



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

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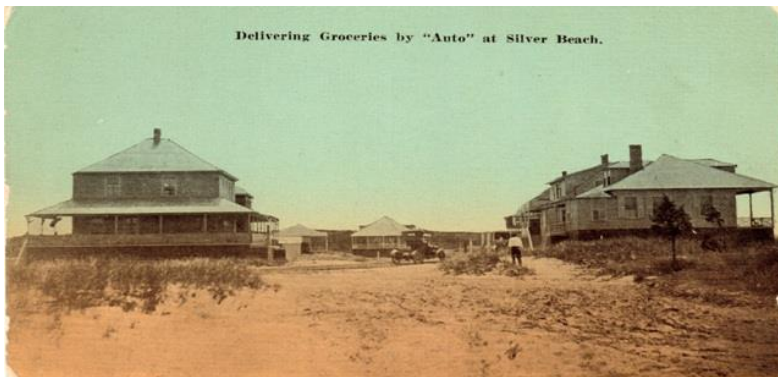
Moonlight, Seaweed, and Ukuleles

Rene (Dillingham) Washburn (1915-2006)

We lived in Annapolis, Maryland, where my father, Alexander Dillingham, taught mathematics at the U.S. Naval Academy. Each May, out came the trunks, to be packed and shipped ahead to Falmouth. In early June, my family made the usual migration from Annapolis to Cape Cod—B & O Railroad from Baltimore to Weehawken, N.J., ferry across the Hudson to Manhattan, the Fall River Line steamer overnight to Massachusetts, and, lastly, a train to Falmouth.



From the beginning we had a vegetable garden behind the cottage. In the spring, Dad wrote instructions to a boy in Davisville, Morgan Dennis, and enclosed a check to buy supplies. When we arrived in early June, the peas were showing flowers and tiny pods, and the rows of green seedlings were recognizable: carrots, beets, green beans, squash, cucumbers, peppers, and rows of corn and tomatoes. This garden fed our family and our guests all summer.



The pine woods behind the garden were often noisy with nesting crows, and whenever Mother saw crows in the garden, she stood on the porch and let out a loud CAW-W-W! CAW-W-W! CAW-W-W! The young crows joined in with their adolescent, cracked attempts to duplicate their parents or my mother. Crow sounds were part of the ambiance in Davisville. Dad dug garbage holes alongside the garden, and in them he

dumped the kitchen waste. This was a simple form of composting.

We didn't miss the lack of a car; the world came to us. Twice a week, Nicholas Tsiknas sent his son, Gus, to Davisville with a truck full of fruits and vegetables. We girls hung around the truck while Mother chose peaches, bananas, plums, and sometimes a watermelon. On Fridays, Mr. Goodspeed drove all the way from Chatham with fresh fish on a cake of ice in the back of his black Model A Ford truck. But the big event was the delivery from Stevens' Store. Mr. Stevens himself came in the morning from East Falmouth, two miles inland. Mother was ready with a list of staples. In the late afternoon when the sun hung low, Mr. Stevens' nephew, the Schroeder boy, drove back with the order. Dorothy Barton was on the alert; she had a crush on him and stood waiting on the front porch. As soon as the truck pulled up in front, she shouted, "Auntie Veda! Auntie Veda! The Schroeder boy is here!" and she ran through the



house to the kitchen door. He was a handsome football-hero type with blond wavy hair. He paid no attention to the four young girls clustered around the carton of groceries.

We lived by the sea, but fishing was not on our list, except when I went with Gibby Willis to the drawbridge at Maravista. We used raw mussels for bait, smashed the shell and put the yellow meat on the hook. I caught an eel once and screamed loud enough for a passing car to stop.

There was nothing to do at night, so we created our own entertainment. One or two packs of cards would keep us engrossed in games of Fan-Tan, Michigan, Hearts, and two-pack Rummy. We met Jimmy and Walter Moor and their cousin Peggy Vanneman, who lived in Davisville, a half mile away. Soon they came after supper to join our games: Kick the Can, or when darker, Mike, Mike, Strike-a-Light. No game store equipment was needed; an old soup can or a few boxes of matches kept us busy for hours. My father was always ready for a game of cribbage, and he played chess with my sister Ruth. I played checkers and Parcheesi.

The summer I was ten, someone gave the three older girls each a ukulele. I received a banjo. We tuned the strings with “My Dog Has Fleas.” We plink-planked-plunked and sang the words to “Yessir, That’s My Baby” and “Yes, We Have No Bananas.”

On moonlight nights, we would ask Dad to let us go for a swim. We loved swimming without our suits and walked through the woodland path wrapped in our towels, guided by the moon shining on Vineyard Sound. We dropped our towels on the sand and dashed into the black water squealing and splashing to activate the phosphorous and illuminate our arms and legs. Dad played lifeguard and sat on the beach until he thought we had had enough.

When we woke up on the morning of a “Smokey Sou’wester,” we knew we were in for three days of watery sunlight, moaning fog horns and big waves swept onshore. We gave up swimming and sported in the surf. Mother offered us girls her Annettes to wear in place of our regular wool suits. An Annette is a black cotton tanksuit worn as underwear under a swimming costume by ladies in the early nineteen hundreds. It was named for Annette Kellerman, who swam across the English Channel without her bathing dress, clad only in her underwear.

The surf rolled us over and over. Large waves slammed us onto the beach, leaving us panting and imbedded in the sand. We patted small fuzzy balls of seaweed under our noses for moustaches. We were a comical foursome, plastered with seaweed, our too-large Annettes drooping and clinging to our small bodies. We wrapped up in our towels and trotted back to the house. There was no shower, and Dad said it was good for our skin to rub the salt in.



TOP: Barbara Gass, Menauhant., 1915.

MIDDLE: Taft family, North Falmouth, 1920s

BOTTOM: Elms family, Menauhant, c1920.



I first met Sylvia Draper when she stopped by a neighbor's house. Her father was a wealthy woolen manufacturer, with mills in a small town outside of Boston. She appeared to be dashingly self-assured, but more than that, I was fascinated by the clothes she wore—gray flannel Bermuda shorts, the first to appear in Davisville. I went looking for her house the next day. At the end of the beach road I found her in an up-to-date two-story house overlooking the inlet and the drawbridge. When Sylvia and I

outgrew sitting on the beach with our families, we met at the public beach, where we would swim out to a raft and mingle with other young people. There were other girls our age that we spent time with, but not to confide in. Sylvia was my best summer friend—we were “Syl and Dil.”

At sixteen, Sylvia said, “Guess what! I got a car!” She added, in a hushed voice, “It’s a red convertible.” We went for drives to Stevens’ General Store, with the top down, of course, and to the Megansett Tea Room on Buzzards Bay. There we ordered tea sandwiches, danced with each other, and enjoyed the piano music.

In 1940, both Sylvia and I married. We were bridesmaids in each other’s weddings. We each had four children and each moved our summer home base: Syl and Rob to Scraggy Neck and we to Chapoquoit Island, a few miles south.

In eighty-three years, I have never missed a summer on Cape Cod.

The tale is an excerpt from an unpublished memoir in the archives. We have published other excerpts in Sept 2017 and Sept 2018. The Woods Hole Historical Museum recently published an excerpt in their [Winter 2019 issue](#) of Sprintsail.