

My (1916-1921) Summer Street

My name is Josephine (Jo) Snare Dwyer. Like my father, Austin, and my brother, Richard, I was born on beautiful Summer Street in the house to which the Hampden Historical Society has referred to as the Captain James Snare house. My seafaring grandfather had been long deceased; and Nanny Snare died on my second birthday, April 21, 1918.

My mother, the former Madge E. Weick was born and brought up in Springfield, Maine. She was a teacher in the McKinley School before her marriage to my father.

Four-year-old Richard and I were surely blessed in the playmates and friends of all ages who shared "my five years" of Summer Street.

I can still see Bob and Ella Edgecomb walking along the sidewalk in front of our side lawn—perhaps coming up from their home very near the Penobscot shore on an errand for their mother at "the Corner", at the top of our hill where our street met the Main Road.

Maverick Whitney's home was the beautiful "The Ledges," with its spectacular river view. With Maverick I literally started my formal education, as we walked together into the "Downstairs" room of the McKinley School

Maverick would have crossed the short down-hill street—was it called Ferry Street—where Elmer, Garry and Eva Graves, all close to my age, lived near the shore.

Approaching our home, but on the other side of Summer Street, were very neighborly and "fun" playmates of ours, the "King kids." Mrs. King made a loving home for Joe, Ivan and Merrill (Bubby) Jewett. Near Mrs. King's, but I can't place their residences, were Winfield Simmons, maybe a little younger than I, whom I seem to remember in navy blue pants (short) and a white shirt; and Muriel Mutty, who appears almost "ethereally" to me, with a round happy face and beatific smile.

Carroll Ellis, a tall blond boy about my brother's age, lived in the same neighborhood, I believe.

Directly across from our home (as we move along toward the Corner) in her charming old brick cottage and usually sitting by her living room window, was "Aunt Mandy" Robinson. Aunt Mandy in her slow, deep voice made us feel wanted at any time we children dropped in. A pretty little Italian lady was Aunt Mandy's housekeeper-caretaker. Nelly Morocco was quite often our guest. Her kindness was especially evidenced in a beautiful black velvet coat and hat she made for my doll.

Continuing toward the hill and down the little lane—does it still exist, I wonder—beside our house, were Percy and Molly Aiken and their baby John. John was, I believe, the first baby I ever really noticed. I dearly loved the gentle, young and sparkling Molly. I remember walking home up the lane with Richard, two of Molly's Thanksgiving oranges bulging at my knit-winter-knickered knees.

On a left branch from Molly's lane was the Stubbs family, with Florence between my age and my brother's, and older siblings, the lane being their route to Summer Street, the Corner, and school.

Back on Summer Street itself and approaching the hill, on our side of the street, a few years older but sisterly to us and much loved by our parents also, were Sarah Robinson and Vida ("Vidy") Nickerson.

Across from Vidy, with kids ranging in age from older than Richard to younger than I, was the wonderful Dexter family. Eleanor, Marian, Willis and Nelson were my very intimate playmates, along with Vivian Farnham, who lived in the house above theirs. Mildred Dexter was in Richard's grade and graduated with him from Hampden Academy in 1929.

Back on our side of the street, opposite the Dexters, were Viola Nealley, about Richard's age, and two older siblings. I remember Viola playing "sailing" in the big old hammock in our summer house, and her suggestion, "Let's pretend this isn't the ocean—or anyway let's pretend it isn't wet!" Viola's father rowed the ferry across the Penobscot. (I never thought before. A psychic moment, perhaps?)

At the top of our street at the Corner were the Post Office, Mr. Bicknell's barbershop, the blacksmith's shop (with its whinnies, its clumping hooves, metallic clanging and flying sparks), and a grocery store—Mr. Robinson's during those years, I think.

I've always known well our postmaster's three oldest children, Bill, Margaret, and Carl Lewis. I think that they sometimes lived in a cottage below our house and I know that later they lived in the Post Office block.

I doubt if it had happened before at the McKinley School and I'm sure that it has never happened since; but enrolled in our small first grade were three grandchildren of sea captains; Captain Whitney's granddaughter Maverick, Captain Rawley's grandson Reginald Clark, and Captain Snare's granddaughter, this scribe.

When I was five our family moved up onto the Main Road into the house which at that time was the second on the Bangor side from the Smith home, During the developing tourist era the ladies of the Smith family, longtime close friends of my mother, opened the charms of their home to the traveling public under the sign "The Kinsley."

How very often for years I'd hear my mother remark, "I'm going up to the Kinsley for a little while"

We kids still had our old friends, of course, but within months beside and opposite our new home were three brother and sister sets; Alvah and Sylvia Emery beside us; Kenneth and Eva Burton across the street; and beside them Russell and Deana Coot, whose mother kept house for Dr. Johnson. Reggie Clark was three houses south. (Incidentally, Reggie, I watched from my mother's kitchen window when that steamroller's brakes let go and it smashed into the tree at the foot of the hill!)

So Richard and I quickly adjusted to our changed location. The family was happy and contented.

But there was one sentimental allegiance stronger than ours; for some weeks my father had to drive down to the “other house” to bring back the Old Gray Cat, who persisted in crossing the fields and trudging back down to his old home. After all, he had been Nanny Snare’s; and he was a Summer Street cat.

There are memories of an eighty-five-year-old’s first five years. I have stressed my contacts with playmates; but I have the warmest recollections also of their parents and our many neighbors whose friendship and kindnesses helped us usher me into a happy and trusting life marked by joy and optimism.

For any misnaming, misdating, mislocating, and misspelling I apologize!

Hampden, Maine