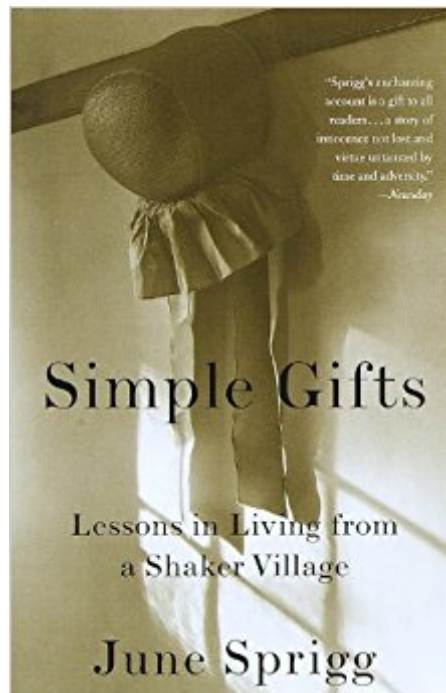




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# **Simple Gifts: Lessons In Living From A Shaker Village**



## Synopsis

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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## Customer Reviews

"This is a simple story that means the world to me," June Sprigg writes by way of preface to *Simple Gifts*, her memoir of a summer spent with the last seven residents of a New Hampshire Shaker community. It's a fitting motto for the serene, unadorned lives of these women--"members of an endangered species," as one of the elderly sisters wryly says--and of the joy they brought a girl who at 19 was "half in and half out of the egg." Although the Shakers took vows of celibacy, their religious tradition always included caring for children--especially those society refused to provide for--and after so many years, the sisters were delighted to have a girl to dote on once again. For her own part, Sprigg found much-needed guidance as she made her own transition into womanhood: "What might have seemed like the unlikeliest of friendships--me at nineteen, a miniskirted college sophomore, and six Shaker sisters in their seventies, eighties, and nineties, soft and wrinkled as old plums--made sense, perhaps to our mutual surprise." As Sprigg spends the summer guiding tours, working alongside the sisters, and poring over old journals, a portrait emerges of a community that remains vital even during its twilight years. Perhaps more importantly, Sprigg finds a spiritual lineage that stretches from one generation to the next--even, she imagines, coming to rest in a non-Shaker like herself. More than just a profile of a historical curiosity, this memoir tells the stories of seven remarkable but very different women, and in the process offers an invaluable testimony to the life of the spirit put into joyous practice. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Sprigg, who has published several books (*By Shaker Hands*) about the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, or Shakers, spent three summers in the early 1970s living and working as a tour guide at the Shaker village of Canterbury, N.H. Although she never completely embraced the Shaker dogma, as a college student she was profoundly influenced by the months she spent with the seven aged Shaker women who were the only surviving inhabitants of the village. In this loving recreation of Shaker life, the author provides a history of the religion as well as interesting biographical sketches of the residents. Despite a strict belief in celibacy that was responsible for the dwindling number of adherents, Sprigg describes Lillian, Bertha and Gertrude, the three elders with whom she had the closest contact, as having led lives that included nurturing children who had been brought to their settlements. During the summers the author came to admire and respect their good-humored dedication to a life of prayer, hard work and nonviolence. And readers will feel deep poignancy in this engaging book when Sprigg writes, "The Shakers I knew best are all gone now." Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Really gives a sense of what it was like when the village still had people in it. Hard to get that sense when you visit today and the "village" is gone. I'm glad June Sprigg recorded her experiences in this book.

I was touched by the author's unprepossessing account of her experience. The writing is good and the narrative moves well. I hoped for a little more spiritual depth.

Good Memoir about the Shaker way of life. 1 Star removed for the pace of the book, which I realize based on the life style of the village vs. modern day, how can the author really speed it up. Good read overall though!

Historical guide through the life of Shakers in America. If you have any interest in understanding the Shakers this is an excellent selection.

Tis book is written in a simple style and with love. It made me long for a simpler time and wishing I could go live in such a time and place.

This told me a lot about ordinary life in a shaker village, I enjoyed it, different than books that just show what the shakers have made.

I, probably as most of us do, thought of the "Shakers", as a history book entry to our long ago past. And no way they could be as exciting and instructive as the sailors/whalers in Melville's "Moby-Dick", or Richard Dana's Two Years Before the Mast". I was wrong!! This book written over one hundred years later by a teen-aged girl in the 1960's deals with the firm values of a religious order, that was as tightly knit and controlled as any sailing vessel. It had to be in order to survive. As did any sail vessel on the endless expanse of salt water. Until the development of a reliable spring clock, no vessel could tell latitude. They could determin longitude, but not else. Herein a group of elderly, dying old (religious) women, (some helpful, some antagonistic and some not) help a 1960's teenage girl into a meaningful life. June's remembrances, make me wish I had known all involved.

I enjoyed the fly on the wall experience I had reading Sprigg's work. I felt like I was going through the same things and meeting the same people she was. All of the people came alive for me as I

read about the lives of some interesting women who lived at Canterbury Village. I must say, though, that the book meant even more to me when I made the trek to the village and took the awesome tour. Then all of the people spoke to me. I found myself reading the book again to put myself in their place.

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