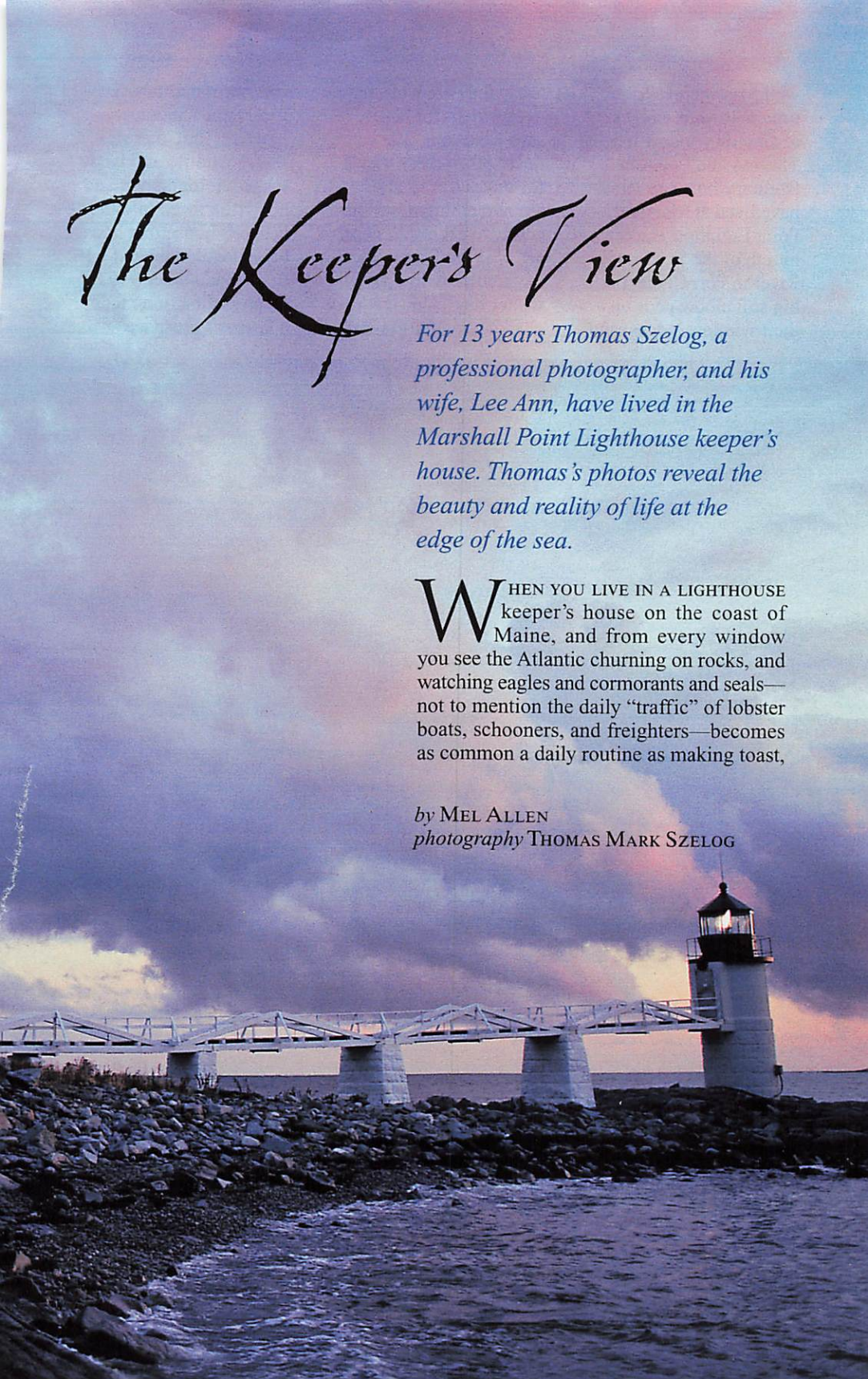
The Keeper's View

For 13 years Thomas Szelog, a professional photographer, and his wife, Lee Ann, have lived in the Marshall Point Lighthouse keeper's house. Thomas's photos reveal the beauty and reality of life at the edge of the sea.

WHEN YOU LIVE IN A LIGHTHOUSE keeper's house on the coast of Maine, and from every window you see the Atlantic churning on rocks, and watching eagles and cormorants and seals—not to mention the daily "traffic" of lobster boats, schooners, and freighters—becomes as common a daily routine as making toast,

by MEL ALLEN
photography THOMAS MARK SZELOG



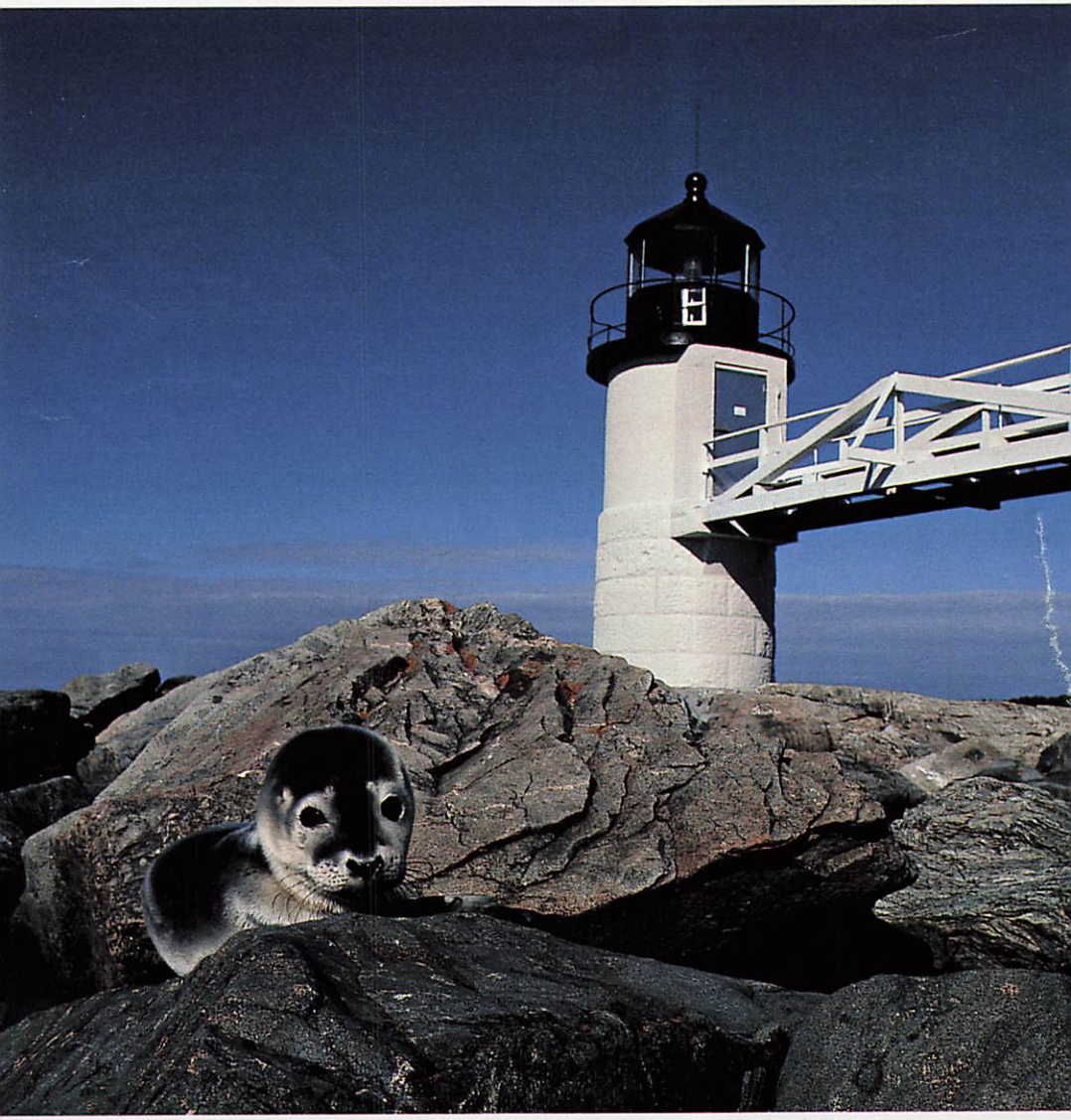
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well, you spend a lot of time with your elbows resting on window ledges. Thomas and Lee Ann Szelog, who since 1989 have lived at Marshall Point Lighthouse at the mouth of the St. George River in Port Clyde, put big soft elbow pads on their window ledges, and today they are worn bare.

"We'll sit for hours," says Lee Ann. "We've never taken these views for granted. You always see something new." Tom adds, "We'd play a game—see who could spot the most wildlife in one winter day." One day they chalked up 40 different species of animals seen from their windows.

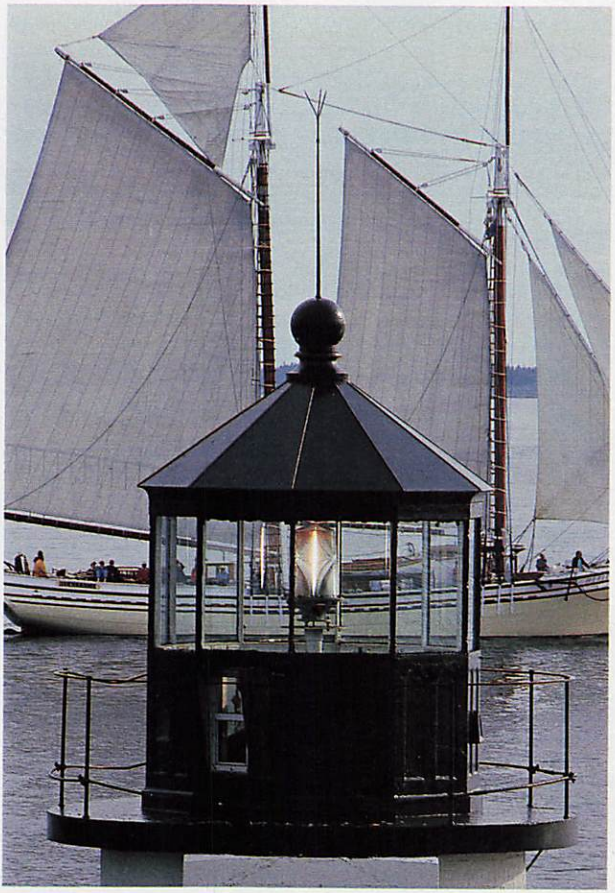
When Tom, a professional wildlife and landscape photographer, and his wife moved into the keeper's house that had been boarded up and left in disrepair since 1971, when automation made a keeper's presence



For 24 hours the Szelogs adopted an abandoned baby seal (above) *they named Clyde. He found a permanent home at the New England Aquarium.*







Tom and Lee Ann Szelog's love for lighthouses brought them together and then to Marshall Point.

unnecessary, their mission was to keep the house safe and lived in. The St. George Historical Society, which had poured many hours and dollars into restoring the house, knew a living presence was vital to keeping the Marshall Point Light as an integral part of the community.

"A keeper's house is a house built to keep people," Tom says. "They had to have people in here. It'd be sacriligious not to." From the first day, with a storm whipping surf past the light, Tom knew "I was in a unique situation. I knew I had to record it."

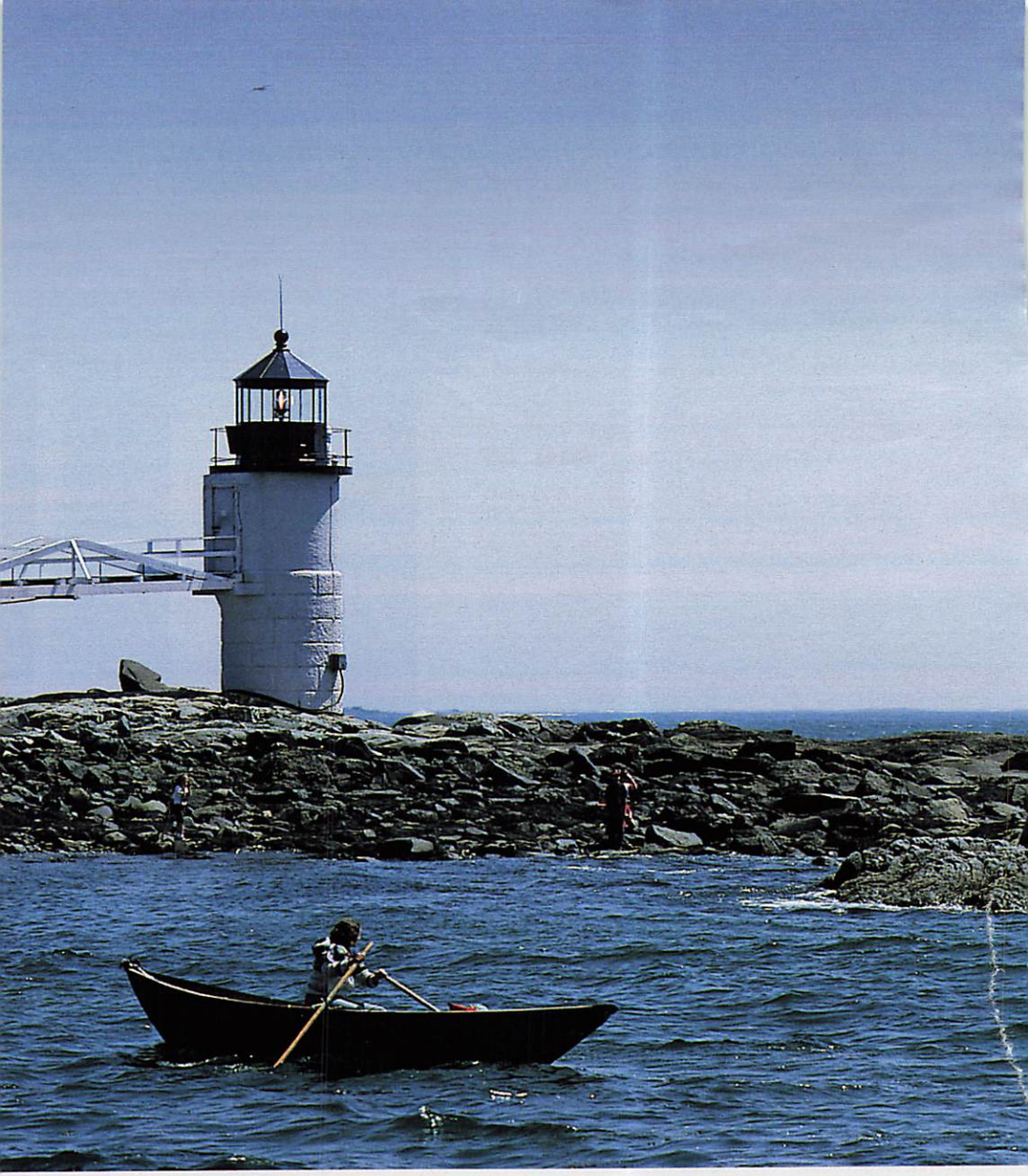
He shot before daybreak, and he shot at dusk. He shot tourists in summer flying kites and sunbathing on the grass, and he shot the utter isolation of a winter storm. He shot weddings from the little balcony outside his bedroom, and he shot baptisms in the frigid water at ocean's edge. He captured the poignancy of an elderly man dressed in coat and tie who stepped gingerly over the slick rocks and tenderly tipped his wife's ashes into the tide pools she so





"Our home has nine windows; with seven of them come views of the Atlantic Ocean. I am awed by the stupendous views from my home."

– Thomas Szelog, from his journal



loved. He was there when an abandoned baby seal waited forlornly for his mother to return, and when a humpback whale paid a visit, and when a bald eagle attacked an eider. He watched windjammers carry their summer passengers past Marshall Point Light, and watched when a sailboat crashed into the ledges and a harrowing attempt to rescue the boat nearly resulted in tragedy. He looked and he photographed the world outside his windows and he never stopped. Tom and Lee Ann filled scrapbooks and journals with their writings and observations. They say they have documented life from a lighthouse more thoroughly than anyone before them.

They almost hesitate to tell the story of how they ended up living in a lighthouse, because it's so "like a fairy tale," says Lee Ann. This is how it goes: Tom and Lee Ann are both working at a bank in Manchester, New Hampshire. Lee Ann's boss fixes them



Tom was watching in 1994 when this 32-foot ketch floundered on the rocks. Miraculously, everyone was safe.

up, and tells Lee Ann, "Be sure to talk a little about lighthouses—Tom loves them." Lee Ann falls in love on the first date, and their second date is spent touring Nubble Light and Portland Head Light. "I remember telling Tom that night," says Lee Ann, "'Wouldn't it be special to live in a lighthouse?'"

They made a pact: Whoever found a job in Maine first, they'd both move. Lee Ann was hired at Camden National Bank, and Tom became the local newspaper photographer. Lee Ann's bank became involved in the Marshall Point preservation project, and Lee Ann attended meetings. There she learned that the restored house needed people. She wrote a two-page letter, and soon she and Tom moved in.

When Lee Ann tells this story, tears well, because the keeper's house will soon be past tense. A few years ago she and Tom bought land in the woods, a good distance inland, and built a log cabin. "We needed more room," Lee Ann says, "especially if one of our parents needed to come live with us."

There was also the matter of privacy. Over 10,000 people visit the lighthouse and its fine museum. Tom, a man who loves solitude, sometimes felt he was living in a fishbowl.

Tom is seeking a publisher for his book of photos and selections from their journal. "A century from now," he says, "people will know exactly what it was like to look out our windows and see what so few people ever see." ✯

To visit Marshall Point:
The Marshall Point Lighthouse Museum is open June-Sept. Sun.-Fri. 1-5 P.M., Sat.10-5; May and Oct. Sat.-Sun. 1-5 P.M. Located on Marshall Point Rd., Port Clyde, ME. 207-372-6450.