



The Air of Summer

Summer air comes slowly to Cape Cod. After many long months, its arrival is always unpredictable, but as sure as the changing seasons.

It's a different type of air. A feeling. A stillness.

When the air of summer descends upon Cape Cod, it claims its presence with a quiet declaration. Activity slows, sounds hush, and a turbulent sea becomes tranquil – pounding waves becoming gentle laps along the shore.

It is in this air that time stands still. At once, air and time move into a different dimension. Lingering, hovering, enveloping, like a warm shroud muffling us all. Air of summer is so much more than humidity or temperature. It's a culture, a great, long adventure, an annual tradition, a state of mind.

'Seems the air of summer arrived so much earlier when I was young. There it would be, just outside the windows of my fourth grade classroom of the Center School. It would always arrive, it seemed, just days before school let out for the summer, making the hours inside crawl at a formidable pace. Those last, sultry days of June would carry on forever, teasing that that eternity called summer was knocking on the schoolhouse door. Recess was little more than a break. And concentration simply could no longer be on lessons or books, as thoughts drifted to early morning fishing trips, endless days in the pool, nights by the fire under the two towering oaks. History turned into camping trips, Math to the annual "big trip" to New Hampshire, Niagra Falls, or Washington D.C. Reading to kickball in the street, backyard baseball 'til nightfall, and, of course, the regular scheduling of summer sleepouts.

Seems summers were almost endless then -- those first days of summer beginning like the start of a great journey, knowing there were miles and miles to travel and so many days to travel them in. Summer started so early, and stretched far into the early days of September, always feeling like they were just the perfect amount of time. Long enough to create the adventures of a lifetime, enough to actually begin to feel bored, and thoughts of "back to school" became somehow welcome, exciting, and precisely on schedule.

Has all that changed? Are summers shorter? Have those sultry days of June stopped knocking on schoolhouse doors?

I think not.

The air of summer stands still for a reason. Waves quiet with resolution. And popsicles still melt in blues and greens, creating wet and sticky fingers. It's still a bicycle ride to the Dairy Queen for a Mr. Misty or a cone dipped in butterscotch, and mornings still begin in warm darkness as young fishermen prepare for a long ride to Mine Brook for that ever-alluding trout. Long days at the pool, or beach, are still as popular as ever, and the crack of a bat can still be heard in many a summer evening.

Families still flock to the Cape for their family reunions. Children still walk the beaches, buckets in hand, gathering magic stones, and shells that trap the sound of ocean inside forever. The Cape Cod League still illuminates magical nights in towns around the Cape, upholding a fine and honored tradition, and ice cream still drips from the bottoms of sweet, delicious sugar cones.

The smell of fried clams still drifts through the trees regardless of direction or time of day, and sandals still line the tops of so many sandy doorsteps.

The air still stands still on the bluffs at Hatch's Harbor and the sound of a lone seagull still commands all other sounds of a summer afternoon. Coolness remains in the warmest of days in the clays of Newcomb Hollow, sandcastles continue to reign between tides, moats miraculously filling with water and, here and there, someone is

still feeling the coolness and weight of a burying sand for the very first time, as friends prance around in laughter and giggles.

Lobsters still boil, steamers still steam, butter still melts -- and, for the lucky ones, boats still dance across the water grabbing the singular spray and coolness left only for them on Cape Cod Bay.

Summer love still blossoms, and summer love still fades, and lingering crushes still go unnoticed perhaps, until next year.

And that fire, that glorious, powerful fire, that burned between the two towering oaks. It still burns. And the laughs, bare feet, and happy stories still carry on on its wonderous, cool-dirt hearth. The swing still swings from the tree at the left, marshmallows toast at the ends of sticks, and games of Hide & Seek still carry on well into the night, as mothers call their children in from the back screen door.

And, yes, mom's and dad's probably still skinny dip after their kids have well gone off to bed.

"Richard, it's time to come in," my mother would call.

"Five more minutes, Mom... OK?"

It always was.

"OK," she'd call back. "Five more minutes."