

Explore New England

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE MAY 18, 2008 | BOSTON.COM/TRAVEL

SPENCER



Silence and solitude

PHOTOS BY ETHAN GILSDORF/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

By Ethan Gilsdorf
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

I arrive in rain and gloom and fog to see where in me is God. Or why God is not in me.

This explains why an atheist elected to infiltrate Saint Joseph's Abbey and its Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance for a few days. Perhaps "infiltrate" is not the correct word. "Crash"? Or simply "be in the presence of," and see what a rigorous expression of faith might be like. And if any of it might rub off.

Caveat: When asked, I say I was raised neither Christian nor anything else. I say I was raised by wolves. I have never prayed in a way that most devout people would consider praying. Yet I yearn to be tethered to a presence beyond myself. I could use that in my life. I need that.

But as Anne Sexton wrote in the poem "With Mercy for the Greedy," in response to a friend who asks her "to call a priest" and "wear The Cross," "need is not quite belief."

So I'm here. Needing. Eyes open.

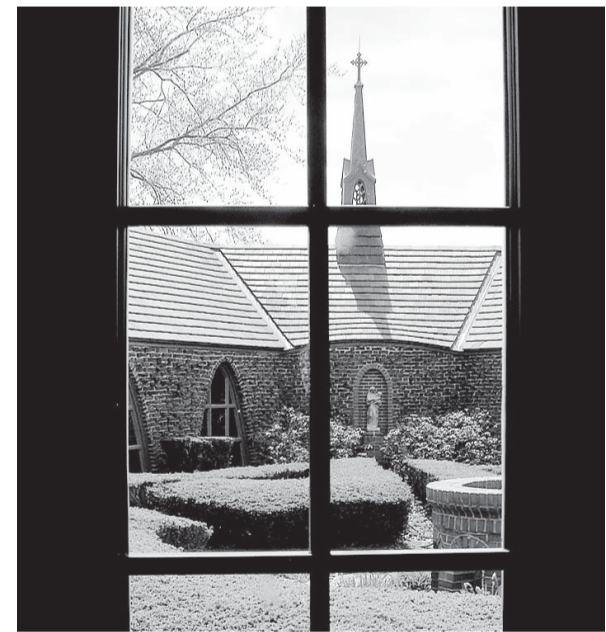
Day 1:

Saint Joseph's Abbey is a 2,000-acre time capsule 20 minutes west of Worcester. In 1950, these Roman Catholic monks, popularly known as Trappists, moved here from the Diocese of Providence. Their old abbey in Cumberland, R.I., had been destroyed by fire (so had their previous location in Nova Scotia). Once again, the monks began anew.

RETREAT, Page M8



A nonbeliever retreats to a monks' abbey to practice their rituals and routines



At Saint Joseph's Abbey in the countryside west of Worcester, the Trappists built a church, cloister, dormitories, and guest house, both removed from the world and surrounded by the natural world.



TIM WACKER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

David Dominy with his daughter Lane, 3, and son Jacob, 8, at Rangeley Lake.

A Norman Rockwell summer place

By Tim Wacker
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

RANGELEY, MAINE

My family and I have many memories of a week spent in a waterfront rental on Rangeley Lake: wild raspberries, orange sunsets, morning mists, children splashing for hours in crystalline waters, fresh-caught salmon grilled with lemon and butter, and canoeing in a warm summer rain.

But as newcomers to Rangeley, there are many memories we don't have: singing with friends around campfires, family talent shows, sandlot baseball, potluck dinners, and bean-hole beans (sort of a woodland version of a clambake). For generations of New Englanders who have been coming here for years, such memories are woven into the fabric of their family life.

"My grandfather, my father, and my uncle first came to this place to go fishing in 1936," said the Rev. Ted F. Tumicki, 37, a pastor from Norwich, Conn. "When they came back from that first trip they brought the rest of the family

up that same year. I've been going there since I was born."

Local real estate agents say that families like the Tumickis make up about 70 percent of their business: repeat customers who stay in the same rental year after year. Vacation communities elsewhere work hard to earn that kind of loyalty. In Rangeley, it seems to come naturally.

The Rangeley Lakes Region, as it is called, sits in a remote section of Maine's western flank. It encompasses roughly 100 square miles of wilderness that extends well beyond the body of water for which the area is named.

A Chamber of Commerce website says there are 111 lakes and ponds here. The best known of the lakes, Saddleback, Rangeley, and Mooselookmeguntic, known locally as "Mooselick," are trout and salmon fishing havens whose fame began with an 1877 Harper's magazine article extolling the eight-pound brook trout.

The Appalachian Trail passes right over Saddleback Mountain and the area is dominated by small streams and big woods that swallow all signs of civilization five min-

RANGELEY, Page M9

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