

## Shining Star: Let your creativity soar this summer on Star Island

By **Vandy Duffy**

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Retreat.

In the summer, this word appeals to me on many levels. Escape, evacuate, hide, keep aloof, opt out, recede, retire, seclude oneself, sequester, get away, withdraw — these all sound like ways to vacation to me. As an art teacher, I work with people, 500 different children, other staff and parents in a 10-month period. I'm also an extrovert, so interacting with people in so many different ways charges my batteries. But summer ...; is a different story.

As a child I lived in Chicago. When I was 16 years old and allowed to travel on my own, I discovered Star Island in the Isles of Shoals off the coast of Portsmouth. Even if you live on the Seacoast, you may never have been there. Many people haven't. We often take for granted local destinations and entertainment resources. I have talked to many New Hampshire natives about my adventures on Star Island in the Isles of Shoals and some people don't know there is a group of islands sitting between New Hampshire and Maine.

The Isles of Shoals may be best known as the home of Celia Thaxter, whose father was the keeper of White Island Light before he built the first hotel on Appledore Island, Maine. At the end of the 19th century, many well-known artists and writers came to the islands. Celia Thaxter became a poet and gardener of renown. In the last year of her life, she published "An Island Garden," poetic reflections of her garden and island life.

Since 1916, the nonprofit Star Island Corporation has owned and operated Star Island, one of the largest of the nine Isles of Shoals. Its mission: —» to hold and administer Star Island and other properties we own for educational, religious, and kindred purposes." ([www.starisland.org](http://www.starisland.org)). Conferences are held on the island in the late spring through early fall months, the island closing up for the harsh winters 10 miles out to sea.

This spring and summer there is a renewed flavor of the artistic atmosphere that existed in Celia Thaxter's time. Star Island Conference center is holding almost a dozen arts and creativity "conferences." The island's distance from the mainland offers a retreat from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. There are usually no more than two or three vehicles on the island, which are used to transport luggage and supplies. Until recently, computers, cell phones and other electronics were discouraged. On all sides there are ocean and ocean views, beautiful rocky shores, gardens and wildlife. The island even has a building for the purpose of creating. The Art Barn sits on the backside of the island. From inside its rustic walls, you can hear the gulls call and the waves crash upon the rocks. This is an inspiring environment in which to create. I know, I have been lucky enough to be the art barn coordinator for a conference for the last six years.

This year's conferences include the New Hampshire Society of Photographic Artists (NHSPA) "Digital Photography Workshop" and the "New Hampshire Society Photographic Artists Retreat." Kyle Belmont, the Star Island Corporation's program and outreach coordinator, tells me that this is the NHSPA's 16th year holding conferences on Star Island. To attend these conferences you don't need to be a member of the N.H. Photographic

Society and they are for all skill levels. The Digital Photography Workshop will be led by Peter Randall, the organization's founder. The NHSPA's "Retreat" will provide workshops with well-known New England photographer Frank Armstrong.

For those not looking at the world through a lens but discovering it through a pen, there are three different conferences for writers: "Writers in the Round," a conference for poets and song writers, and "Writelines I and II." Published writer Dale Slongwhite, the founder of the Writelines conferences, has been leading writing workshops on Star Island for nine years. Her workshops are based on the writer's rule that the more you write the better you get. "Usually, when people come in the first day some have their heads down, are nervous, they think 'everyone will be better than me, should I even be here?'" says Slongwhite. "We begin with only positive comments and feedback. It buoys up people's confidence. By the end of that first day they feel, 'I am a writer.' They write more and get better. Being a writer is the way you view the world. The way you pay attention so you can talk about it, or write about it, tell the story," explains Slongwhite. "Everyone in these workshops learns something, from the most experienced writer to the person just starting out."

For those wishing to make connections with other artistic and creative people Star Island annually offers the Star Arts conference in mid-June. "It will awaken and inspire your inner poet, singer, dancer, painter, photographer, comedian, writer, musician, actor, or even polar bear swimmer. With 10 miles of ocean between you and everyday civilization, you can indulge in an old favorite hobby or learn an entirely new craft. Join this passionate and diverse community for a week of active creation, porch relaxation, island wandering on the crags, or personal reflection. All adults and experience levels are invited to this nourishing and beautiful experience."  
([www.starisland.org/conferences/2013](http://www.starisland.org/conferences/2013))

Also, being offered this year is "Conversations in Creativity ...; Come ignite your creative spirit through conversations with artists, chefs, scientists, writers, and others equally invested in the creative process, in a week of sharing and personal exploration." ([www.starisland.org/conferences/2013](http://www.starisland.org/conferences/2013)) Kyle Belmont says that this conference is based on the "TED Talks" concept of others sharing their creative pursuits, thus sparking conversations about creativity.

During the months of August and September, the Road Scholar (formally Elderhostel) program will be hosting two week-long conferences on digital photography and watercolor painting on Star Island.

Additionally, for dancers and singers, there is the Star Hampshire Dance weekend, which will feature contra, square, English country and couples dancing. This conference will coincide with Star Island Harmony weekend. Star Island Harmony is for those who are interested in singing a cappella four-part harmony of various song types from various traditions.

So, if you are feeling overwhelmed or just plain uninspired, you may find that a "retreat" is just the remedy. Just know that on Star Island you can retreat but with these creative conferences you surely won't "disengage."

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## Go&Do

Star Island Conferences, [www.starisland.org](http://www.starisland.org)

Dale Slongwhite, Writelines, <https://writelines.net/>

Writers in the Round, [www.witrhome.org/retreat](http://www.witrhome.org/retreat)

Road Scholar, [www.roadscholar.org](http://www.roadscholar.org)

Star Hampshire, [www.nhcountrydance.com/music/star-hampshire.html](http://www.nhcountrydance.com/music/star-hampshire.html)

Star Island Harmony, <http://amidonmusic.com/workshops/star-island-harmony>

New Hampshire Society for Photographic Artists, [www.nhspa.org/aboutus.cfm](http://www.nhspa.org/aboutus.cfm)

Star Arts, [www.stararts.org/home/index.php](http://www.stararts.org/home/index.php)

Conversations in Creativity, [www.conversationsincreativity.org/](http://www.conversationsincreativity.org/)