

# DEAR READER,

I have always gone by “Virginia,” with one exception: from the age of nine, for one month every summer, I was “Ginny.” At sleepaway camp, away from those who knew me as one person, I was able to imagine myself as another.

It took a few tries, though, to find the place where I felt comfortable trying on more than just a new name. Like Goldilocks, the third time was the charm, though I could not have said why that camp was “just right.” I only knew that I felt encouraged in the truest sense of the word. And while I always reverted to “Virginia” when I returned home, vestiges of the braver, more confiding “Ginny” were stickier. While I still struggled, of course, to figure out where I belonged, I had been given a gift of inestimable value—the knowledge of what it felt like to be in safe harbor.

In the years since, I’ve grown fascinated by the question of what intangible qualities make a community welcoming or alienating. How does its character form? How is it sustained?

***Liberty Island*** turns back the clock to the infancy of the summer colony at the center of my debut novel, ***Haven Point***, and explores those questions through the eyes of Anna and Julia, aunt and niece. Both crave refuge from Boston society—scholarly, retiring Anna because she is weary of social demands, and free-spirited Julia because she chafes against its restrictions. Both struggle to trust that this summer community is the haven that its name implies.

Their journeys are a powerful reminder that the cues we look for, often unconsciously, can sometimes lead us astray. Just as sanctuary can be found in unexpected places, we can feel alienated among the like-minded.

Ultimately, ***Liberty Island*** is a tribute to the unsung heroines (for it is so often women) who, with an unerring sense of what truly matters, and the ability to nurture that with their quiet influence, become the guardians of a community’s soul.

Virginia Home

**P.S.** My summer camp had closed by the time my own daughters were of age. Fortunately, we found them another refuge. Fittingly enough, it was in a town called “Freedom.”



Photo Credit: David Baratz