



Simple Gifts: Lessons in Living from a Shaker Village

June Sprigg

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In *Simple Gifts*, June Sprigg tells the story of one of America's last Shaker communities--Canterbury Shaker Village, in Canterbury, New Hampshire--during its twilight years, and of its seven remarkable "survivor" women, who were among the last representatives of our longest-lived and best-known communal utopian society. As a college student Sprigg spent a summer among them, and here she gracefully interweaves the narrative of their lives with the broader history of Shakers in America as she shows us how her experiences there affected her own life and opened the door to her creativity.

Gleaning information from old records and journals that she pored over that summer and later, Sprigg brings to life the generations of Canterbury Shakers from the eighteenth century to the present--their customs, their architecture, their spirituality. She also explores the social and cultural forces and the internal imperatives and tensions that caused membership to decrease, all of which, by 1972, brought the community to crisis.

Chronicling the daily life of the village as she found it, Sprigg uncovers the affirming energies of the Shakers--the prominence of mutual love and respect, the devoted tradition of mothering surrogate children, and, above all, the surviving women's spirited eccentricities. She reveals the Shakers as individuals--their personal histories, their wildly different beginnings, what they gave up to join the Shaker community, and, more important, what they gained.

Through her lively text and drawings and her intimate connection with the community, Sprigg brings us close to its people with a book that both enlightens and inspires.

From the Hardcover edition.

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