

In Stratford, a little light housekeeping



Family relishes living in shadow of historic lighthouse

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It's twilight at Stratford Point Light in the Lordship section of Stratford, and the sun sits low on the horizon, burning yellow, while the thin clouds glow orange like carved jack o' lanterns. The soft light falls evenly on the white lighthouse, giving it a reflected luminescence.

Then dusk falls, and an electronic sensor triggers the beacon at the top of the lighthouse, starting its night-time pulsing. The swirling light falls at the level of the treetops in the parklike setting of the point near the mouth of the Housatonic River.

Rebecca Coleman, standing in the doorway of the keeper's house, talks about how this is probably the most beautiful place she will ever live.

"When it's cloudy you can see the beam go completely around. It's peaceful," said Rebecca, the wife of U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Judson Coleman.

The couple has lived in the keeper's house since August, and although neither is native to New England -- Judson is from Minneapolis and Rebecca is from Pensacola, Fla. -- they have found themselves immersed in a quintessential New England experience: listening to the tolling bells of the buoys and the sound of the waves splashing on the rocky shore.

"People love this place and want to live here," Rebecca said. "It's not hard to get housesitters."

Sometimes they go into the lighthouse, which has been automated since about 1970, and climb to the top just to enjoy the view. There's not much in it, save for a spiral staircase.

"We go in there and hang out," Rebecca said.

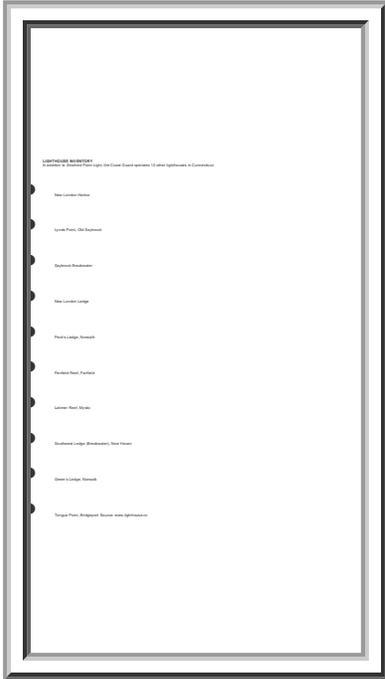
The lighthouse, keeper's house and surrounding property are owned by the Coast Guard, whose officers have traditionally lived in the idyllic setting,

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but in the Colemans' case, the local chief had other accommodations, so the keeper's house was available.

The Colemans had been living in Milford after Judson was transferred from Kentucky, and couldn't believe their luck when told they could move to the keeper's house.



Living there takes the place of the lieutenant's housing allowance.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live in a place like this," said Lt. Coleman, whose job is to perform safety inspections on small commercial boats. He works out of the New Haven Coast Guard station.

At 30, Coleman has been in the Coast Guard since he was 22 and fresh out of college with a degree in environmental studies. The couple has a 3-month-old daughter, Finley Drew.

"Our little family spent our first Christmas here," said the lieutenant, holding his daughter on his lap while his German shepherd, Cru, sat at his feet.

"The lighthouse has been here since 1822, and I assume the keeper's house has been here as long as the lighthouse," Coleman said. "There were two keepers. One lived upstairs and one lived downstairs. They rotated their hours."

That's part of why he likes it: he's a Coast Guard history buff. "This is really the roots of the Coast Guard," he said of the lighthouse.

Roland Spigarolo, a neighbor who has owned several small houses next door to the lighthouse on Prospect Drive for decades, loves the locale.

"There are not too many places nicer than this," he said, confident he is living in one of the best neighborhoods in Connecticut. "I've been here 35 years and I haven't locked my door."

A lighthouse is more than a utilitarian building that provides safety for boats, though. Rebecca reflected on how a lighthouse is symbolic.

"It's that light that brings you back home, a safety zone," she said. "It's something we'll remember forever."

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