



### Late 1944 A Half Built House

Late 1944

"Float, Hazel, float." Bobbie and I were encouraging our younger sister as we swam across Lake Wangumbaug. Before this summer had ended, we had decided to swim across the lake. We were real life adventure kids always looking for a new challenge. Well, that was Bobbie, anyway. We were excellent swimmers while Hazel was very good but lacked stamina. As who wouldn't at age 11? Anyway, we plunged into the water from our raft and off we swam. Hazel got tired very soon and, so, we would say, "Float, float!" She would dog paddle and then swim and then float and we made it.

We crawled up on the sand, thoroughly exhausted and just lay there huffing and puffing. We stayed there so long trying to catch our breath that the neighbors came out to see if we were alive or dead. Imagine three scrawny, sopping wet mermaids lying full out on your little patch of beach. They gave us cold drinks and drove us back to our side of the lake. And then we walked the several miles home.

A little time-out here. A city friend asked me to explain about outdoor stations or backhouses. The reason we all had them is that we all lived on well water and even though Dad dug ours much deeper than it had started, we never abused it in the summertime. So, all those bodily functions that were necessary to our health, safety and well-being were performed outside until it was too cold. And who decided that? I can tell you it wasn't a question up for grabs. Dad decided!

And so, off to my Sophomore year at MHS. We had added a couple of recent North Street School graduates and we made up stories and games as we walked the three miles to and from the bus each day.

One day in the early Fall, we discovered on the side of Route 44, hidden deeply in the bushes, a half/built house. It must have been started in the summer and then abandoned. This was too good to ignore. We all crept up to the house, single file, Indian style, with sticks in our hands to protect us against the unknown. We discovered some hair on the windowsill. Even as I write this now, my tummy goes a little crazy. We were sure a murder must have taken place. We all scurried away.

But day after day, that house was like a magnet. We made up all sorts of scenarios. And we saw new hair deposited there, more than once. We were too timid to go around the back of the house for fear we'd find a body. Even Bobbie, the intrepid, never did a complete tour, though he did investigate either side. But, as all kids do, we talked about this so much that word got around to parents and to the State Police.

The incident that caused the next effect was that we left some hair, probably from a horse, on the windowsill and the next time we looked it was gone! Now, we were really scared to death.

Bobbie and I never told, but someone must have because that very night, while still light outside, Officer Jeanne Heckler from the Connecticut State Troopers dropped by.

My mother was bewildered and Hazel knew none of it. Nor did Teddy: we thought that they were too young to know about such things. Murder was not for little kids!

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## Birthplace of Nathan Hale

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What amazed us was a woman trooper. Wow! There weren't any women in any of our cops and robbers stories! There weren't even any robber women.

The State Trooper questioned us very carefully while Mother stood there wondering what mischief her children had been up to. We were so happy to have Officer Heckler's undivided attention that, like all kids, we blurted out the whole story "and without embellishment". I'm happy to say. In our minds every word we said was true!

Heckler then said that she would do a follow up, and she did. Some barber had been leaving his hair discards along Route 44 rather than paying to have them hauled away with his trash! And the wind did the rest. As for our hair, it, too, was tossed by the winds of fate!

Respectfully submitted, Jean Thibault Castagno

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