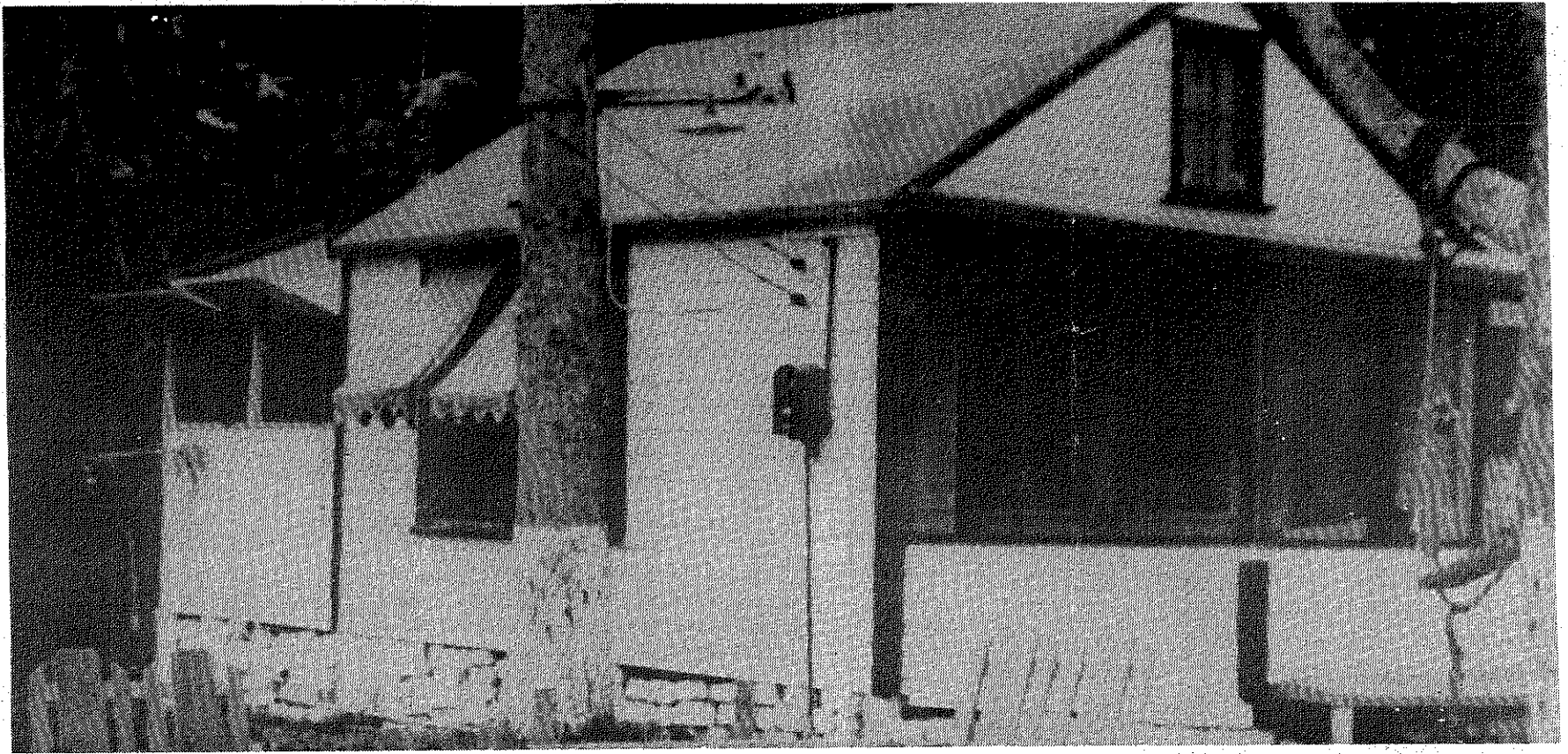


Coves and Beaches... ...Warwick Downs Remembered



WARWICK DOWNS ATHLETIC CLUB (1916): Purchased in 1963 by Helen and Joseph Brehany

By Margie Degnan

In 1936 my father and mother, Joseph and Helen Brehany, purchased the Warwick Athletic Club in an area named *Warwick Downs*. It was to be used as a summer cottage for their family of three daughters—Frances, age 9; Margie, age 7; and Mary, age 1. The former club was on "rental" land and was located across from the main beach on Landon Road. At that time, Landon Road ran parallel to Narragansett Parkway. My father named the cottage "the five of us", but he later changed it to "Remember me", which was prophetic, as its memory still lives.

I was seven years old when my father took me to see the cottage they had purchased. The former club had a screened-in front porch and a large main room that had a small loft above that held state and local flags. The rear-screened step-down porch contained a bar which was being dismantled as we watched. That rear screened-shuttered porch became our kitchen. My father, with the help of a friend, built a room on the right side of the house, so we would have a place to sleep. He installed used trolley car windows that ran all around that sleeping room.

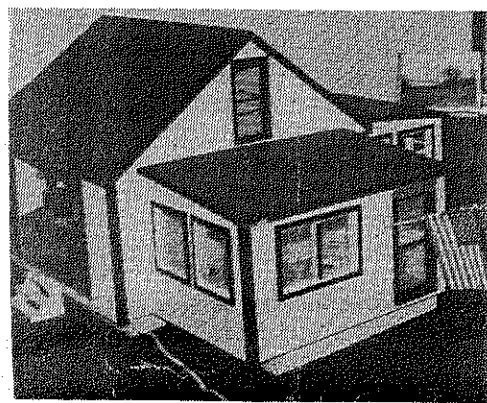
We had a lot of sunshine, but not much privacy. If you tried to open one of those windows, it would immediately fall into the cavity of the framework. Those mis-installed windows gave rise to a steady flow of front porch sleepers on real hot nights. The property had two clay horseshoe courts and lights were strung overhead for night games. There was one privy outback, which must have been inconvenient for club house members.

My younger sister, Mary Palumbo, has never let the memory of our cottage fade. She often phones me from her home in North Carolina to tell me that she dreamed about the summer house at Warwick Downs again and that it looked the same, but that she couldn't find the new owner so she could buy it back.

Well....in reality, Mary knows that the rented land the cottage was on was sold to developers years ago and that the house was demolished. I know why she dreams that dream, and why I sometimes dream it too. I think we're trying to recapture some of our happiest childhood memories of the Downs.



Exterior of Dollhouse



MARGORIE & BIBSE (1930)



Interior of Dollhouse

So that Mary wouldn't have to reach back 1,800 miles, I designed a dollhouse-size replica of our former summer home, had it built, and gave it to her on her 55th birthday. It was a labor of love from one sister to another. That Warwick Downs cottage is now in Charlotte, North Carolina, where my other sister Frances Deschenes also lives.

When our cousins visit North Carolina they all get to see the "cottage," and recall their visits with Aunt Helen and Uncle Joe, that included hot dog roasts and quahog chowder...Rhode Island style! Our cousins, the Grady's, the Crohan's and the Brophy's still share their favorite memories of the Downs with us, 50 years later.

THE BEACH

The cut-curb driveway to the main beach is still there. To the left of that driveway, down the hill, near the swimming area, was Sykes Grocery Store. The store was later owned by Elsie Boothroyd's mother. Part of that side of the parkway is where the Narragansett Village Condos now stand.

Years ago, during the height of the summer season, the beach was a bustle of

activity. The beach was especially crowded on Sundays, as droves of city folk fled to the Downs for relief from the heat. They came by bus and the parking lot of the beach was packed with cars.

The kids from the Downs retreated to Mr. Murray's dock on the left side of the beach to get away from the congestion, but we reclaimed the beach when Monday morning dawned. I can still remember my mother saying she always felt that the temperature was 10 degrees cooler as soon as she set foot on our dew-fed lawn.

In the 1930's and 40's, the beach had many different lifeguards. There was Joe Strumski, Hilda Eberle and Art, to name a few. They taught us to swim and some of us passed their junior lifeguard training. I did, and those lessons helped me save my cousin Bob Crohan's life when he couldn't make it to shore from the raft after high tide had come in, and no lifeguards were on duty.

There was a huge raft at the main beach, and the water was crystal clear from the shoreline to the raft. We loved to dive and do cannon ball jumps from the raft. We also played "king of the mountain" there. We had no fear of the water. We used to row out

to the lighthouse, and when the huge tank ships came by we would row to the channel posts and hold on to them as the tanker's wake rocked our rowboat to and fro. We had on our cork life preservers and thought they kept us from harm. We didn't realize until we were much older that the life preservers were left over from World War One, and if we ever had to rely on them, we would have sunk for sure, as they weighed a ton when they got wet.

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

We enjoyed our summer friends, some of whom lived year round at the Downs. I palled around with Margaret Murray, who was a tomboy just like me. We also played with Elsie Boothroyd and Bob "Dinky" Spinney...Boy, could he tap dance! There was also red-headed Franklin Murphy, Happy and Pop Grant, Herbie Brooks, Charlie and Richie Harrigan, Irene Pedleton, the McKennas and the Gormleys, Bobby and Gladys Restivo, Ray, Pop, Earl, Gloria, Jackie and Glenda Butler and the Crabtrees. Some of the older group were the Potter Boys, Tom and Bill Pomfrey, Tom Matthews, the Sullivans, Elsie Anderson from the Swedish Village and Sis Gallagher from the Parkway, the McInnis Brothers, the Langs and Barbara and Celia Withington, Al Rondina and we even had "San Carlo" from Cuba for a season.

THE ANNUAL CRESCENT PARK SWIM

The above swim was the highlight of the summer season. Once a year the older boys and girls decided what day they would swim across the bay to Crescent Park. The swimmers would depart from the dock side of the beach and a small flotilla of rowboats would stay with the swimmers all the way to the Crescent Park shoreline. What stories the swimmers would tell when they returned. We youngsters hung on to all their tales of near fatal cramps....etc.; when all they really had to do was climb into the nearest row boat for relief. It all seemed so heroic to be part of the Crescent Park annual swim.

They say "you can never go home again", but you can. My Warwick Downs home is in Charlotte, North Carolina and it has been well remembered! It was the best gift our father ever gave us. Thanks for the memories, Dad.