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In tune with the dunes

Stephanie Foster finds her place in nature

By Ellen C. Chahey
arts@barnstablepatriot.com

There are two kinds of only child: the kind who is a self-described “lonely only” and the kind who can’t get enough solitude.

Stephanie Foster is the latter.

So, she has written, she cried when she won the lottery to spend a week all alone in C-Scape, a dune shack in The Province Lands. Foster, a photographer, recorded her experience with her camera. The result is a show of her pictures at the Cape Cod Museum of Art off Route 6A in Dennis Village, running through Jan. 23. Foster will give a gallery talk about her show Dec. 16 at noon.

Foster, who lives with her husband in

Harwich, said that she likes cities. And she has lived in Boston’s Harbor Towers. But Foster’s encounter with herself – which she recorded in a diary that is distributed at the exhibit – is to be expected from a trip alone into the dunes, and as an award-winning journalist she writes an account of her week in crisp, clear prose, with a poem to boot. She encounters, too, the ancient elements of earth, fire, water, and air.

Of the earth, Foster writes of life in the shack, “There was no electricity, running water, or indoor toilet... The pale dunes looked dramatic against the bleak sky... This was not rustic Ralph Lauren land. This was the real thing.”

She goes out in hope of finding some scallops. Instead, she comes back with a dramatic photo of coyote tracks in the sand.

Of fire, Foster writes, “I quickly became acquainted with kerosene, propane and wood and put the word ‘combustible’ out of my mind.” A vivid photograph of the shack at sunset reflects the fiery face of

our nearest star.

Water, water was everywhere – this is the outer Cape, of course – but there were new uses of it. Foster writes that she had to learn in the dune shack “what ‘priming the pump’ meant.” Not to mention “a plastic bag... called a solar shower.” Foster’s “Autumn Day by the Sea” positions the shack in its nearness to the Atlantic.

Possibly wind and air provide the most exciting aspects of Foster’s week with the elements. She had arrived on a Saturday, and records in her Sunday diary:

“A howling storm wakes me. The shack is trembling as if it had a terrible fever. Outside the wind screams like a hungry, crazed animal.” Later in the week, a hurricane warning comes up, and Tom Boland, the caretaker who drove her out to the shack, reappears to ask if she wants to evacuate.

Her answer: “I can hear and feel the pounding waves inside the dune shack. Since the tsunami in Asia, I am deeply afraid of them. But I stay.”

Her reward is another kind of photo, a gentle one of a dune path shrouded in fog.

“The shack, the dunes, the weather intensify each other,” Foster said. All the interactions offer the potential for photographs that show “what it’s like to stay there, without having to pump the water,” she added.

“I’m curious,” Foster said. “I know that others” who have stayed in a dune shack have said, “Now what do we do?”

But, she continued, as an only child she learned that, “It’s an accomplishment to be alone with yourself and not be bored. I’d make a bow and arrow for myself while other kids were playing with paper dolls.”

The moon became a symbol of Foster’s week in the shack. “You can hear yourself think out there,” she said, “and you think that this is the moon everyone is seeing all over the world.”

The Cape Cod Museum of Art is on the Web at www.ccmoa.org.



Dune Shack Experience

Foggy Path



STEPHANIE FOSTER PHOTOS



Good and Evil

OPPOSITE

ON THE COVER

TOM BOLAND PHOTO
Photojournalist Stephanie Foster, in her element among the dunes of The Province Land.

Provisions