

Annandale Days

February, 2016

I'll always remember the railroad that ran through town. In those days, it was the old steam engines that blew their loud whistles as they approached the Annandale station. The freight trains, which allowed all kinds of cargo to move on to destinations throughout New Jersey, would simply pass through town at a very slow speed. The passenger trains would stop at the station to let riders on and off the train. The conductor would exit one of the cars and put down a little step stool for the passengers to use. When all the passengers were safely on or off, the conductor would signal to the train's engineer and the train would leave the station slowly picking up speed as it went. Passenger trains allowed people who lived in the Annandale area to go to their jobs in Somerville, or on to New York City, as the train stopped in Jersey City for people to use the Tube to get into Manhattan.

As kids, we would walk the railroad tracks occasionally to check our balancing skills and to collect soda bottles that had been thrown from train car windows. A small bottle deposit was \$.02 and a large was \$.05. We would take the bottles to Harvey's grocery store and buy candy as well as gum balls with it. Or, we'd place some of the pennies on the railroad tracks and find them smashed and disfigured after the train ran over them. Most times, they were relatively easy to find after the train passed, and each would have its own design to it. What a good time over a couple of pennies. Probably like putting silver dollars on the tracks today!

In November, we'd follow the tracks for hunting adventures. Several of us had our licenses and would walk along the tracks and shoot rabbits. We'd take them home, skin them, have our mothers cook them, and share a delicious dinner.

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

My dad was a volunteer fireman in Annandale. I thought that was the greatest thing, since I got to play on the fire trucks sometimes. When I wasn't doing that, my friends and I would play fireman on our bikes. I dreamed of someday being a fireman myself.

My family and I would go to the Christmas party every year at the old firehouse on the corner of West Street and Maple Street. Santa would always make an appearance and all the kids would go home with a small gift and candy.

On days when the fire whistle blew, I would always run out of the house and stand along West Street to watch my dad and the other firemen go by on the truck.

My dream came true when I turned 21 years old and became a fireman. This great experience lasted almost four years in Annandale and another 33 years in Washington Township, NJ, about 10 miles away where my wife and I moved.

Jim Bird lived on West Street in Annandale from 1948 until 1972, when he and his wife, Sue, bought a house in Washington Township. They stayed there until Jim retired in 2006 after 41 years with the Jersey Central Power and Light Company. After trying Florida for three years, Jim and Sue moved to Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, about 20 miles south of Myrtle Beach. They are a couple miles from the ocean and like it there very much.

Our family moved into Annandale in the spring of 1959. There were five of us, my husband and myself and three children ages six, four and almost two. We settled into Howard Lance's duplex on East Street, also known locally as Back Street. It was a small, three-bedroom house next to Farrington's Lumber Yard. My husband had a new job as a pilot for United Airlines, so he was away a lot and the job of finding our way in a new location fell to me.

There was so much to do. I was not feeling well and I was starting to faint from time to time. I was getting scared. We didn't know a soul in this little town, had no friends or relatives nearby, and I really needed help with the three children. Not knowing what else to do, I got on the phone and talked with the operator.

Those were the days when you picked up the phone and an operator said, "Number, please." I did not have a number to tell her, so I told the operator my sad tale and asked her what I should do. I gave her my address, and she immediately told me that help was on the way. She knew the town, and had friends there, one of whom she called and sent her over to take the children off my hands. I was never so glad to see that guardian angel come through the door.

Not only did she take the children off my hands, she put me in touch with Dr. Pierce, who made the first of many house calls that very evening. It turned out that I was dangerously anemic resulting from pneumonia I'd had the previous winter. Dr. Pierce started me on the path to recovery. I will never forget the kindness of my new neighbors in Annandale, who all stepped up to take care of these strangers in distress. It was the best Welcome Wagon ever.

Margaret (Peg Dyer) Haake lived on East (Back) St. from 1959 to 1961. From 1961 to 1976 she lived on Maple Avenue. Although she now lives south of Clinton, her postal address is still Annandale, which suits her. Other than the addition of an area code, her telephone number has remained unchanged since the 1961 move to Maple Avenue.

There were always lots of fun things to do growing up in Annandale. Farrington's Lumber Yard was a favorite place to play. On summer evenings when the lumber yard was closed, we'd play Kick the Can there. We'd choose the person who would be "it" by using the "One potato, two potato" method. I had a great hiding place and never got found.

Across the street from the lumber yard, we spent many hours playing in those big piles of sand used at the Redimix concrete plant. We would jump off the elevated train track into the sand, and it's a wonder none of us broke a

leg. We even climbed the ladder that let to the top of the tower to take in the great view of the town.

We played "war" as well as "cowboys and Indians" mainly in Headley's woods and in the fields "down the track." First, we'd meet up in town and choose sides. The "bad" guys would get a half-hour head-start, then the "good" guys would hunt them down. We used cap pistols or shouted: "Bang, you're dead!" Of course, the typical response was: "You missed!"

We loved putting pennies on the train tracks and watching as the trains ran over them. Always present was the fear that we would make the trains jump the tracks. They never did.

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.

Delivering newspapers in Annandale had its challenges, especially during winter. When snow covered the roads, I traded my trusty Sears bike for my Flexible Flyer to carry the papers. It took three times as long because I had to pull the sled, but at least the papers got delivered. Well, at least most of the time.

I can still feel the chill one cold winter day as I pulled my overloaded sled to the end of West Street, then out High Bridge Road, past the Creamery, and under the train culvert. It wasn't just the snow that day, either. It was the wind, blowing the snow sideways hard enough to sting any piece of uncovered flesh.

Walking in the middle of the road since there were no cars out, I rounded the corner and started up the hill. About a half mile to go. When the wind picked up, I started walking faster, hoping to get the job done sooner.

And that's exactly what happened. The wind ripped into the bag carrying the papers and tore out the contents. I dove for the papers, but they were already dancing down the hill, stopped only by fences or the occasional telephone pole.

Having no more papers, my route was finished for the day. As I pulled My empty sled felt light as air as I started pulling it home. And then I realized I'd have to call everyone who wouldn't be getting a paper that day, and I'd have to pay for the papers that blew away. Suddenly, the snow seemed deeper and pulling the sled got a lot harder.

Robert (Bob) Young lived on West Street from 1958 to 1963. He is an author of children's books, a writing consultant to schools, and a retired teacher. Robert lives in Lowell, Oregon, a small town near Eugene at the southern end of the Willamette Valley. The town is the same size of Annandale.