

# Trees, Wintergreen, & the A.P.A.

A conversation with Eleanor Kerr took place on May 30, 1977. The Kerr's own a sugar bush of over three thousand maples situated on a mountaintop near the village of Fine in St Lawrence County. To get there you get off of Route 3 between Star Lake and Pine and climb a steep two-lane road for a couple of miles, pass a few small houses and trailers, till you reach a place near the summit where the woods fall back away from the highway. Eleanor Kerr's trailer is on the right with the property itself on both sides of the road.



There's something about tranquility up here. If I got problems on my mind or something's bothering me or if I want some guidance or something, I always come up in these mountains and sit on the rocks, where I'm alone and it's quiet and nature takes me right over and I can think better. Everybody thinks I'm crazy but you go up in the woods and you just sit. Things will work out for you - someday or another. People giving advice - Telling you what to do - You've got to think about your own life.

I'll show you where I'm going to be buried - if it ever comes to that, they been trying for a long time. I'm going to be on top of the ground but it's gonna be ashes - "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." The only spot up here that's got the moon and the sun shining right down on the ground.

We haven't heard a thing since everybody raised so much heck over it. (About the Adirondack Park Agency.) Trying to get so we couldn't cut trees or build or anything else like that. My son and I wanted to come up here and cut down these maples and they wanted to stop us unless we had the Conservation Department come in and mark 'em - which we do every year. Now, just get the beauty of this here - right up in those pines there - there's usually a fawn and a doe. That's where they have little ones - right over there.

If I want to build a house here I'd have to get permission from them to build by house. Every one says, "The heck with it." and you can't build a house on anything less than 43 to 52 acres - Person has to buy that much to get the land to build and that's not right - Another thing is too. If I wanted to give this land to my son I can't give it to him. He has to buy it and he's got to buy over 52 acres and that's sub-dividing your land too. If you had say half an acre, two acres, you can't just give it to him - he can't buy it, you've got to deed it all to him - That's what I don't like.

Here's the spot right here. At night time that moon shines just about there and the sun, when it's a good day, it'll come right down between those trees and hits right over there. I did have it all marked out here. This is the only place there is grass up here. Anywhere there's a peak in the sky between the maple trees shining down on - for some reason or the other - it's a safe protected area. God's land. Looking down on you and sort of protecting you. You got the sun in the daylight and the moon at night, but you always have light there - if the moon shines, and as far as the rain is concerned, it's always watering the spot. You've got to grow and you're helping to fertilize the ground too.

This A.P.A. agency is beyond anybody's dreams of what they said they'd be. Now you take a wide open area like this. You want to put up a home - They come in and tell you you can't on your own property.. Which you've maybe owned for fifty years. It's been in the family. They tell you you can't do it. Why! We're not harming anything - just building a home on our own property and taking down the other one. What they're trying to do mainly is not get you building too many buildings in one spot to try and preserve it for wildlife - They tried to tell my son he couldn't put a trailer in. I says don't tell my son what he can and cannot do. There's a house there - Why can't he put a trailer there. I kicked 'em right out.

Well, one of my neighbors down here just had a bear chew up a cow. Took the hind-quarters back and ruined the bones and everything else - Took the rest of the cow and sent her to the Conservation Department. It looks to me as if that bear did a good job on a full grown cow. Took hind-quarters and ripped it right out of the socket. Get a mother bear who just had her cub. That's what probably happened. They won't reimburse her for the cow. They will partly but not fully.



(AMR GILL BROOK FLUME, ST. HUBERTS, N.Y., photo by KateFraser)

Take a spring like that - see how clear it is. That's good drinking water. Never be afraid of that. If you can get someplace where there's a little gravel here - That's wonderful drinking water - Instead of where it's so muddy. Another thing is too, you follow this on down straight through you've got to come out on a main road or some civilization someplace.

We had a girl lost up here fifteen years ago and we hunted the woods high and low for her - couldn't find her anywhere. Had search parties out and everything. I said ah, if she's got any sense at all she'll come right out on the main highway down at Harrisville. I sent one of the troopers down there. Sure enough. She came right out there at Harrisville. They said "How did you know?". I said, well, anybody's lived up in these mountains...

Right over there is the Seaway - Oh you see the smoke that's over there - That's it right there. That's about fifty to seventy-five miles away. I didn't think it was until I took a pair of binoculars - You take a pair of binoculars - You can see the stack of a ship. That was really something!

This ought to be a very good year for blackberries - It's been hot and dry. Strawberries, they ought to come out pretty good. We don't get some rain they're going to burn right out though but blackberries and huckleberries they'd do just as good.

See the blackberry bushes are starting to come out right now, the buds. You don't see buds this time of the year unless it's gonna be a full year. We usually get blackberries the size of my thumb. Strawberries aren't gonna be very plentiful. We aren't getting the plants - There are a few blossoms but they're not loaded like they usually are.

Well, I'll show you some wintergreen. Winter green only grows by swampy areas. Swampy or wooded, something like that.

You take leaves - You come down during July or August - Maybe you get a small sack full. You take 'em and take maybe a tablespoon full of water and boil 'em up - Put just a teaspoon full - a little bit of sugar with it. Oh just a pinch and you've got the best cough syrup you've ever seen. It's strong. It gets the juices.

This is a swampy area so we're going to have to go one side or the other. Here we go! Taste! Eat it! Isn't that good! Want a good picture of a piece (wintergreen)? Wait a minute. This goes in big leaves all right - Here's a dead leaf. This is no good - and here's new sprouts just coming up. Boy that stuff's good! I'd live on that. Here's the old and here's the new. That's the old stuff. That's as big as it grows. I've seen some bigger leaves. Right there is a little blossom. That's the best we can find cause it's just coming up.

You see the bears and deer get in here and they eat it - They live on this stuff, so do I usually, ha! You can live for about a year off the wooded land - and white birch - We don't have any white birch around here - but this stuff right here - This is yellow birch. See the texture of that (on inside of barkstrip). It's smooth. Take that and wet it down and if you wet it down good it'll soften up and you can chew it. Just like gum. White birch is alot better to eat. I don't like yellow birch that much. That's the only place you'll find wintergreen in these woods, next to a - see that's all springs in there - That's why it's growing here.

## WINTERGREEN

leaves are used as antiseptic, stimulant, analgesic, and aromatic. Oil obtained from this plant contains methyl silicate, which is used in the preparation of aspirin. Tea may be used whenever aspirin would be used. Baths to which strong tea has been added, can help troubled skin and soothe aching muscles. Ruled by the moon.



Now look at this spot right here. Now listen. So there isn't a sound hardly except for the birds. Now we'll walk down farther ways. You notice around you. The trees and the bushes and everything, see what happens. People don't notice it like I do. See there isn't a tree moving. Everything is perfectly calm. You don't see a budge up there. Now walk down a ways and you'll see 'em begin to rustle - That's how mother nature takes care of things. You wouldn't believe it. Did you notice that maple tree across the road from my trailer there? That's way over a hundred and fifty years old. We call it the grandfather tree and it's still blooming today with maple leaves.

See the trees! They're starting to move. Before you didn't see a sound, did you? That's because Mother Nature's just ... It's the wind - I can't explain it to you exactly how it goes - It's a phenomena of nature - Nature will take care of her own. We'd walk out of here and there wouldn't be a sound - Just the birds. Everything would be still, but the minute anybody disrupts it - Going through it, like tapping a tree - the leaves will all be rustling as if they were talking to each other. That's the way I figure it. We're in her forest. People don't see little odds and ends like that. They take it for granted - You walk down, you see the beauty of it. Hmm someone's been down in here - rolling stone - Oh it's beautiful down here! I haven't seen a grey squirrel up in here in thirty-eight years and I saw my first one today. Went right across the road in front of me. Hardly ever see a grey squirrel. There's red squirrels or red chipmunks.

That's a twin maple right there. See how the "Y" comes? That's what they call a twin maple - because of the "Y". A Siamese twin tree. A Siamese maple tree, because they aren't split - see they hold together. This one's got two trees and it's based at the trunk - just like human bodies are. Very rare that you see that. You don't see a maple grow like that down so close. Usually they've got the crotch way up there and they aren't Siamese.

Well, I was going to show the three sisters. We can't find them! I name my trees. There's three trees growing right together. Just like three sisters and they're young. Now here's a little maple - just starting. He'll be grow'd up someday.