

Flashback: Yaddo, Then & Now: A Sweet Inspiration



I was born Mary Ann Bruchac in Saratoga Springs in upstate New York, and raised a few miles away in a little town named Greenfield Center. These two places could not have been more different. Greenfield, in the Adirondack foothills, was still country, much of it rugged and with a lot of farm land. The population was a mixture of ancestors of the town's earliest settlers, and immigrants, who had arrived from Europe in the early 20th century. Many from both of these groups lived off the land or had blue-collar jobs. I am descended from both early settlers and immigrants.

Saratoga Springs, whose slogan in the 1950s was still "Health, History, Horses," had been internationally known by the 19th century as "Queen of the Spas." Though the city was in decline during my childhood, its reputation was still intact and its thoroughbred racing going strong. Summers the population exploded with visitors to the tracks, including the wealthy upperclass who owned spectacular mansions and estates along the city's wide thoroughfares. But of all

Saratoga's attractions, the private **Yaddo** grounds, an exclusive artists' retreat just beyond the racetrack, captivated me the most. Through Yaddo's wondrous wrought-iron gates passed countless artists and writers from all over the country, invited for their creative sojourn at the Mansion and guest cottages.

I made this photograph of that mythic entry in 1992. Looking at it I am again that little girl, watching the road disappear behind our car, eager for what was coming up ahead, around the curve and a few steps beyond the circling trees—statues, fountains, a grand tiered rose garden, and a colossal Mansion at the top of the biggest lawn I had ever seen. This was the stuff of fairy tales, but I was the one enchanted. This photograph, made so many decades later, became the seed for *Sweet Inspiration*, my series on places that have inspired creativity.

On Location at Yaddo, 1984

Filming for *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*

I returned to **Yaddo** in 1984 on an artistic foray of my own. One Sunday afternoon I showed up with my NYU film crew to shoot sequences for *Lyn Lifshin, Not Made of Glass*, my film about this well-known contemporary poet. Permission had been cleared and Curt Harnack, then-director, was pleased to welcome us, since Lyn had often been a guest at Yaddo.

Everything went fine until while shooting in the Library our camera lights blew out all the power, which luckily happened near the end of our shoot. Hastily we wrapped our interior scenes while power was restored and moved outside to the Tower where Edgar Allen Poe once wrote. There we shot in a full snowstorm until our equipment froze, not to mention our extremities. At that point we had no choice but to move on. I would shoot on and off another year before completing this film, but in the end it was worth all the effort. *Not Made of Glass* won many prestigious awards and Lyn and I toured the country with it.