

Annandale Days

April, 2015

Playing baseball at the Creamery was great fun. In our day, the backstop was in the corner farthest from the swamp. Third base was right next to the Annandale-High Bridge road. We called it the “back road.”

The big guys—guys like Skippy Apgar— would always be captains, because they said so. When they picked their teams, the smaller boys, like me, were usually the last to be picked. Not everyone who played had a glove. I bought mine from the money I made delivering papers.

Losing baseballs was a constant challenge playing at the Creamery. There were no houses across the “back road” from the ball field, just a thick woods and many balls were hit there never to be found again. There was a catch-basin there too, and it was not unusual for a foul ball to roll into it. Then the smallest kid would have to crawl in to get the ball back.

Only the big guys could hit the ball as far as the swamp (not really a swamp, but the pukey-looking waste they pumped out of the Creamery.) Rarely did we have more than one ball, so depending upon how quickly we got the ball out, we played with a wet ball or stopped playing altogether.

It was great playing there, never about winning or losing, just friends getting together to have a good time. Strikes and balls were never called, but we did call outs on the bases. There were disagreements, but never any fights. The team that yelled the loudest usually won the argument. This was long before parents organized sports for kids. Little League? I don't know if it was around, but it sure wasn't a part of our world.

Bill Sherman grew up on Center Street and lived in Annandale from 1945 until 1962, when he left to attend the University of Montana to become a “forest ranger.” After graduation and a stint in the Army, during which time he was married (and still is), Bill worked in insurance and higher education before settling into a career as a high school guidance counselor. Bill retired early at age 57 and has been enjoying his “life after employment” from his home in East Windsor, N.J.

On summer Sundays in Annandale, I would leave my house on Center Street and venture over to Back Street, pushing my home-made buggy to the top, ready to challenge all comers. Among them were the Voorhees brothers, Randy Emery, the Scheiers, Joey Apgar, and Cy Whitley with his Beetle Juice blue buggy, complete with an angle iron v-shaped bumper.

In one race, Cy's buggy hit a Corvair parked along the side of Back Street. The buggy put a huge dent and a long scratch down the entire side of the car. This did not go over well with the owner, and races were suspended for a few weeks until we got the endorsement from the town. All of us racers had to chip in to repair the car, which Mr. Scheier did at his body shop.

My only racing victory came in a very surprising way. Starting at the top, my cart found its wheels quickly, and we started passing a few others as we picked up speed. Somewhere about halfway down, Cy spun out and created the opening I needed to secure the win. Of course, words flew that I had pushed off illegally, but I swear to this day it was a clean start.

I remember the parents and other spectators rooting all the racers on as we flew down the street, heads down low, hands firmly gripping the wheels as though we were doing a hundred miles an hour, which we were in our minds.

Britt Long Lived on Center street from 1957 to 1967, near the top of the street by the old post office. He graduated from North in 1970, and went looking for the meaning of life. He tried college, but his inability to comprehend the written word shortened that attempt. Britt became a truck driver, then an owner-operator, hauling bulk chemicals. In 1993, he left the trucking business and started selling pre-owned cars at Flemington Car and Truck Country, where he still works today. Married for 38 years, he and his wife have two wonderful sons and two grandsons. Their oldest son is an English teacher at Central, as is his wife. Their youngest works in NYC, lives in Hoboken, and is living the dream.

Annandale may have been a small town, but it did have its share of businesses. Harvey's Grocery Store, up on Main Street, was one of them. It was a popular place, especially after the first day of school. We would come home with our new books that needed to be covered, and we'd head right up to Harvey's. Mr. Harvey would give us strips of paper he used for wrapping meats to cover our books.

Often, we would have a few pennies with us to try to win money from his gumball machine. If you got the yellow gumball with the red stripe, you won \$.02 cents of candy. If you got the purple ball with dark purple stripe, you got \$.05 worth of candy. I got several lucky balls in my youth.

The other big store in town was the store on the intersection of Highway 22 and Center Street. We would often go there and get candy when we had a few dollars. The owner's son (Howard Lance) was a newspaper writer for Hunterdon County Democrat and the Plainfield Courier News.

Humphreys was on the west end of town. That is where we took our daily breaks and get a soda or something when we would be doing our paper routes. I delivered the Easton Express and my friend Billy delivered the Plainfield Courier. My sister and her friends stopped by there after school to buy cherry Cokes. Humphreys was where my father always bought his Exxon gas since Mr. Humphrey gave a four-cents-a-gallon discount for regular customers. I guess he was the forerunner for the gas discount plans used by food chains today.

Coss's garage was another Annandale business. My father would go there most Saturday mornings to chat with other men from the town and just hang out. When I got my car, I always had it serviced there. During the gas crisis of 1973, I was able to pull into Coss's after dark and he would open the pumps and sell me gas when I needed it. That is where I learned that loyalty to a store was a two-way street.

And, of course, there was Lindy's Tavern, on Highway 22 at the east end of town. I never went inside until I was 21, but I had lots of fun there. My friend lived next door and we would use the roof of the tavern to play on and for jumping-off contests.

David Frace was born on Gobel's farm, which used to be across from the high school. He was the last baby to be delivered at home by Dr. Boyer. David lived on Center Street from 1942 until 1954, when his family moved to the tenant house on Austin farm on Beaver Avenue. After high school and Army enlistment, David began a long career working with computers. He now lives in Bel Air, Maryland, about fifteen miles north of Baltimore, where he works at his second career: umpiring softball and baseball games

On a lovely and peaceful early summer morning, Eric Hegstrom and I walked down Allerton Rd, past the small grade school towards Highway 78. We were junior high age. Carrying tennis rackets, our destination was the Tinnes tennis court at the top of the hill on the other side of the interstate, by the beautiful old brick mansion. There we would join our friend John Loomis and tennis teacher Charlie Price for a group lesson.

As we approached the underpass, all was still; even 78 was still. Absolutely no traffic. I don't remember who thought of it, but we agreed it would be a splendid thing—and serious fun—to take advantage of the situation and have a crawl across the 30 yards or so of concrete. It would be much more interesting than the underpass.

Our rackets clattered on the pavement. All went well until about halfway across when a car appeared. This wasn't too much of a worry until we realized it was the Loomis car. John lived up towards Cokesbury, and he would certainly be coming in a car driven by his mother. This was one of a number of possible outcomes that our partially formed brains had failed to present us.

Busted! Mrs Loomis' dark eyes were naturally prominent, but they positively bulged as the car passed us. She was frightened and furious. We knew our parents would soon find out.

We finished our lesson and for some reason—probably to delay the inevitable—I walked Eric to his house on East St, instead of stopping where I lived on Maple Avenue. Mrs Loomis was there, and in the last 90 minutes or so she had not calmed down a bit. Or maybe seeing us pissed her off again.

“You could have been killed!”

It was not the time or place for an eleven-year old to try his version of reason, but I did anyway: “There weren't any cars, Mrs Loomis—it was completely safe.”

Surprisingly, this didn't help. At all.

Her voice raised a pitch: “You were lying face down in the middle of the road!”

When Eric and I (helpfully) pointed out that, actually, we had been crawling and had not been lying face down, hysteria approached as she screamed, “ARE YOU CALLING ME A LIAR?!!”

There was nothing for it but to go home to my parents who, of course already knew.

They grounded me for a week. Eric was grounded for one night—he had to delay that evening’s plans for the High Bridge Carnival. None of it seemed particularly proportionate at the time but I learned my lesson: I have not crawled across an interstate since!

Peter Dyer was a wannabe major leaguer, living on East (Back) Street from 1959 to 1961, and on Maple Avenue from 1961 to 1970. (1967-1970 summers only). He is now a freelance writer, living in Wellington, New Zealand with his wife, Cathy.

I grew-up on the lower, east side of Annandale, where my parents, Henry and Louise Krohn, owned and operated Annandale Florist and Nursery (now the entrance to The Mews). Just beyond their property—sixty years ago— were fields, woodlots, and Beaver Brook. In my youth, beavers did not inhabit this stream. However, in earlier times when Native Americans lived throughout New Jersey, beavers were among the most prized resources of this brook.

We have many human influences in our lives: family, friends, neighbors, and teachers. If you’re lucky, like I was, these influences were all positive, so much so that I fondly recall Annandale and her people as the years turn into decades, and the decades into a lifetime. But, I also had another huge influence in my early life, a non-human force, a true force of Nature: little Beaver Brook.

To me, and others of my age, the fields and woods east of town were our playgrounds (with few ticks and no Lyme’s disease, lucky for us). In the summer we formed teams and played ‘army.’ In winter, after a deep snow, we tobogganed down the long field that ran below the railroad track to the brook. If the snow was deep enough, we would fly over the barbed wire fences that bisected the field. On one occasion, the toboggan—trickier to steer than a sled— ran squarely into a fence post. We were all fine, but the toboggan suffered a splintered front-end.

Beaver Brook was more than a mere playground. It was the home of Nature's mysteries, an unyielding attraction that constantly called to me. With patience and persistence, Beaver Brook did reveal its treasures: the small human-like prints in the mud made by a raccoon's front paw, a belted kingfisher plunging head-first into still water and emerging with a minnow dangling in its bill, and a red fox pouncing into the grass to catch a mouse while I stood frozen only a few yards away. Beaver Brook was my teacher and my laboratory.

Beaver Brook was also where I first fished for trout. After many unfruitful attempts to catch a trout, success finally came. I vividly recall the blue-bird day one April morning when shortly after sun-up I hiked from our house, through the tree nursery, and past our irrigation pond to a quiet pool on Beaver Brook. At the Swimming Hole, I stood on the roots of a tree used as a diving platform in the summer and quietly lowered an earthworm into the deepest part of the pool. Instantly, there was a strong tug on the end of the line. Setting the hook, I knew that I had hooked more than a chub. As I gently raised the glistening fish from the water, there was no doubt; this was the prize, my first brook trout. It was a real trophy even though only 10 inches long and stocked by the state. I quickly grabbed the fish before it jumped from the hook, wrapped it in grass, and ran straight-up the steep bank to get home as fast as possible. Mom showed me how to prepare and cook the fish. After cleaning, we carefully washed it, rolled it in flour, and fried the trout in butter. What a wonderful breakfast!

To this day, I have a few trout (not hatchery, but wild) breakfasts each year to celebrate spring. Priceless is the memory of that cool, spring morning on Beaver Brook when I caught my very first brook trout, and my mother taught me how to prepare the best breakfast ever.

Bill Krohn lived on East Street from his birth in 1945 until the early fall of 1962, when he left to attend the University of Alaska (and later two other universities). Eventually, he became a wildlife research scientist and university professor. Today, he lives in Maine with his wife, Ellen, who he met more than four and a half decades ago while attending the University of Maine. They are now both retired, but Bill continues to research, write, and lecture about Maine's environmental history (http://works.bepress.com/william_krohn/). The experiences of his youth in the 'wilds' of Beaver Brook, combined with the valuable lessons taught by hard-working and loving parents, led Bill to a lifetime of real wilderness adventures.



Bill Krohn holding a trophy-sized silver salmon he caught in the wilds of Alaska.