



# Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island

*Jill Nelson*

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## **Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island** Jill Nelson

In this elegant book of photographs, personal narrative, memories, and fascinating historical detail, bestselling author Jill Nelson conveys the special magic of Martha's Vineyard and the African Americans who have summered or lived there for generations.

Jill Nelson has been a summer and occasional year-round resident of Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard for nearly fifty years. It was where she learned to swim and ride a bike, first kissed a boy, became a writer, and, during twenty-eight summers, raised her own daughter. In *Finding Martha's Vineyard*, Nelson offers a lively, intimate portrait of a place that has provided respite and rejuvenation, community and contemplation for generations of African Americans.

Part memoir, part history, *Finding Martha's Vineyard* describes the various groups that settled on the Vineyard and in Oak Bluffs; slaves and their descendants; devout Methodists and Baptists; African Americans "in service" who accompanied their white employers to the island and over the years established a haven and a community; the black middle-class families who came each summer to escape the heat, hostility, and racial tension of their hometowns; and generations of African American professionals—doctors, presidential advisors, writers, academics and artists—who visit or live on the Vineyard today. Nelson interviews the Cottagers, the proud owners of Oak Bluffs' famous Gingerbread cottages; members of the Polar Bear Club, a die-hard group that swims together every summer morning at 7:30 A.M.; and such famous residents as Vernon Jordan, Bebe Moore Campbell, and Stephen Carter.

*Finding Martha's Vineyard* is about the power of place in our lives. A rich treasury of reminiscences, excerpts from news articles and documents from the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, recipes, and glorious photographs, it brings the sights, sounds, celebrations, and social importance of the island community brilliantly to life.

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