

## A Memorial Day Story

Rita Littlewood Teele

“I’ll begin at the beginning and end at the end.”

Please travel back in time with me to August 23rd 1969—David’s and my wedding day. During the ceremony at the Annisquam Village Church, my new husband slipped a wide gold wedding ring on my finger. Inside the ring was engraved his name, and 1969. His narrower wedding band carried an inscription of my first name with the year. We drove from the church to a reception in the garden of #8 Squam Rock Road, then the summer home of David's parents, John and Katharine (KP) Teele.

Many of our wedding guests were longtime Annisquam friends of the Teele family. The day of the wedding, Winsor Gale arranged a barbeque lunch, on the land between the French and Gale houses which overlooks Ipswich Bay. The day before, I had been staying in the Lovejoys’ house and when their bachelor son, Fred Lovejoy, arrived home from the hospital, (he was wearing a bowtie) he and I had a conversation. Forever after, I’ve been able to tell people that I spent the evening before my wedding with Fred Lovejoy....



But back to the wedding: Sylvester Ahola on trumpet and Miriam Lane on accordion, serenaded our guests. Surrounded by love and good wishes, we began our marriage.

In the summers that followed, David and I tried to get back to Annisquam as much as possible. We stayed with his parents in the little house on Squam Rock Road that had been the chauffeur's house on the Hight Estate. (The garage became the large front room that one entered through the front door.)



8 Squam Rock Road, Annisquam, 1970s

David liked sailing. I liked the beach, the ironed white cotton sheets on the bed, the smell of cooked bacon on a Sunday morning, and playing tennis at the Old Wharf Lot with John Teele who always beat me. There were often young nieces and a nephew in residence. They were delighted to have attention from an aunt and uncle who, as yet, had no children of their own. One summer afternoon, when the sun was shining, the sky was blue, and the grass was long, I was outside in the dog-legged yard swinging each child in turn, round and round and round. Child and aunt got dizzier and dizzier with trees, granite walls, flowers, and green grass blurring into bands of greys, pinks and greens.

As the world came back into focus, I realized that it was missing. My left hand was bare; there was a pale circlet on my tanned ring finger. The children and I looked and looked and looked until our eyes hurt with the looking. The ring was gone. And it was still gone when I looked time and time again. The lawn was mowed and no ring appeared. How could something so solid and so *golden* disappear? Perhaps it flew over the wall.... But it was gone and that was that. I bought a replacement ring in a jeweler's shop in Harvard Square. There wasn't much money to spare at the time; the band was narrow without engraving. The jeweler was more than a little suspicious.

### *May 2007*

Fast forward nearly 38 years to springtime in 2007. The start of the season had been rain-soaked and the days, cold. But there was the rare evening when we were able to sit outside on the porch at #39 Leonard Street.

KP Teele and her sister, Elinor Hughes, had bought the house in 1947. And although he loved access to the water, John Teele was no fan of the 44 double hung windows, which needed screens in summer and storm windows in winter. And, the large back lawn required constant mowing. The house at #39 Leonard Street was sold to Jed Smith and his wife and the senior Teeles moved to the smaller house at 8 Squam Rock Road, shown in the photograph above.

When the Smiths left Leonard Street for Adams Hill, Emily Muzzey, widow of David Muzzey, became the owner of #39. After her death in 1983, David and I, with the help of his parents, were able to buy back the house where David had spent summers as a child. (His attic bedroom still had the same wallpaper, but cars no longer announced their arrival into Annisquam on a planked bridge.)



The front porch at #39 Leonard Street: Stars & Stripes, Union Jack (for English Rita), and the New Zealand flag—our home away from home—and John Teele's gate.

On a springtime evening in May of 2007, David's sister, Sylvia—mother of the nieces and nephew who were swung around in the garden so many years ago—is visiting us on Leonard Street. Deedy Sargent, who lives across the street, is working in her garden. She joins us on the porch, and then for dinner. The evening is filled with Annisquam memories and we mention our own story of the lost ring because David has acquired a metal detector. Although I do not have the same faith in technology as does my husband, I'm willing to try using it to find the ring. We've seen a Canadian flag flying from a flagpole at the house on Squam Rock Road. Canadians are nice people. Perhaps they'll allow us to search the yard.

"I'm sure they won't mind," says Deedy. "I know them and they are friends of my daughter. Jeff Weiss and Marilyn Short come down from Toronto as often as they can—with their son Asher—and I'm certain that they will be here for the Memorial Day weekend." Deedy makes the connection for us.

### *Memorial weekend, May 26-28, 2007*

My sister, Yvonne, arrived on Saturday evening of Memorial weekend. On Sunday, she and I climbed the hill to #8 Squam Rock Road. and met Jeff and Marilyn inside their front door. Their welcome was warm, and enthusiasm in helping us, genuine. We were allowed to try our luck in using the metal detector in their yard.

By the time the weather had moderated and thunderstorms were no longer on the horizon, it was 4 p.m. on Monday afternoon. My sister had already left for Vermont, and David and I were walking up the hill through hot and muggy air. At #8 Squam Rock Road, David opened the wooden gate that was covered in ivy and knocked on the door. The house was empty of people; Jeff and Marilyn had already returned to Toronto. David and I were a little hesitant to walk into their yard. It was eerie to be in a place that we hadn't seen for 25 years. A garden now lined the hedge, and the rough wooden trellis that had been mounted on the low granite wall behind the old garden, was gone. David unzipped the black canvas bag that was emblazoned with "Bounty Hunter" and assembled the metal detector. I had a small fork and trowel at the ready.

"Where did you lose it?"

"If I knew where I'd lost it, I might have found it," I replied sweetly.

We began looking in the region where the yard angled away from the house, where I thought I remembered playing with the children. While I swatted at mosquitoes and contemplated the difficulties of searching in the brush beyond the wall—which seemed to me to be the likely resting place of my ring—David swung the detector backwards and forwards along the edge of the garden, working away from the house. The presence of metal is signaled by a low frequency buzzing noise. We weren't hearing anything. David came back to the bend in the lawn. I took off my watch for use as a control target and placed it on the grass. After diddling with sensitivity and discriminatory knobs, David turned and walked slowly toward the house, sweeping the garden as well as the grass. We both heard a low frequency sound among the plants, near the outdoor barbecue. I dug under the area of greatest signal. We teased apart the little piles of dirt, rescanned, and found...gold covered foil that must have come from a beer bottle, or food wrapper.

"Well, at least we know that it works," was David's comment.

Our second discovery was a circlet of metal, probably aluminum, that I dug out from a clod of turf. The discovery of more pieces of foil followed.

“How about I fan out from the bend in the lawn crosswise?”

“Sure,” I said with a mental shrug. I was getting bitten, I was bored, and I wasn’t sure what food I had at home to put on the dinner table.

Our next major discovery was my watch, which I had forgotten to put back on my wrist. The look that I got from my husband does not warrant description.

About 2 feet from the edge of the garden, in the lawn, we got a consistent low frequency signal. I got the trowel and dug up a plug of lawn. The signal was still there, so we widened the hole until there were four more plugs sitting beside it. I put my right hand on the lawn and the swinging circle of the detector made the same low buzz over my engagement ring. I dug the hole deeper until we had about 8 inches worth of dirt alongside the displaced turf. But there was nothing to be found in the hole, and with great care, I replaced the pile of dirt, replanted the grass, stamped everything back in place, and made a wish for rain in the coming week. We continued on our way across the lawn to the hedge.

“Next time we come, I’m bringing mosquito repellent. These damn bugs are just awful.”

“How about I look for another half hour and we’ll call it quits...It’s almost 5:30 now.” David replied.

At the edge of the lawn, near the hedge and the “new” garden, we kept getting signals that seemed to continue along a line, under the grass.

“I think we’ve found the old pipe that brings water out here.”

“Well, there’s the tap in the garden, so you’re right.”

This was getting very tedious. I looked over the hedge to the wooden barrier that the current owner of the High house had put up across the driveway. It replaced a pile of dirt that he had used as a blockade. Things had changed since 1980 when parents with children had used this lane as a shortcut to the beach. I swatted at another mosquito.

After a few more minutes, I was summoned by the detective who had found another buzzing candidate. I dug down under the target area and we scanned the spoil. A flat brass oval, punched with holes, one of which was incomplete, came out of the dirt. It was inscribed with “J.W. Teele” and a telephone number.

“This is a dog tag that belonged to one of Dad’s dogs!”

That discovery was the turning point of the afternoon. If we could find a dog tag that had been in the ground for over 30 years, we should be able to find a ring—that is, if it wasn’t over the wall.

“Where was that area that we looked at before? We got such a strong signal there, we should rescan the area.”

“You mean where we dug half the lawn up and didn’t find anything?” I replied.

This yard is going to look like it was attacked by gophers, I was thinking. Just as well that the owners aren’t here to see us, but at least I’ve been weeding the garden as I’ve been digging....

It took us a while to find the place in question because I had done such a good job replacing soil and turf. But examined again, it gave us the same low frequency signal that we had heard previously.

“David, if you have a separate smaller coil that is specific for gold, why don’t you try that?”

I wasn’t terribly optimistic, but if we were going to dig the lawn up again, it had to be with good cause. David agreed, refitted the metal detector with the smaller coil and walked back to join me near the bend in the lawn.

We looked at each other as the detector buzzed seductively over the area. I pulled out the original plugs of turf and put them to the side. The signal came from the edge of the excavation. I dug a big chunk of grass and dirt to extend the hole. It was beginning to look like a very big gopher had

taken up residence. David turned the fist-sized plug of grass upside down, and it was alive with red ants.

“Please don’t get bitten by those things!”

This would not be a good end to a futile search, I thought, but exposed to the daylight, the ants ran for cover. And then everything happened in slow motion. The metal detector became a wand, the plug of turf emitted a low purring sound and magically, out of the soil surrounding the grass roots, David pulled a golden ring.

We were both kneeling across from each other when he presented me with a dirt-packed golden wedding band that had been lost for nearly 38 years. I hardly looked like a bride. I had dirt all over me, tears were running down my face and my nose needed a handkerchief. But I didn’t care one bit. After all those years, my wedding ring, with its singular engraving, was in my left hand.

***Postscript.***

You won’t see the ring on my left hand. I did not want to risk losing it (again). And because I was working in hospitals, regulations did not permit anything other than a thin gold band on a ring finger. I now wear the ring on a gold chain around my neck for special occasions—and our golden wedding anniversary in 2019 (I was a child bride) certainly was a special occasion.