

The Train Trip

by Martha Burnham

We looked forward to going to West Falmouth for weeks before school closed. The train trip was part of the annual adventure. At last we were off. No matter what the weather we had to have hats and coats. The big trunk was packed in the front hall where the driver of the railway express truck could pick it up. After that went, we locked up and walked to the station. Our local train pulled in to the South Station about a half hour before we could get onto the Cape train, so we waited in the big South Station waiting-room until it was ready.

When the announcement came that the Cape train was made up, we walked to the gate with our suitcases, the cat basket, and usually a couple of dolls and the red tin doll's trunk.

The train smelled of fresh varnish and coal gas, and the seats had high backs and were covered with dark red plush; I ran my finger over the bristly ends of the plush pile. A little puff of gray dust came out leaving a smudge on the end of my finger. After a while the train started, swinging out and over the bridge that crossed the South Bay. Presently the door opened and a boy with a sharp nasal voice came through, wearing a white coat and carrying a vendor's tray, hung on a strap around his neck.

"Magazeets, magazeets," he called. "The very latest copies of Life and Judge, fifteen cents a copy." The chant continued the length of the car with occasional interruptions for sales. Papa bought a copy of Judge; Lois and Eleanor began a game of hangman. Pretty soon the boy was back again,

this time with a tray of refreshments. "Peter's chocolate almond bars, fifteen cents a package," he announced. He also had sandwiches and ice cream bars, but we settled for the chocolate, which could be divided around. At Campello train station in Brockton the train stopped, and he got off.

The first part of the trip was not scenic, and we busied ourselves with games. Stations whisked by one after another. The real fun began at Buzzards Bay, where the train divided and a new engine was attached. Also we could begin to smell salt air, and went back to the platform for a sniff while we waited for the drawbridge to close and let us over [the Cape Cod canal]. The train stood waiting with its brakes wheezing as if weary of the pull from Boston. The rest of the trip we were mostly looking out the window, watching for the familiar landmarks, observing the people who had come to meet the train and so forth. Finally there was the happy moment when we could look across the fields and see the cottage, tiny on its point beyond the inner harbor. The train whistled for a crossing, and we hoped the people at the cottage heard it.

At the station in West Falmouth we got off, checked to make sure our trunk had come with us and arranged for it to be sent around by road. We weighed ourselves on the freight scales. An annual ritual because we all gained pounds during the summer. We watched the train pull out and stepped briefly into the station where the slow ticking clock conversed with the clicking of the station telegraph. Then out and down to the waterfront at



Courtesy of Falmouth Historical Society.



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the town wharf with our hand luggage. We waved, and a tiny figure across the harbor waved back, and shouted through the megaphone that she was coming right across as soon as she fetched the oars.

We sat down on our bags and waited, sniffing the air with delight, listening to the terns, watching the barn swallows darting in and out of Mr. Kingman's boathouse. At last the big rowboat pulled up alongside and we went down into it for the row across to our cottage. It was the best day of the whole year.

I don't think even Christmas could compete with the joy of rediscovery. Each year, at first the cottage seemed to have shrunk a little, then I would realize that I was taller. I had to run around looking into every room to be sure it was just as I remembered it. Then there was the tour of the point. I started at the narrow part of the neck where the road crossed and went all around the edge. The cat had been let gratefully out of the basket and was happily hunting mice. I started down the west beach past the big boulder, pink granite with mica patches in it, that nestled against the bank, walked along the rocks where we built our beach picnic fires, touched all the rocks on which we played house, and squinted my eyes out toward the bay where the sunlight sparked on the water and there were sails out beyond the breakwater.

I rounded the end of the point where the bayberry and rugosa roses grew on the bank and the Rosemary growing in the water just had its head above the surface.

At the end of the point I turned and came back along the east beach, walking again on the rocks as the beach grass grew too close here for comfortable walking. Fiddler crabs scurried about among the roots of this grass. When I came to the wharf I ducked under the rail and crossed over it and the sandy area where we swam. Here I did walk

through the beach grass as there were no rocks, and the tide was coming in so I could not walk around it. There was another patch of sandy beach just before coming to the lane again, a section big enough for building sand castles. It was also a place where we dug clams when the tide was low. So back to the road. I returned to the front of the cottage and sat down on the steps where I could look across the island causeway to see the misty shape of the Sippawisset Harbor House in the distance. [Hotel Sippawisset was built in 1900, became the Cape Codder Hotel in the 30s, closed in the 80s.]

There were honeysuckle vines growing up the trellis by the steps. Pink and purple petunias brightened the garden that bordered the grass by the porch, and the breeze whispered in the blue spruces that stood along by the west porch and by the east bank near the wharf. I could hear the truck coming down the lane with the trunk and I was completely at peace with the world.