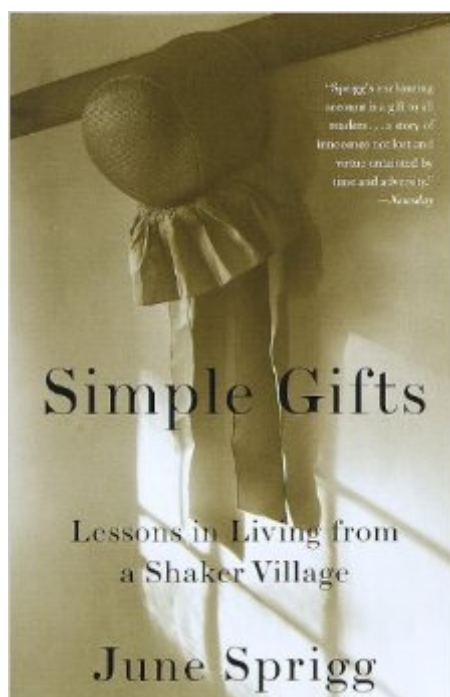


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Simple Gifts: Lessons In Living From A Shaker Village



Synopsis

In *Simple Gifts*, June Sprigg tells the story of one of America's last Shaker communities--Canterbury Shaker Village, in Canterbury, New Hampshire--during its twilight years, and of its seven remarkable "survivor" women, who were among the last representatives of our longest-lived and best-known communal utopian society. As a college student Sprigg spent a summer among them, and here she gracefully interweaves the narrative of their lives with the broader history of Shakers in America as she shows us how her experiences there affected her own life and opened the door to her creativity. Gleaning information from old records and journals that she pored over that summer and later, Sprigg brings to life the generations of Canterbury Shakers from the eighteenth century to the present--their customs, their architecture, their spirituality. She also explores the social and cultural forces and the internal imperatives and tensions that caused membership to decrease, all of which, by 1972, brought the community to crisis. Chronicling the daily life of the village as she found it, Sprigg uncovers the affirming energies of the Shakers--the prominence of mutual love and respect, the devoted tradition of mothering surrogate children, and, above all, the surviving women's spirited eccentricities. She reveals the Shakers as individuals--their personal histories, their wildly different beginnings, what they gave up to join the Shaker community, and, more important, what they gained. Through her lively text and drawings and her intimate connection with the community, Sprigg brings us close to its people with a book that both enlightens and inspires. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I grew up close to the only surviving Shaker village in the world and my interest in this interesting people is alive and well. I enjoyed this book for the glimpse of people who remain alive within the pages of books written by those who lived and worked among them. I would agree, this book is meant for those with an interest in the people and their everyday lives. It is a great way to prelude a visit to the Canterbury Village where everything is made real.

This book is NOT just for those with an interest in the Shakers. I picked it from the library shelf at random while looking for something else, and I am so glad I did. Those who enjoy learning from their elders, those who are trying to make sense of religion, and those who love a good memoir may want to give this book a try. I loved the author's positive outlook. She treats her subject with great sensitivity, warmth, and attention to detail.

I enjoyed the fly on the wall experience I had reading Sprigg's work. I felt like I was going through the same things and meeting the same people she was. All of the people came alive for me as I read about the lives of some interesting women who lived at Canterbury Village. I must say, though, that the book meant even more to me when I made the trek to the village and took the awesome tour. Then all of the people spoke to me. I found myself reading the book again to put myself in their place.

June Sprigg is a perceptive, compassionate, and poetic observer of Shaker life as she shared it in the early 1970's. Her representation is sympathetic but doesn't "whitewash" the human frailties of the people she encountered. Her descriptions of the beauty of the natural surroundings in which she lived and worked are superb, delicate, and rich. The work is further enhanced by her sweetly simple pencil sketches of the village and the Shakers she grew to love. Perfect reading for summer--or any other time.

If you are looking for another Sue Bender's Plain and Simple, this is not the book you seek. If, however, you are interested in people, especially people who espouse a dying way of life, this book is well worth your time. And, if you have an interest in Shaker music, consider this a must - you'll "meet" some of the singers on the last "field recordings" of the Shakers.

I, probably as most of us do, thought of the "Shakers", as a history book entry to our long ago past.

And no way they could be as exciting and instructive as the sailors/whalers in Melville's "Moby-Dick", or Richard Dana's Two Years Before the Mast". I was wrong!! This book written over one hundred years later by a teen-aged girl in the 1960's deals with the firm values of a religious order, that was as tightly knit and controlled as any sailing vessel. It had to be in order to survive. As did any sail vessel on the endless expanse of salt water. Until the development of a reliable spring clock, no vessel could tell latitude. They could determine longitude, but not else. Herein a group of elderly, dying old (religious) women, (some helpful, some antagonistic and some not) help a 1960's teenage girl into a meaningful life. June's remembrances, make me wish I had known all involved.

Good Memoir about the Shaker way of life. 1 Star removed for the pace of the book, which I realize based on the life style of the village vs. modern day, how can the author really speed it up. Good read overall though!

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