

A young boy with light brown hair is running towards the camera on a dirt path in a forest. He is wearing a light blue t-shirt with a graphic that says 'The Beatles' and dark pants. He is holding a violin in his left hand and a bow in his right. The path is surrounded by dense green foliage and trees. The background is slightly blurred, emphasizing the boy in the foreground.

# *Into the Woods*

Cherishing Traditional Song and Dance  
at Pinewoods Camp

By Constance Lindner  
Photography by Jack Foley



**I**t's Campers' Week at Pinewoods Camp in Plymouth, and 8-year-old Alice Flanagan is biding her time. Though too young to join in the centuries-old rapper dance, a descendent of ritual sword dancing, lesson that is about to commence in the nearby pavilion, she is not about to miss her chance of taking in the intricate sequence of movements.

Oblivious to the campers splashing in Long Pond and conversation around the camp store about the particularly good root beer and the warmth of the water, Flanagan remains rooted to her perch on the office steps. "I've waited all year for this and I don't want to miss it by going swimming," she tells camp associate director Steve Howe, who nods understandingly.

Further down the trail, a group of 8-year-olds are dancing their steps slowly, wooden sticks held aloft as they walk in circles, sometimes meeting up to intertwine their "swords" in a ritual sword dance. The accordionist breaks off as instructor Andy Davis asks, "How many of you felt pulled? We want to just get rid of that. It's not a good feeling." And they begin, again, with greater care.



Other young dancers are taking a break, discussing the feasibility and physics involved in potentially clog dancing one's way through the pavilion floor. Around them is the smell of wood and greenery, elongated time, and the swooshing, rhythmic steps of parents and grandparents dancing at yet another of the camp's four pavilions.

Though only six miles from the Sagamore Bridge off exit 3, Pinewoods Camp is a world apart—with 25 wooded acres tucked between Long and Round Ponds. Folk music, American square dance, Highland, sword, and other ritual dances are taught by instructors and enjoyed by mostly adult participants who travel from across the United States and even overseas to participate. So popular has the camp become that several satellites have been set up in other parts of the country so that long-distance attendees have a closer-to-home option.



By the mid-1930s, the Girls Scouts had been moved to another property so that the renamed Pinewoods Camp could dedicate itself exclusively to riding the wave of Anglomaniac sweeping the upper crust of Boston society, who clamored for lessons in English Country and Morris dancing. Storrow later bequeathed the camp to Lily and Rick Conant in the mid-1940s, and the couple ran the place largely from their kitchen table, surviving despite the occasional deficit and growing disrepair. In 1976, the faltering retreat was rescued when the Conant family, camp participants, and a number of pond area residents merged to form the nonprofit Pinewoods Camp, Inc.

Today, up to 150 campers converge weekly from June through July for their fill of programs run by "user groups." The Country Dance Society, Boston Centre; Country Dance and Song Society; the Folk Arts center of New England; and the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society take turns at the beautiful site teaching English, Balkan, or American dance, as well as music chorus, consorts, and ensembles.

For most of the summer, Pinewoods is a place for adults to immerse themselves in dance and music in the company of those who share that interest and extend a ready acceptance, says Howe. But that same sensibility is present in the two week-long sessions and one weekend set aside for inter-generational use, whether it's Family Week or the no-frills Campers' Week,

It's about as comfortable a camp experience as one can get, with custom-built pavilions, cabins, an open dining hall with pond views and meals made from locally grown produce, two freshwater lakes with canoes available for use, and a camp house for large meetings.

Traditional dance and music has been enjoyed at this site since its founding as "Pine Tree Camp" in 1919 by Boston gentry Helen Osborne Storrow of Storrow Drive renown. The site was initially the first national Girl Scout leadership training school but, as president of what is now the National Country Dance and Song Society, Storrow made sure to fold English and Scottish dance into the program.





"It's pretty powerful for a child to perform in front of 150 people and it fosters their creativity and confidence because this is done as part of a caring community," says Donna Bednar, who helps organize Family Week. Her mother-in-law, Helena Cornelius, is an English Country Dance instructor and Bednar's son, Ryan Cornelius, has added English Country music to his repertoire of loud rock that he plays on guitar at home.

where volunteerism fuels the lessons and maintenance.

What makes this time so special, besides the rarified experience of reveling in traditional music and dance in the midst of nature, is that "the grandparents and parents are not sending the children away but bringing them along to enjoy something they love a lot—it's a sharing of a favorite experience," says Howe.

Everyone is kept busy with classes that are set up for different ages and skills, but there are communal swims twice a day, and morning and evening meetings. During the morning gathering, individuals can contribute a song or story.





The relatively new option to bring children along has enriched camp sessions with second and third generations sharing the experience together, offering yet another reason for oldest members who have returned as much as 50 years without let-up to keep returning.

Ellie Hansen and husband, Bob Erenburg, of New Jersey, are bringing their American grandchildren and two from Sweden for this summer's Family Week. They first gave up their beloved English Week in 2003 to share their musical interests with oldest grandson Reese Hansen, then four years old. Within no time, Reese was comfortably ensconced in the rhythm of classes, swimming, and free time spent building "fairy houses" of pine needles and twigs with the other children and has returned with his grandparents each summer. As he got older, Reese appreciated free time to explore the narrow trails, as well as the impromptu piano lessons from the many musicians at the camp, who demonstrated method and offered advice.

"He took piano lessons at home, but this changed Reese's entire understanding and appreciation of what it could be," said Hansen.

"We eat, talk, sing, dance, and are woven together," said Henry Chapin, a Manhattan-based musician, who spent summers growing up "across the pond" from Pinewoods, near many second cousins, including Steve Howe, with sounds of music wafting across the



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water and the occasional meeting with camp characters rowing on the lake." At age 8, Chapin visited the camp one evening and danced with May Gadd, an English woman brought to the States by Cecil Sharpe to teach wealthy Americans English Country dances. At 14, he worked his first job under the Conants in the camp kitchen while immersing himself in the camp's many offerings.

"It was and is a place where you can dance and have a magic week," says Chapin. "The only difference is that now there are children's programs whereas staff's kids and workers used to have to find their own amusements."

Chapin's cousin, Steve Howe, has been attending the camp for 20 years, first in the company of his parents and now with his three children participating. Though much of his time is spent behind a desk in the camp office, making sure all runs smoothly, he finds another type of satisfaction in watching the decidedly simple pleasures unfold, where children fashion fishing rods from sticks and glow when they have figured out a particularly complicated dance step or know the lyrics to a song.

In the evenings, everyone joins in song and dance before those nine and younger are led off by a Fied Fiper, who escorts the children to their bunks with song. A monitor remains in the area, making sure no child is crying or missing a parent. The early bedtime matters so that the children can start the next day refreshed and perhaps even brave enough to join in on one of the evening dances.

"It's fun to watch the new children talking within days about what they will do here next summer, and wonderful to watch them realize how much of the dance they have mastered," says Howe. "As they join in step with everyone else, it seems that what pleases them most is realizing they are part of this community." **SSL**



To learn more about Pinewoods Camp, visit [www.pinewoods.org](http://www.pinewoods.org).