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## From the EDITOR

# Relationships can be powerful forces to shape the future, sometimes in profound ways.



This summer I learned a fascinating story that demonstrates that truism, when I visited the Roosevelt Campobello International Park in New Brunswick, Canada, just across the border from Lubec, Maine.

In the visitor's center there, a birch bark canoe that looks to be about 18 feet long hangs from the ceiling. A park ranger told my husband and me that the canoe was made by Tomah Josef, an elder of the Passamaquoddy tribe, for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his youth. The figure of an owl, the animal Tomah Josef chose as his spirit helper, is etched into the bow, beside the phrase "Remember Me" written in his native language.

At the park, we hiked one of the beautiful seacoast trails and toured the home where FDR summured from boyhood through the early days of his political career. We heard how he first became ill there with what was long assumed to be polio. Now, though, there's some evidence it was another crippling disease. But that's a different story.

The Tomah Josef tale was completely new to me, and I had to know more. After leaving the park, I found the rest of the story on the Internet. Tomah Josef lived on a reservation in Eastport, Maine, and each summer canoed to Campobello with his family to camp, fish and collect medicinal plants. When FDR was 10 years old, his father hired Tomah Josef to teach his son how to paddle a canoe. The two became friends.

Tomah Josef told the boy about his native customs, and how he and his people wanted to keep them and their communities intact. At the time, the U.S. government was carrying out forced assimilation policies on native tribes, but Tomah Josef told young FDR that his people didn't want to leave the reservation. He also told the boy he would one day be a leader.

When Tomah Josef died in 1914, FDR was a 32-year-old assistant secretary of the Navy in Pres. Woodrow Wilson's administration, at the beginning of his storied political career. But Tomah Josef's message wouldn't be left behind. When he became president in 1933, FDR chose Native American advocate John Collier to lead the Office of Indian Affairs. The forced assimilation policies ended, and an Indian division of the Civilian Conservation Corps was set up to employ Indian men. Collier's Indian New Deal, supported by FDR, returned land to Native American tribes along with their right of self-determination.

Now, consider the power of relationships in a different context — our relationships with the lands and waterways we love. That could be Long Island Sound, the lower Connecticut River, the tidal marshes along the coast or our own lawns and backyard gardens. Just as Tomah Josef made a lasting impression on a young boy that helped change history, we can be deliberate about our relationships with these places, with an eye towards a better future. That's what the Long Island Sound Blue Plan and the Connecticut NERR proposal are basically all about, as the articles in this issue describe. It's also what's behind the research into marsh migration, the Coastal Certificate classes and the movement to replace lawns with native gardens, also explored in this issue.

Don't underestimate the power of relationships. Let's make them count not just in the here and now, but long into the future.



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*This issue is dedicated to the memory of  
Karen Berman, contributing editor.*

**Above photo:** Tomah Josef paddles his canoe in this detail of an 1894 photo. Museum Collection. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, PM 2004.29.6060

**Cover photo:** Alem Tiden, on bow of boat, reaches out to Ronald Lapaan, far right, as he wades into the waters at the Great Island State Boat Launch in Old Lyme. Tiden and his father, Wilfred, at wheel, of Old Saybrook, were heading out for a day of fishing with friends Lapaan, of Bristol, and Randy Milan of East Harford, center, on Oct. 26. Photo: Judy Benson