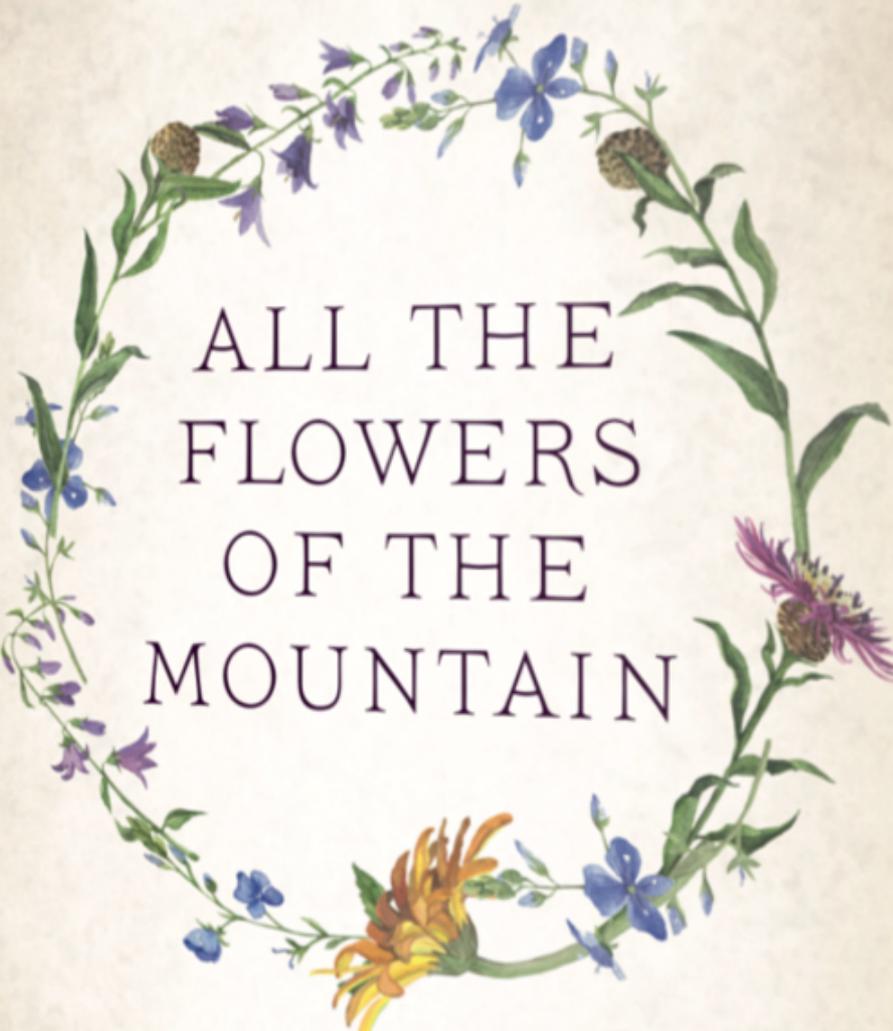


BOOK CLUB KIT

ALL THE
FLOWERS
OF THE
MOUNTAIN

BY
CHRISTINA HOLBROOK

"A captivating love story full of complex characters who will steal your heart . . . reminiscent of *Where the Crawdads Sing*."
—Christie Aschwenden, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Good to Go*



ALL THE
FLOWERS
OF THE
MOUNTAIN

A NOVEL

CHRISTINA HOLBROOK



TIPS FOR HOSTING YOUR BOOK CLUB

ALL THE FLOWERS OF THE MOUNTAIN

by Christina Holbrook

1. CHOOSE A THEME

Consider:

Sugar Hill Picnic
Profile Lake Club Cocktail Hour
Ollie's Pub Night
Paris Bistro Dinner

2. MAKE A SCHEDULE

Welcome and food - 30 minutes
Book discussion - 60-90 minutes
Socializing - 30 minutes

3. SET GROUNDRULES

Agree to disagree
Limit discussion to current book
Make sure everyone has a
chance to talk

4. DIVIDE

RESPONSIBILITIES

Ask guests to bring food and wine or
help with clean up if you are hosting

5. PLAN THE MENU

Serve small bites and finger food
Avoid messy sauces
Tie in with the theme for
the event

6. USE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Choose which questions you'd like to
discuss in advance or write your own
Read them aloud to the group

OTHER IDEAS

Listen to an interview with the author
Play music from the era (1970's and 80's)
Meet outdoors in a nature setting
like a garden or park
Make a craft together such as a
garland of forget-me-knots
Skinny dipping?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1

How does the book's setting in the mountains of New Hampshire influence the story? How might the love story between Michael and Kit have been different in another location?

2

How do the social class differences between Michael and Kit's families become an obstacle to their future together? Do you think this factor would be as powerful for a young couple today and what other factors might create obstacles for them?

3

Georgia O'Keeffe is quoted in the book: "There is something unexplored about women that only a woman can explore." Do you agree? For this story why is it important that the author is a woman?

4

Both Kit and Michael need to get away from their pasts and their families in order to see themselves clearly. Do you think they could have had a successful relationship if they had both stayed in New Hampshire and not pursued their dreams first?

5

Water is an important metaphor in the book and plays a role in each of the major transitions of the book. How does water symbolize Kit's relationship with Michael? How does water both hold and reveal secrets to Kit?

6

Kit and Michael are aided and challenged by a cast of supporting characters. Some are up to no good, like Genia and Brandon. Some are friends, teachers or guides like Tom, John Landsman, Alfred, and Esther Winthrop. Which characters struck you as particularly meaningful to the development of Kit's story or Michael's?

7

The book begins with the Morgan family conspiring to cover up a secret concerning Kit. What role do secrets play in the book? Which secrets were the most damning – or surprised you the most?

8

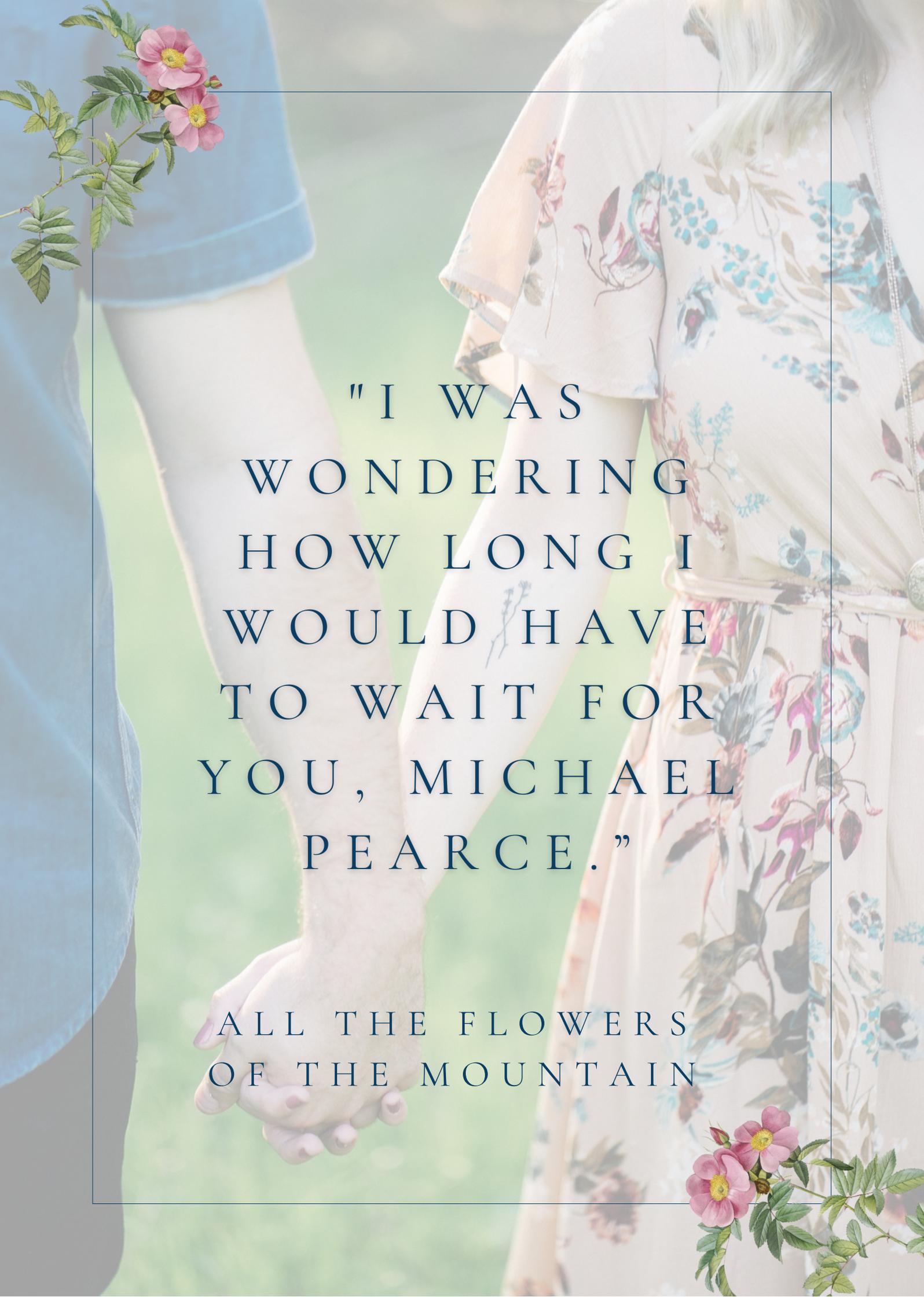
How did you feel about the fate that befell Brandon in the book? Can you imagine a different resolution for his story?

9

The majority of the book focuses on a relatively short time in Kit and Michael's lives, yet the overall arc of the story covers many, many years. Why do you think the author chose this structure for the book? Is there a lesson here for us to learn?

10

Why do you think Michael left Paris without seeing Kit after viewing her sculpture? Do you agree with his decision? Why is a sculpture a fitting symbol for the love between them?

A romantic scene of a couple holding hands in a field. The man on the left wears a light blue short-sleeved shirt. The woman on the right wears a white dress with a vibrant floral pattern in shades of blue, pink, and green. They are holding hands in the center of the frame. The background is a soft-focus green field. Pink flowers with yellow centers are visible in the top-left and bottom-right corners. The text is overlaid in a dark blue, serif font.

"I WAS
WONDERING
HOW LONG I
WOULD HAVE
TO WAIT FOR
YOU, MICHAEL
PEARCE."

ALL THE FLOWERS
OF THE MOUNTAIN



A CONVERSATION WITH CHRISTINA HOLBROOK

What is your debut novel *All the Flowers of the Mountain* about?

First and foremost it is a story about falling in love: About how one person can open your eyes, change your life, break your heart, and remain – despite time and distance – your North Star. The person you are always trying to get home to.

It is also a coming-of-age story, about the struggle to define who we are within the context of our family of origin; the hard choices we sometimes have to make, the mistakes and the loss, and how we find meaning in our lives.

Finally, for me, it is also a love song to a particular time and place. The White Mountains of New Hampshire, where I spent so much of my childhood, were (and still are) an absolutely magical part of the world. And the 1970s and early 80s were a time of unusual freedom—there were no cell phones, and there was still a great deal of emotional distance and lack of supervision in the relationships young people had with their parents. This freedom opened the door to both danger and exciting possibilities.



Rural New Hampshire plays an important role in the story. Why did you choose it as the setting for your novel?

I grew up spending summers in the White Mountains. My family had a beautiful, rambling country home in Sugar Hill, New Hampshire, and my mother's parents also had several farm properties in different locations.

I think my inner, personal and creative landscape was formed in this place: swimming in Echo Lake or in the icy pools below the waterfalls at The Basin, climbing Mount Lafayette, skiing Cannon Mountain, spending entire days exploring on my bike. And like Kit, I was a big fan of skinny-dipping!

My school year was spent in New York, so it was tremendously liberating to be set free in this wild, rural place where time was so unstructured. I could easily spend an entire day sitting very still and hoping to catch a glimpse of deer or fox in the woods, searching for hidden swimming holes, or laying back in the field grass watching clouds float through the sky—and not encounter another living soul.



As a kid, I was also always trying to make sense of a kind of spiritual reality I was aware of. I felt this very strongly in the wild places of my childhood. I remember being quite convinced, one early morning, that as I came down a path through the woods, I was about to encounter God!

Finally, those years when I was a child and then a young woman in New Hampshire were very meaningful to my family. Together we experienced an awful lot of fun, drama, and rich memorable times.

What are the challenges of writing about actual locations and businesses in your book compared to creating fictional settings?

Many of the important locations in the story are in fact made up. Having spent so many years in the White Mountains it was somehow easy for my imagination to concoct the particularly grand summer house and farm that is “Cedaredge,” the Morgan family compound. And while Profile Lake is an actual lake, the Profile Lake Club is a fabrication as is the “wild side” of the lake where Kit and Michael make some important discoveries related to the story’s key mystery.

That being said, no story about this area would be complete, would be authentic to the reader, without the inclusion of some of the most beloved landmarks: Polly’s Pancake Parlor (where, by the way, I worked one summer!), The Sugar Hill Sampler, Thayer’s Hotel which once included a pub called “Oliver’s.” There is an elegant Profile Club, though it is not on the lake, and the Old Man of the Mountain, an iconic rock formation, sadly tumbled from the mountain several years ago.

When I do refer to real places, I try to capture the essence of their charm or glamour. But they are fictional creations of my own, and their details are not necessarily accurate in a journalistic sense. It is my hope that those connected to these places will forgive any errors and my flights of fancy.

Kit and Michael grew up in very different social and economic circumstances, which proved to be an obstacle in their relationship. Why did you feel this was an important issue to explore in the novel?

My feeling is that families of origin are often on the side of safety; parents want their children to live the same kind of lives they have lived.

Families have a way of exerting pressure on the younger members to perceive the world through the same lens as the family elders. In the best cases, parents do this because they want their children to be happy; in less-than-ideal cases they don’t want their views of the world challenged by their children’s choices.

I came from an “old family,” like Kit – relatives on my father’s side of the family arrived in this country on the Mayflower and fought in the American Revolution. I was a debutante, as were other women on both sides of my family. So, I am familiar with the particular kind of pressure to make choices that would affirm, for the older generation, the values of this social group.

But demands can be exerted in many ways. Michael’s family objects to Kit, just as Kit’s family looks down on Michael. His family do not want him to stretch himself, to seek more education—they would prefer he stay home and reaffirm the values of his parents. In that way, his family is as rigid as Kit’s.

I think it is a weakness, a kind of selfishness and short-sightedness, that many adults show when they put pressure on their kids or the younger generation to perceive the world the way they do – this may have to do with class and economics, but it can also just as easily be about race, religion, politics, professional choices, gender or sexual preferences.

While there is a specific social/economic conflict in this story, I hope readers might find a kind of universal aspect, too – as in the tale of “The Ugly Duckling.” Both Kit and Michael experience the pain and confusion of being outsiders within their own families—and part of each of their individual journeys is to discover who they are and find their true place in the world, and their tribe. That journey is one that life urges on each of us, no matter who we are or where we come from.

Both Kit and Michael want to figure out what will make life meaningful for them. What do you think it takes to create a life of meaning? What might we have to give up in order to find greater meaning?

Both Michael and Kit have to confront family and social situations in which others presume to know what is best for them, what they should want. And society has only become more insistent, more in-your-face in this regard.

For Kit, the pressure is so intense that she believes her only option is to take drastic and dramatic action. To forfeit love. Michael has to find a way to create meaning in his life, even when love seems lost forever.

It can take a long time to grow up, and so I believe that their time of separation is necessary. You have to make a lot of mistakes, confront your demons, be ready to put your ego aside so that one day you are both strong enough and vulnerable enough to humble yourself to love.

As I get older it is more and more clear to me that, in the end, love is all that matters. It’s so simple, but it can take a lifetime to figure this out.

Michael and Kit share a connection to and love for the natural environment of New Hampshire. What does a connection to nature mean for you, personally?

I think a connection to nature is what grounds us and makes us feel alive. Kit regains a sense of herself as a whole person – creative, sensual, hopeful, and self-confident – during her summers exploring the forests, lakes, waterfalls, mountains of New Hampshire.

When Michael wants to share with Kit who he really is, he takes her on a hike up a hillside to experience a view of all the surrounding mountains and farmlands, rivers and forests of his New Hampshire home. And, ultimately, both return to this place of deep and intimate natural beauty.

Also, as time went on, and I made more revisions to the story, I began to make this connection between Kit and the Cedaredge bull, Freddie. Both are unfairly penned in, and both ultimately make a break for it.



“Memory is like a familiar garden. We wander around, following the well-worn paths, and everything looks the same to us. But one day, we notice in a different way. We see the strange flower or the lizard or stone that was there all along. In front of our very eyes, but somehow hidden from our awareness until that moment. We bend to pick it up, look at it. We understand, all at once, its significance ...”



Why did you choose to structure the novel with present time events as bookends around a major flashback to many years in the past?

Good question, because earlier drafts of this novel take place only when Kit and Michael are young. But I knew somehow that they would come back to each other—they had to!—and that each would be changed by the intervening years. I suppose I understood that Kit and Michael had their own life lessons to learn, and that they had to do that learning on their own. But ultimately, they were meant to be together.

You've been working on this book for five years now including many revisions and challenges along the way. What has your writing process been like and how has it been influenced by your own personal journey?

It's been a long process! The novel began in the first person as a story told by Michael. Then, I re-wrote the story in the third person. Finally, I spent a year on this final version, re-writing the novel so that it would include both Kit's and Michael's points of view.

What seemed curious to me from the start is that I felt completely driven to work on this manuscript, every day without fail. I didn't procrastinate, had no issues with writer's block, but was up at 4:30 or 5 am each morning and writing until I could barely see. It was like an obsession--and it only became more intense in the past year, as Kit began to tell her side of the story.

In March, just as I was about to begin submitting the manuscript to publishers, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor. It sounds crazy, but I can't help wondering now if some part of me "knew" that I was running out of time.

I had surgery in April and will begin treatment soon. I hope and pray that I still have plenty of months and years ahead of me. But the truth is I don't know. I received an amazing gift when Sunroom Studios offered to bring this novel out in what amounts to lightning speed, with a pub date in July! Because I want to hold this book in my hands.



Like a good fairy tale, this story seems to be populated with a cast of supporting characters: some who help the main characters and others who threaten them. Tell us about some of these.

One of my very good readers, Jeff Deck of the New Hampshire Writers Project, urged me to think about my secondary characters and to develop them as much as possible.

Kit and Michael are both compelled to seek different paths from the ones their families would have liked. They are each determined to confront and experience life on their own terms—mistakes, suffering and all. Along the way, both Michael and Kit meet villains who threaten them, and mentors and guides who help them grow, gain clarity, and transform as human beings.

Kit's extended family threatens Kit's and Michael's happiness and stirs up trouble and creates confusion. Fortunately, Michael has his good friend Tom to lean on. And his boss the veterinarian John Landsman bolsters his confidence by trusting him with tough work assignments and relating to him man-to-man. Alfred the hermit appears like a friendly spirit offering help and clues. Elsie and Max gently encourage Kit to see herself more clearly, and of course Esther Winthrop emerges as a kind of fairy-godmother. And at two crucial moments, Kit's little sister and brother each save the day.



The novel explores womanhood and various challenges faced by women in our society as one of its themes. Why is this important to you? In what way is Kit a reflection of your own journey?

What's funny is that the very first draft of this novel, begun five years ago now, was written in the first person, from Michael's point of view only! I strongly identified with his character—and still do.

Many re-writes later, I had a conversation with the novelist Emily Colin. She urged me to expand the story so that it included Kit's point of view as well. I resisted at first, and now it seems, well, pretty obvious that this story had to be a weaving back and forth between both characters. Did I resist this because Kit's point of view was necessarily so much more personal? So much harder? Probably.

In a certain way, Michael is a much more straight-forward character. And maybe our society creates the conditions for boys and men to operate in the world in a more straight-forward manner. For women, it's different. And particularly during the period when much of this story takes place, say, in the late 1970's-early 1980s. Opportunities were opening up for women, but at the same time women were still expected to conform and acquiesce to men. And my experience at least was that women were encouraged to have "interests" but when interests turned to focused ambition that was perceived as anything from unattractive to downright dangerous.

"There is something unexplored about women that only a woman can explore."

-Georgia O'Keeffe

Kit journeys from naïve and vulnerable—uncertain if she can trust her own instincts—to strong, self-aware and sure of her place in the world.

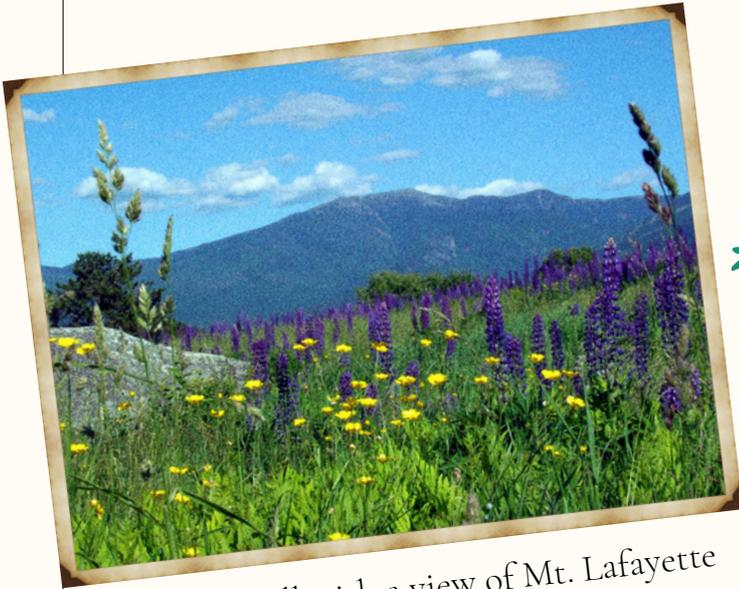
I can relate to traveling this long and at times arduous path. And Michael also journeys to a place of confidence in the world. Kit and Michael become emotionally whole when they are finally able to admit that their lives will not be complete without the other and when they both are ready to take action to address this need.

Finally, this story has a personal layer for me. As a young woman I had a very close friend named Alan. We hiked and did homework together, spent hours talking on the phone, and stumbled through awkward flirtation. Eventually Alan moved out west, and I made a life on the east coast. It took me 35 years, and several bungled opportunities, to realize that this was the person who I had been missing all my life. We were married in 2018.

Christina Holbrook



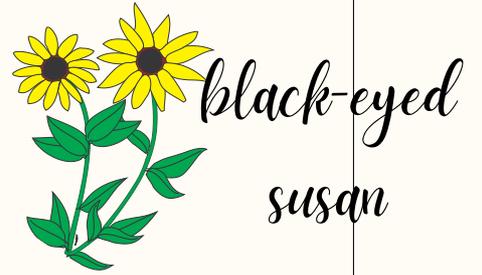
KIT'S SCRAPBOOK



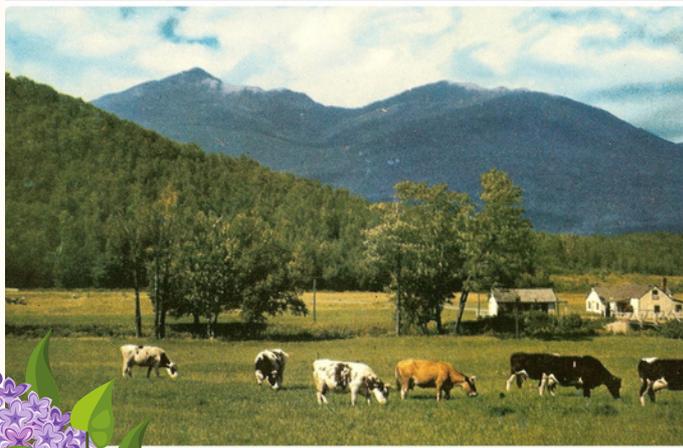
Sugar Hill with a view of Mt. Lafayette



lupine



black-eyed susan



Cedaredge Farm



daisy



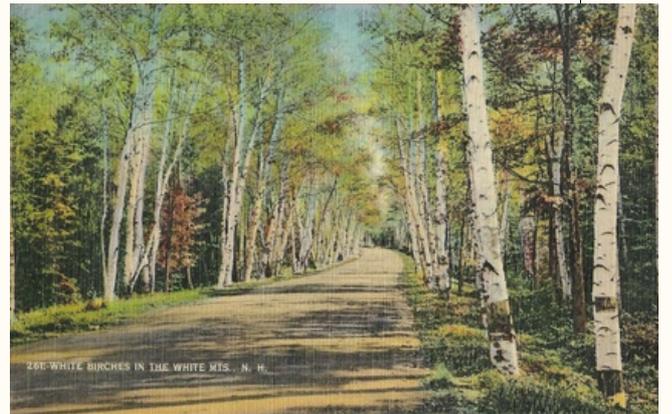
Profile Lake



lilac



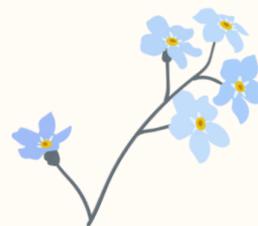
Home of Ollie's Pub



Backroads from Franconia to Sugar Hill



daylily



forget-me-not

KIT'S SCRAPBOOK



Polly's Pancake Parlor



bluebells

Polly's Blueberry Pancakes

INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup buttermilk

1 large egg

2 Tbsp melted butter

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup yellow cornmeal

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking soda

1 tsp baking powder

2 tsp sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup blueberries, if desired

DIRECTIONS

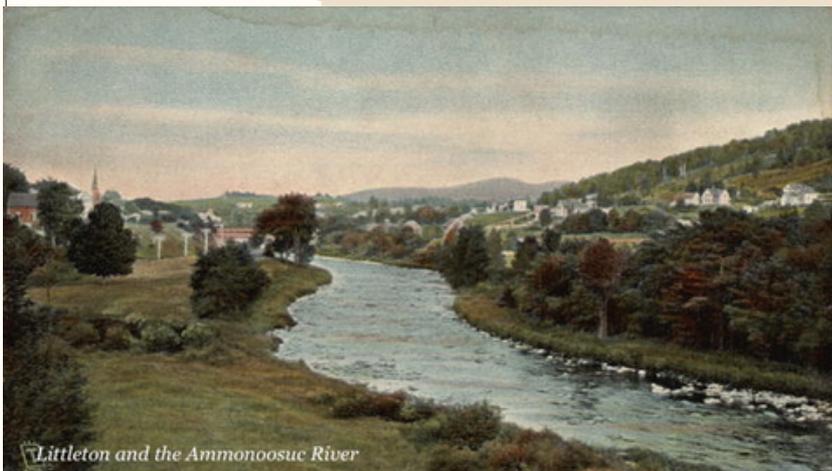
1. Whisk together liquid ingredients then fold into dry ingredients and whisk gently.
2. If batter is too thick, add 1 to 2 Tbsp buttermilk. Fold in blueberries.
3. Cook on griddle coated with butter over medium heat until bubbles on top of cakes pop, about 2 minutes. Then flip and cook until lightly browned.



Indian
paintbrush



iris

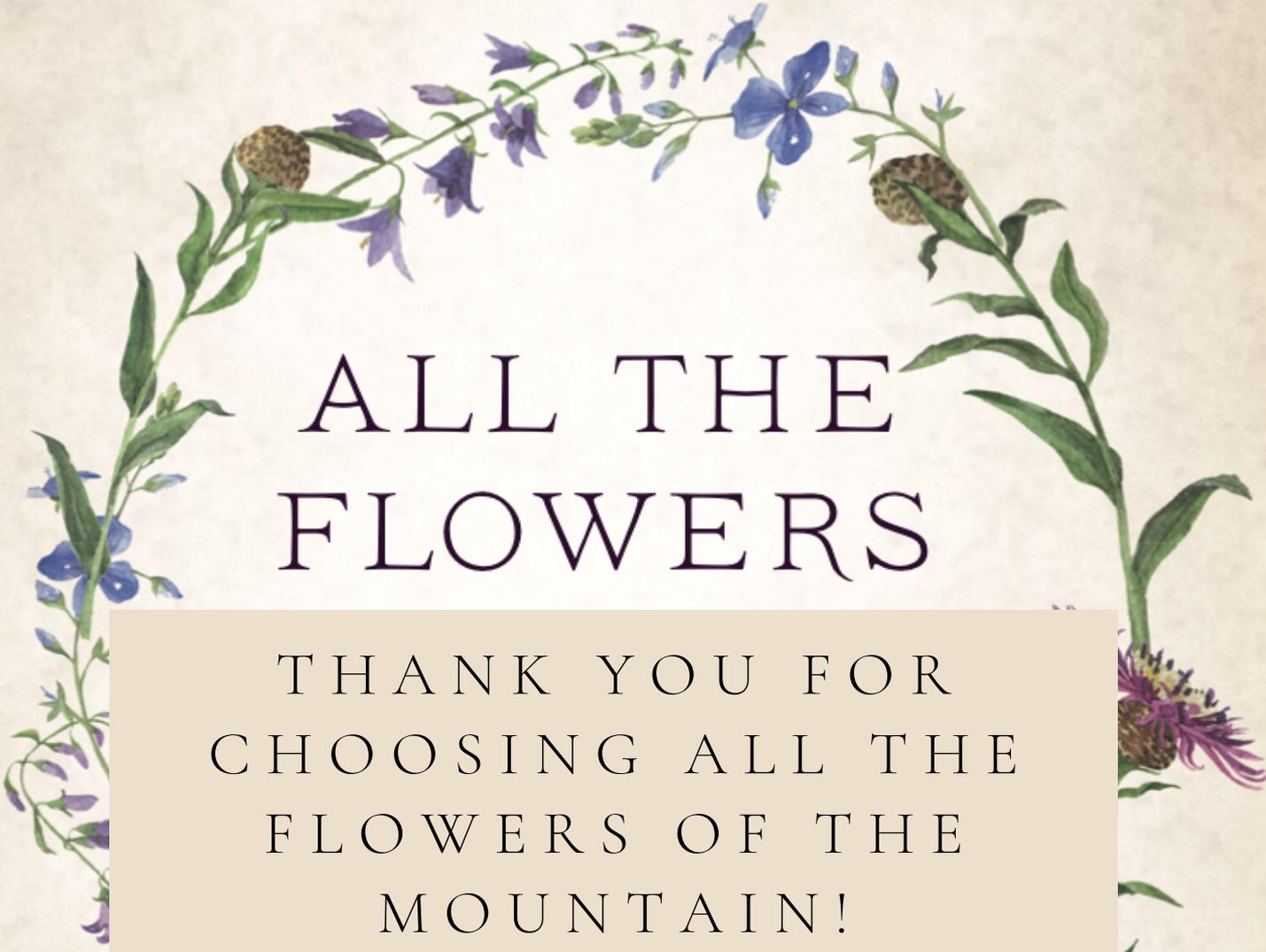


Littleton and the Ammonoosuc River



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your heart . . . reminiscent of *Where the Crawdads Sing*.”
—Christie Aschwanden, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Good to Go*



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