

SIDE WALKS SANDI SERKESS "WALK THIS WAY, PLEASE"

I was born in 1952 on Lanark Road, in Brookline. Number 32, I have been told. We lived there until I was two. My babysitter was a teenager who lived downstairs, her name was Shirley, and supposedly I cried for years after we moved because I missed her. In fact, I have been told, I missed her so much that she came to visit us soon after we moved. That ended the torch bearing, as I did not remember her when she came. We ran into her a few years after in the White Mountains in New Hampshire, and I was as nonchalant as a person could be. But I was inconsolable on moving day, 1954. Yes I was. I remember it well.

I screamed and cried as the moving men put the last of the boxes in the van, and with only seconds remaining, I grabbed the stethoscope from my doctor's kit and put it around my neck. I clasped the banister of the hall stairway and would not let go –Uh! Uh! Then my father put me under his arm, horizontally like a duffle bag, and off I went to the new house on Rutledge Street in West Roxbury – like it or not!! And I decidedly did not like it. But what could I do? I was too young even to talk, never mind protest, or protest intelligently at that!

But we moved, I adjusted, grew to like it, yes, even love it – but to this day I often wonder what happened to the stethoscope: it never made it off the van. The house my parents bought for \$12,000.00 has just been built and we were the first owners. It was very small, but every few years they added a few rooms until we were all comfortable. My first recollection of Center Street was the library— an institution about which I can't say enough. My life began and ended with books even as a child. But the trip to Center Street, which I first made by myself in 1957, on my fifth birthday, was like a magic carpet ride. I surveyed the entire world of reality as my feet flew down the street and I remember it all today as if it were yesterday.

I did not dress casually, most certainly not. I wore a dress or skirt, white socks, my Mary Janes (patent leather shoes); I combed my hair, I carried a purse. Was I going to Sack's Fifth Avenue? Indeed, I was!

I left my driveway, turned right, and in about ten seconds I was on Bellevue Street. I walked the first block to March Avenue; my best friend, Eve, lived at number 28, and Mrs. Kendall, the cat lady, lived at 30. She owned a lot of cats. Mrs. Ursula Tirrell, my kindergarten teacher, lived at 26. I often took that right to visit Eve, but if I did not, I kept going straight until I saw the apartment house at the corner of March Avenue and Bellevue. My grandmother lived there and so did my second grade teacher, Miss Catherine (with a "C") Lenihan. My grandmother's window was the second on the back wall, and rather than ring her doorbell, I would go to the window in back and yell, "Grammy?" She was almost always home, boiling hotdogs, and playing four way scrabble by herself. She would let me in and I hunted for candy and looked through the thousands of photographs she kept in a hope chest in her bedroom. She had been married to my grandfather for almost fifty years and they had lived on Martin Street, number ten. He had courted her when she was a lovely eighteen, and she had the love letters to prove it. Oh! How I loved to read them. And see the photographs of her with her lovely blond hair flowing past her waist. She was quite the catch!

Across the street from the apartment house on Bellevue Street was Billings field. The Billings Family was quite prominent in West Roxbury in the 1800's and will have their own article soon. There we played netless tennis almost every day; there was no playground in those days. We passed the stairs cautiously during the day, and even more so at night. There were always bored teens hanging there in groups.

Next to Billings Field was the Y, where I went swimming and attended camps over the summer. When I turned eight, Eve, my best friend and I, had to take a bus to catch the bus to Hale Reservation where the camps were. Bus rides were five cents then, each way, including transfers to Forest Hills to go downtown. At the corner was the service station as it is now, but where the pizza place is was a drug store with a soda fountain, comic books, candy and cigarettes. The man who owned it had a daughter named Judy and I would go in there to talk to her. She was twelve when I was five and that scared my parents who cautioned me against her. I heeded their warning. (That store later became the CentreVue Restaurant.)

To the left was a cleaners owned by Asian Americans and then there was the Veterinary Hospital. It was owned by Dr.

Mickey Martus. His daughter, Hildy, was a friend of mine. They lived above it and I would visit her several times a week. They belonged, as we did, to the temple on Corey Street and my mother played mah jong with her mother (among others) every Tuesday.

Further down the street on the other side was the Capital, a supermarket, one of three within only a few feet of each other. That is where Walgreen's is now. On the corner of Mt. Vernon and Center was the Congregational Church. That burned down in the seventies, was never rebuilt, and the congregation joined with the Baptists on Stratford Street. The lot remained empty for many years until the library built its annex.

Then there was the library. There is so much to say there I must save it for another article.

Next to that was Elm Farms, where Roche Brothers used to be, and next to the fire house, where CVS is now, was FINASTS, yet another supermarket. The neighborhood in those years was all kids and supported the three supermarkets easily. But in another decade the FINASTS would yield to several dress shops, including the Lemon Drop and Mr. G's, before it became CVS. I worked at both the Lemon Drop and Mr. G's and hated both. Fashion was not my thing.

Next to that was Hills, a kind of Woolworth's, and next to that was a very small House Of Leslie. At the corner was the First National Bank. Across the street, where People's bank is now, was yet another bank (Merchant's??) where I had my first bank account and drove the tellers crazy taking out 25 or 50 cents at a time. To this day I believe they took the money from their wallets!

If you took a right, you were at the small ball Bowling Alley and Joyce's Driving School, where I learned to drive and where the Irish Social Club is now. The Bowling Alley had a great pop corn machine.

Back on the other side, next to the First National Bank, on the other corner, was a drugstore. East's. I think. It had a soda fountain with swivel seats and lots of goodies. People could pay bills there. Next to that was Woolworth's, in competition with Hills. These two stores were where Value Village used to be. Then you crossed the street and came to Hanley's Bakery where we devoured the half moons (a cookie with white frosting on one side and chocolate frosting on the other) as often as our allowances permitted. Next to that was where the best potato chips in the world were sold. You got a bag of chips from a container, so they were fresh. There was the five-cent size and the ten-cent size. They were as greasy as anyone could want. We had to wash our hands several times a bag. Across the street on one corner was the old police station, on the corner of Hastings Street, and on the other corner was Cumberland Farms, open at night, long after Elm Farms had closed.

Further down, on the same side, was Decelle's, as always, and next to that was where I took Tap and Ballet lessons. It was a dance studio. I only approximated dancing and the pictures we still have of me in my leotards is distressing, to say the least. I left of my own accord when my parents were asked to spend fifty dollars on a tutu for my December recital. I cringed at the thought of both the recital and the tutu and fled, my parents not far behind. Ballet wasn't my thing either, I guess.

The Unitarian church was there then as it is now, and that was as far as I was allowed to walk—and as far as my memory can carry me.

Anyway, I ran out of space....

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