

Annisquam Impressions: First Decade

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Scenes of Annisquam, AM needlepoint, completed 2019.

Top from left: Lobster Cove; my sister (then Betsy); sunset from the big house; Mary Kanda and Rhonda at Lighthouse Beach; OWL beach (AKA Big House Beach, Little Beach, Bradley Beach, and I'm sure many other names..)

Bottom from left: Adams Hill Road near the Swan's/Egan's; Lobster Cove (Tony Gross's boat and the bridge); composite pic—roses at 29 River Road plus the ocean and an imaginary tree; Sarah on the sunfish in Lobster Cove; the wall at 18 River Road.

From my very first year I have spent all or part of every summer here in Annisquam, starting at “the big house,” 76-78 Adams Hill Road. My grandfather, Charles F Bradley, and his architect brother-in-law, William Chase, built the two-family house in 1898. When I was growing up, Uncle Willie and his brother-in-law, Uncle Louis (Louis Cole) summured in the inland side of the house, and we and our cousins, the Janeways, stayed in the seaward side. Adelaide Cole Chase, the portrait painter, died three years before I was born. Even though I never knew her, in our house she was always “Aunt Adelaide,” and her portraits and still lifes continue to surround us in the house, alongside some of the actual objects she painted. Alas the people from the portraits have left us.

My first summer, at age 9 months, was 1948. Through my first decade (and beyond), we would arrive in mid-June and stay until Labor Day. Some impressions from those years remain strong:

“Ka-thunk.....thudda thudda thudda.....ka-thudda thudda.....kaTHUNK!.....”

Annisquam!!! WE'RE HERE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! The tires hitting the uneven boards of the wooden bridge sing the song. The seemingly endless journey from Baltimore is over. Finally, paradise!

The summer stretches long and quiet, from mid-June to Labor Day, the ocean beckoning me to be in it and on it—more in than on, to be honest—for as many hours as possible. I am a solitary kid, and we do many things as a family. So, although I am a sometimes participant in AYC's

Junior Program, I never become part of the village gang, whose existence and exploits I have only recently, and rather wistfully, learned about.

From day one we are barefoot the whole summer. This means that for the first week or two we are hopping and wincing from stones and the hot road, on the way to the market. After a week or so, thick calluses make walking anywhere and on anything a cinch. The market yields an ice cream cone to eat while browsing for candy, M&M's mostly. On the way home, a stop at the Kennedy's little kiddie cabin to raid Nat's comic book collection precedes the delicious moment: flop down on the sleeping porch cot, sort and consume the M&M's by color while settling in with the comics. Sweet sounds wash in the background: people chatting while walking down to the beach; the thwack of tennis balls; the distant hoots of triumph and frustration. "Good shot!" "I got it!" "Aghhh!"

Early morning low tides find us rowing across the channel in the My-Way, our wooden skiff. Anchoring and racing along the bar, jumping in puddles and launching into the water, our dog racing along beside. Equally thrilling is rock hopping, which feels like flying. Somehow, as I race across the rocks between "our" beach and Lighthouse Beach, I touch rocks but never land. All I need is a small solid surface, tilted or flat, high or low, a place to touch down with my toes long enough to launch lightly to the next. I am airborne, leaping and skimming, not stopping till I reach the large smooth rocks down from the Stevens' house. (Somewhere inside, I think I can still do this. "Don't try it!" my seventy-something body warns.)

Most hours logged by far are those in the water. Something in that salty expanse pulls me like a giant magnet. My time "at the beach" is time in the ocean, different routines depending on the tide. At mid-tide or higher, a great game is swimming against the tide from one end of the beach to the other, then zooming with the tide the other way, and back again, and again, and again. This is most satisfying if there are folks on the beach to applaud my epic struggles and stunning speed. Low tide requires plunging in off the steep drop by the point and swimming around different moored boats. I'm not sure how our skinny bodies stand the cold, but it's no different with the current crop of little ones. Blue lips apparently are not a sign of discomfort. When I am called to lunch, I pretend there is a shark to get myself out and up to the house.

We sail endlessly in Somersault, our red Turnabout, and Grayling, the red Fish Boat. Mostly just heading out to the bay or up into the marshes, stopping to jump overboard in the river. On longer trips, my little sister Betsy dozes in the sail bag on the floor of Grayling. Occasionally we take a sailing picnic to the back of Cranes with Grayling and Nice Lines, the little inboard my dad bought from Stu Forbes. She also serves as a sweet fishing boat, a frequent bearer of mackerel for dinner.



Anne, Lee, Barbie J, and ? in Somersault



Dickon, me and Betsy

On foggy days or nights, the big old horn at the lighthouse offers company. It stirs from the lowest of notes, so quiet I'm not even sure it's starting. Then sure enough, it's whirring up to a high steady note, holding there for what seems like forever, then dropping down and down, fading to nothing. Two minutes later, the deep growl cranks up again. The high note is still fairly low, not shrill like modern horns, and there is something deeply comforting about the sound. The horn itself is a large wooden structure, a widening trapezoid shape, where you can climb in and sit....and HOPE it doesn't start to sound while you're in there. It's a safe bet on a clear afternoon, but still not without a sense of peril.



The old fog horn [photo (cropped) courtesy of AHS, accession number AHS1132; format 4x5 print, undated]

Games of all sorts prevail in the house. Charades with the living room landing as a stage, the teams three steps down on two rows of couches and chairs. The front row is the guessing team, and with every turn, the teams reseal themselves for better viewing and shouting. No timer, no score, just shrieked guesses and hysterical laughter.

Uncle Charlie Janeway, a brilliant, pre-eminent doc at Children's Hospital, mysteriously has difficulty with charades. One time he is given the clue: "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice." He is told it is a movie title, but not having seen the movie he finds it bewildering. He parts his hair in the middle with his hands, strides out on the stage, grinning broadly and waving his hands around, stops, and smiles in all directions while making more gestures. The goal? Portray Bob Hope. When this doesn't yield anything remotely resembling Bob, he strides off the stage to think. He changes his hair a little and comes back with the exact same act. After 4 tries, he retires from the fray amid general good humor.

My cousin Barbie and I seem to have charades ESP. Once I am portraying the "whole thing" for the clue, "Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto," by miming playing the piano. Without any more specifics, Barbie pipes up with the correct answer.

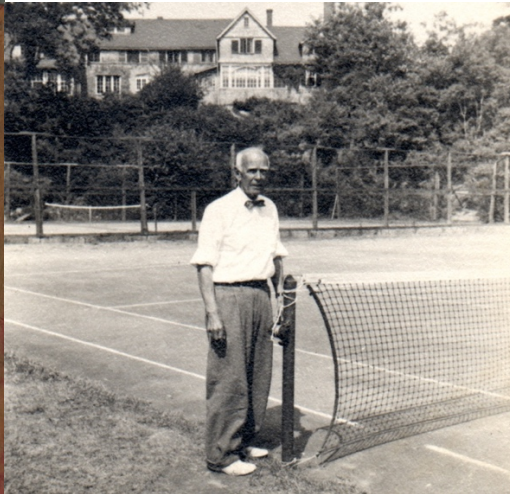
Raucous card games are another staple, particularly Pounce! We gather as many as 8 players around the cocktail table in the window seat. Running commentary from everyone, cards flying across the table, getting bent when they collide. Apart from contrary claims of being there first, there is not as much fighting and arguing as you might expect.

In 1954 Hurricane Carol provides high drama and a trove of family lore. I'm seven years old and the big storm is coming. We have a bird's eye view of the channel and the bay, huge turbulence and sluicing rain, the wind howling. I'm outside on the driveway in the pouring rain, holding an umbrella. Water sluicing over my boots, I am literally picked up off the ground by the wind and moved a few inches towards the water. This is both a memory and a myth. Later, the family is gathered on the sunporch marveling at the angry ocean when with a "whump" and a huge crash, the giant multipaned window in the dining room blows in with a massive splintering of glass. The sucking pressure thumps our chests. Fragments cover the dining table and all the furniture in the room. I remember it, and I remember the story it became. On the river, huge motor yachts and sailboats fly out the channel, having broken their moorings. The tide is so crazy high that you can't even start down the steps to the beach for fear of being swept away. During that storm, we use even more pots and pans than usual to catch leaks.

When our babysitter of three summers, Abbie Cole, has the temerity to get married and become Abbie Dawkins, I bury my sorrows by making a lobster block print to create a wedding gift of placemats and napkins. My mother, a frequenter and friend of the Folly Cove Designers, receives permission for me to use their press, with their supervision of course, to make the prints. This is a huge thrill and takes some of the sting out of losing Abbie's companionship.



My block for Abbie's Napkins



Uncle Louis, Keeper of the OWL courts

The river is a source of constant entertainment. Trawlers heading out at dawn and returning in the afternoon, laden with fish, followed by a cloud of screaming gulls diving for scraps. The vigilant search for desirable boats so we can yell “My boat, My boat, My Boat!” before someone else does. Exactly which boat has been claimed and the meaning of this mysterious possession remain a bit vague, but that doesn’t diminish the competition. Lines of Turnabouts or Fishes being towed in after the race; my mother pleading for someone to go out for one more short sail regardless of time, wind or tide. And her more or less nightly insistence that we all drop everything and come to the porch to see the “most beautiful sunset ever!”



OWL tournament photo. From left: Charlie Janeway, Sarge Kennedy, Betty Janeway, Lee Janeway, barely showing—Billie Kennedy, Lee Kennedy, Dinny Stevens, my mother Mary Meyer, Anne Janeway in the back, Betty Voorhees, Janey Stevens; my cousin Barbie Janeway on the ground; Bob Voorhees; Brooks Stevens; Carlie Janeway, and my dad, Bill Meyer

August is full vacation mode for my father who, as a psychiatrist, takes only this month off. His weekend commutes are over and he can finally let down and relax. We fish, sail, play in the OWL tennis tournament (bringing home many a trophy), feast on lobster on the porch with the sunset coming earlier and earlier. We still engage in our summer activities, but as the days get shorter a small dread begins to build. The open-ended feeling is replaced by a feeling of diminishment, a dwindling.

The sad day comes, when the lovely sound of the wooden bridge spells departure for another long year. Baltimore and school feel foreign and unwelcome. This is HOME.