

by Lou Ann Homan-Saylor

My summer life on Ocracoke is enchanting. Now that I have settled in, it feels as if this is my home, my life. Maybe that is part of my philosophy for life in being present in the moment, wherever that takes me and whatever I do.

I fall asleep at night thinking about living on this fragile sandbar two and a half hours out to sea in a cottage built during the Civil War. The cottage was originally built by a man who was seeking a bride. The story is lost to time as to why he never married, but eventually he moved back in with his parents and the cottage was sold to the Howard family as a wedding gift for Homer and Aliph. Thirteen children were born in this 1,000 square foot cottage, although six did not reach adulthood.

Homer & Aliph Howard Home:



Sometimes at night when the wind blows through the cottage's creaking doors I think I might hear the laughter of children. I would prefer, however, to not hear the laughter of those long ago children!

The sandy lane in front of the picket fence is full of clam and oyster shells to give it a base

for walking and for bicycles. Often tourists will ask if they were put there for decorations, but I assure them that not much was put here for decorations.

I spend a lot of time in my Mad Mag Studio which is adorned with thrift shop furniture, books, a borrowed guitar, seashells, twinkle lights and my necessary means of modern life: the laptop and camera. My studio was once the washhouse and still sports the old floor and ceiling from long ago. It is indeed charming with a wonderful creative space.

Folks visiting think that my day is just whiled away sitting on the pizer (porch) shelling beans or reading. Whereas I am known to do just that, there are chores to be done as in every household: sweeping, scrubbing, cooking, washing ... the usual. There are some differences here as the sweeping is done with a broom, there is no dishwasher and all the laundry is hung outdoors. I often think of Miss Aliph and how hard she worked raising the children here without running water or indoor plumbing or air-conditioning. She strained mosquito larvae out of the cistern water, brushed her screens with kerosene to keep flies and bugs out of the house and birthed each child in the small downstairs bedroom.

My work is usually in the evening as I lead ghost and history walks, write and perform in the weekly Opry and have my own show of stories and songs on Friday nights. Sometimes parties or events begin after hours.

The Ocracoke Opry:



One night this week my friend Jude Wheeler invited friends over to see her Night-Blooming Cereus bloom. The party wasn't even to begin until 10 p.m., which was perfect for me as I would just be finishing up telling stories in the graveyard. It was late, but the waxing gibbous moon led the way to her island cottage. Several folks had already arrived carrying cold bottles of wine as a relief from the summer heat.

As I arrived the flower was not in bloom. Jude was sure the last three blooms would open, but they were still closed up. We settled onto the screened-in porch listening to the night sounds, telling stories and laughing a good bit. We, of course, talked about the flower that had drawn us all together. The Cereus, also known as the Queen of the Night Cactus, is pollinated by night-flying insects, like moths. It is a close relative of the Christmas cactus. However, this flower blooms late into the night and closes in the morning, and that's that.

Upon the midnight hour, we, the guests, decided it was time to depart. As we opened the screen door to leave, someone shouted that the cactus had begun to bloom. We stood around the flower as if it were a treasure chest just being opened and we literally watched the Queen of the Night Cactus bloom. Within a half an hour it was full and gorgeous, and we were in awe and humbled by its beauty. I took a photograph of this phenomenon before leaving for the night.

Night-Blooming Cereus:



Walking home through the sandy lanes I could only wonder about the beauty of the world and of the simple life I choose by being here.

My own garden was bathed in moonlight as I whispered "Good night beautiful world."