

Growing Up Chatham: Lightning Bugs and Lemonade

Submitted by Luke Bruss, Communications Committee Member

Chatham Village was a wonderful place to spend summer vacation. It meant long days of playing in the park with friends; it meant baseball games with Dad; it meant 3 months of freedom to stay out “until the street lights came on” and catching lightning bugs in the front yard afterwards.

As I mentioned in the March edition of the Chatham Village Times, during the warmer months my friends and I spent a lot of time in the woods, on the ball field, and in the hockey court which is now the pickleball and basketball area. We were always outside, and with around 5 dozen children in the neighborhood at the time, there was always a game of hide and seek, street hockey or something else going on.

Because I wasn't able to run as well as my friends, one of my favorite things to do was to ride my Big Wheel. If I had a cast, which was quite often, I'd fashion a sling system with the shoestring from my unused shoe. My casted leg would hang in it, swaying back and forth while I pedaled with my right leg as I navigated the sweeping curves of the sidewalks in the New Village courtyard. If I didn't have a cast, I liked to take my Big Wheel over into lower courtyard of the Old Village. A lot of my friends lived over there, and the long straightaways and sharp turns always made for exciting races. That green Incredible Hulk Big Wheel, and when I got older, my bicycle, were the great equalizer. It made me feel just like all the other kids. It was freedom of mobility and it was everything to me.

Into junior high and beyond, we would play a lot of sports, and even if I wasn't supposed to, I was running around playing hockey, whiffle ball, basketball, and football with my leg wrapped up in fiberglass. We also played rundown between the two towering trees in the field between the park and Pennridge Road. Rundown, for those not in the know, is a game that had two fielders, each with a baseball glove, and baserunners trying to get from tree to tree without getting tagged as the fielders threw a ball back and forth. If you got tagged, you were out. The last one left running the bases was the winner. But usually, before that happened, the game would be brought to a screeching halt when

we would hear the distinct jingling bells of the ice cream man. Eating that ice cream (my favorite was always the red, white and blue Jumbo Jet Star) while sitting in the shade provided by the canopy of that great tree, adjacent to the bench above the tennis courts, is honestly one of my fondest memories of my life.

Looking back at those times, I wonder if the dull ache that usually radiates through my lower body could've been assuaged had I not been as active and independently minded as a kid. I don't regret any of it though, as it has made me into the bold, independent man I am today; and besides, it was a lot easier to block a slap shot with a cast on my leg than to block one with a bare shin!

My favorite memory, without a doubt, is also my most personal. My late sister Stacey and I would munch on popcorn and play Monopoly deep into the Summer night. It was always competitive, which is why games between the two of us would always take so long, but it was always fun. Sitting at the dining room table with the rest of the lights dimmed a bit and a slight breeze blowing in through the opened doors and windows without worry, was an amazing time.

Like I've said many, many times, and will always say: Chatham Village is home. It's safety. It's community in its most pure form. We are a large, extended family here. The past few years have been rough for me, to say the least, both professionally and personally. But all I have to do to reset and relax is stroll down to that wooden park bench, under that majestic tree, and breathe in the smell of freshly-cut grass and the budding gardens beyond the recreation courts. Sometimes I'll bring a book; sometimes I'll bring my sketch pad; sometimes I'll just sit down and meditate on how lucky I am to have grown up in such a wonderful neighborhood.

I didn't get a chance to begin to touch on the Fourth of July celebrations that were the highlight of a Chatham Village Summer yet, so next month I'll add that to a special piece I'll be writing about: the annual Festival of Flags display that I put on my porch every July. **Stay tuned!**

