

# Growing Up in Padanaram

By Verie Lima

Prior to moving to Padanaram, I started school at age 5 at the Smith Neck School. It was a two-room schoolhouse with grades 1 through 4 in one room and grades 5 through 8 in the other. We had only four kids in my first grade. One of my classmates, Marcia Cornell, would eventually graduate together with me from high school. I was only in this school for about four months until we moved, so I don't remember much during this period. However, I do recall an exercise where the teacher gave us crayons, construction paper, scissors and glue and told us to make a house. I slapped several sheets of construction paper together with glue, drew some windows and doors, and presented it to the teacher long before any of my classmates were finished. The teacher praised my work, saying that I showed some "ingenuity" but using a word that I would understand. Then I went back to my seat and looked over at my classmates. They were meticulously working with the construction paper to create what looked like a house, cutting out windows and doors, and using their crayons to add color as appropriate. It was then that I realized that I might have missed the purpose of the exercise.



**The Two Room School House on Smith Neck Road**

In 1942, we moved to homes on Bakersville and Rock O' Dundee Road. Both were in the Padanaram school district. We were transported to school by bus. One day the bus broke down while returning us to our homes. The incident occurred just after we crossed the Padanaram Bridge. The driver walked back to the village to make a call for another bus to finish the trek to our homes. But most of the kids began walking home. That is what my sisters and I did. Can you imagine that happening today?

In 1944, we established residence on Elm Street in Padanaram. It was and still is a quaint little village that Shirley and I find very attractive. It is located on the Apponagansett Bay, with the sailboats and yachts providing an attractive backdrop for the village. Unlike today's "Wal-Mart world", everything was available locally then. There were at least two grocery stores, a drug store, post office, fish market, hardware store, liquor store, barbershop, three gas stations, two churches, a yacht club, a library and a restaurant. I must not forget Joe the Barber, who gave me my first haircut at 5 years old for 25 cents.

Fifty years later, I would visit the location of one of those grocery stores which had long since been closed or converted into a souvenir shop. The proprietor identified herself as the former wife of the guy, Bill Woodhouse, who ran the store when I was a child. I pointed out to her where the candy counter was located when I was a child and her husband ran the store, and that I would come into the store, without any money, just to look at the candy! At least, that's my story. In reality, I was probably hoping they would give me some.

We occupied the second and third floor of the partially finished house. From the outside appearance, the place was an eyesore, located next to a Catholic Church and homes of wealthy residents surrounding us. The house, which eventually would be upgraded and become a landmark in the village, was then in need of a paint job, and the garage was a mess with broken windows. But hey, it was my first introduction to indoor plumbing. At last, there would no longer be the need to shop at "Bed, Outhouse and Beyond".



**My Home in Padanaram on Elm Street as Viewed 60 Years Later**

Not long after moving to Padanaram, we had one of the worst storms to hit the eastern seaboard. It started in the early evening of 15 September 1944, and by the time darkness set in, a full-blown hurricane was in progress. Sometime during the evening, a huge elm tree, about fifty yards up the street from us, fell on the roof of Brown's Motors, an auto specialty shop that repaired and serviced cars, and was the dealer for Kaiser, Frazer and Henry J cars during the war years. My brother would work there as a mechanic for several years after the facility was restored and he was discharged from the Army. Fortunately, the event occurred in the evening while the facility was vacant. If that tree had been the elm tree directly across the street from us, we would have been history. But the most vivid memory of the storm involves my father, who at the time was working at the Gosnold Mill in New Bedford on the night shift. At 10 PM, with the storm at its peak, he walked home, a distance of at least three miles, through the howling winds and drenching downpour, on streets containing uprooted trees and downed power lines.

One nice feature of living on Elm Street in Padanaram was the fact that on Memorial Day, the Parade went directly passed our house. It started at the Padanaram Bridge where a wreath was thrown into the Narragansett Bay from the bridge in honor of the Military

personnel who lost their life in prior wars. Then they headed for the Village in Padanaram and headed up Elm Street until they reached the cemetery located next to Padanaram School and where my parents were eventually interred. I could stand next to the window or sit on the side porch and watch the parade as it passed by.

Padanaram also featured a small library located two blocks up from our house where Prospect Street intersected with Elm. It was named the **Southworth Library** and was opened in 1889. It consisted of two rooms and two employees, one handling the circulation desk and the other a librarian. It's where I first developed an interest in reading, as I am now quite a United States history buff, even though I forget most of what I have read. One of the things you could do is receive credit for reading a book by letting the librarian, Mrs. Martin, drill you with questions to make sure that you had actually read it. If you passed the test, you got a certificate. I've since forgotten what you could do with it.

During the winter, when there was a significant snowfall, school would be canceled, and police would close the hill on Bridge Street to traffic and allow the kids to use it for sledding. Whenever these weather conditions occurred, we would gather by the radio and wait for the announcement as to whether school would be closed. On one occasion, during a marginal snow-storm, the school superintendent decided to leave the schools open based on the roads being passable for the school buses. But some kid (or grownup) called into the radio station to say that schools in Dartmouth would be closed. When the superintendent got word of this, he immediately tried to rescind the announcement. He may have succeeded, but once we heard the words, "**no school in Dartmouth**", we were long gone and headed for Bridge Street.

During recess or lunch break we would often play a version of Tag called, "**Last one up the fence is it**". When someone would shout that phrase, we would all run from near the school to the fence that separated the schoolyard and the cemetery. The last one to arrive would be **it**. Then it was his job to tag as many as he could to help him until there was only one kid left, who then become **it**. Today, no kid would play a game like this without an **APP**. When we first began playing this version of tag in the second grade, I was small but the second fastest kid in the group that played it. Only Morris Anthony was faster. But then in the third grade, when Bruce MacLean and Douglas Hawes moved to Padanaram, I suddenly became the fourth fastest.

Several times a week, a bunch of kids varying from my age to five or six years older than me would show up at Padanaram School in the evenings during the summer months to play baseball. Little leagues had only recently begun to be organized but had not yet made their way to Dartmouth. Someone would bring a bat; the ball was often one that no longer had a cover and was wrapped with tape to keep the strings from unraveling. We would pick sides and play until dark. The field had a short left-field fence which we likened to the short left-field fence at Fenway Park, the home of the Red Sox. Beyond the fence was the cemetery that my mother was buried in. A ground ball had an excellent chance of hitting a rock before a fielder could get his hands on it. But we didn't know what a good field was like, so it didn't bother us.

The celebration of Halloween was somewhat different than it is today. In addition to the little kids dressed in costumes and going house to house looking for treats, teenagers

participated by playing pranks on their neighbors. Most of the stunts were harmless, as the kids resorted to simple and non-destructive things like annoying the residents by using a plastic straw to shoot peas at their windows. The most popular “trick” was writing on store fronts with a bar of soap. The police never made an issue of these tactics since the store owners would have their property back to normal the next morning with a little bit of elbow grease. The bottom line from the authorities was to have fun without doing any property damage.

Our house in Padanaram was unique in that the front butted up to the sidewalk, making it vulnerable to the soaping of windows. I would be on the third floor with the window open waiting for someone to come by and apply this type of mischief. When they did, I would douse them with a bucket of water, then put my head inside the window before the shower reached the ground floor so that they would wonder where the water had come from. I did this for at least three Halloweens. It got to the point that some kids would apply soap to the window, then hastily clear out of the area in attempt to escape the oncoming bath.

Padanaram had a fire department in the village, staffed primarily by volunteer fireman. They were very responsive since most of the men worked in the village only about 100 yards away. Starting in about 1951, they began showing movies every Friday night for 25 cents. It started out as a local thing with the kids from South Dartmouth attending, but it eventually got a life of its own such that boys and girls from all over the town attended. The movies were pretty awful by today’s standards (for example, *Son of Monte Christo*), but it became the place to go on Friday night, except during basketball season.

The Padanaram Bridge Played an important role in connecting the two sides of Dartmouth that are separated by the Aponagansett Bay. Without it you would have to drive a few miles to Russell’s Mills Road where the bay ends. It also served as an excellent place for fishing for both kids and grownups. I can still recall catching a balloon fish, where if you tickled its stomach, they would inflate, perhaps as a defense mechanism. They had no food value, and all you could do is throw them back in. When a large boat (or even a small boat with a high mast) needed to enter the bay, local volunteers would rush to the bridge to manually rotate the bridge to provide passage for these vessels. The process has since been automated.



## **Padanaram Bridge**

Another contributing factor to the beauty of Padanaram was the Yacht Club that was located about 100 yards south of the main intersection (Bridge and Elm Streets) of the village. When my wife (from Indiana) first visited Padanaram, she was immediately enamored by the boats of all types moored in the bay.



## **Apponagansett Bay**

If you cross the Padanaram Bridge and drive a couple of miles down Gulf Hill Road, you will eventually reach the old Gulf Hill Dairy where the iconic building that housed the ice cream parlor once stood. The building still exists but has been moved into a park closer to the bay. For ice cream this was the place to go. Just up the hill was where the Dairy barn was located. Every morning the trucks would line up to be loaded for their deliveries. The trucks were not refrigerated, making it necessary to load them with ice during the summer months. I worked one summer on a milk truck as a helper. Our routes were located in Freetown and Lakeville, an indication of the large territory that the dairy's business covered.



**Gulf Hill Ice Cream Parlor**

While at Padanaram School, we were still at war. Cars (at least on the east coast) had the top half of their lights painted black so that they could not be easily be seen by potential enemy aircraft at night. The blackout was also to prevent the illumination of American ships on the Atlantic coast, making them easy targets for German submarines. At school, we regularly had air raid drills that involved us lying on the ground on our stomachs with our face turned sideways. The older kids told us that we turned our heads that way so that if a bomb did explode near us, our guts could come flying out. Then, while in the last month of the fourth grade, the teacher (Miss Messier) told us that Germany had surrendered. I probably didn't grasp the full significance of her announcement, but I knew my brother, who had been serving in the European front, was out of harm's way and would be coming home.



**THE THIRD GRADE CLASS** of Dartmouth's Padanaram School in 1943 included the following students, led by teacher, Eileen Doyle Atwood. Mrs. Atwood only recently retired from teaching at the Cushman School. Students are: (photo and names courtesy Gardner White) row one: (L to R) Judith Hellway, Peggy Green, Besty Burkhardt, Sally Howland, Patricia Ponte, Barbara Mattson, Joan Raymond, Sandra Harrop, Mary Garganta and Susan Brownell. Second row (L to R) Philip

Brownell, Philip —, Veriato Lima, Russell Crapo, Billy Horan, John Leblanc, Bruce McLean, Gardner White, Thonry Klaren, Bob Turner, Morris Anthony, Douglas Hawes. The Chronicle thanks Mr. White for his generous contribution by lending this photo for our readers' enjoyment. All old photos and postcards loaned to The Chronicle will be returned without damage and promptly. Please consider giving us some of your treasured old photos to be published in The Chronicle.

### **My Third Grade Class**

In 1946, I got my first job as a paperboy. My friend, Maurice, a classmate, delivered papers at our house, and when he heard of an opening, he gave them my name. The route had about 60 customers and was located somewhat in the country, down Rockland Street to Russell



Mills Road, then to Milton Street, then to Slocum Road, then back to Russell Mills Road to Elm Street. You could subscribe to the New Bedford Standard Times for \$.34 a week amounting to \$.04 a day and \$.10 for the Sunday edition. When they raised the weekly cost of the newspaper to \$.45 a couple of years later, it hurt because some of my customers would give me a half-dollar and tell me to keep the change. I began the route using the bicycle given to me by Gardner White and repaired by Doug's father. Not long after I got the job, I bought a new Bike for \$32, making a small down payment and paying \$2 a month for about 12 months.



### **Me and My First Bike**

The truck that brought the evening papers for me to deliver left them off at the corner of the Padanaram School yard at Bush and Elm Street. It was also the drop point for another kid named Seth. You see, when I was in the fourth grade, I had a big crush on his sister, Helen. She was one grade behind me, but I would see her every morning when she brought the attendance sheet around to all the classrooms for the teachers to record the day's attendance. The protocol was that she would knock on the door and I, being the closest to the door (at least until the teacher decided to re-arrange the seating), would get up to open it. I was probably daydreaming each morning until the knock came. Anyway, Seth and I, even though he was older than I by a couple of years, became good friends. But I had my own selfish motives in mind. I tried everything I could to get an invitation over to his house for the sole purpose of seeing Helen. But, despite our friendship, he never invited me! Win some, lose some!

Once in a while, a couple of my friends from Padanaram, Thorney Klaren and Gardner White, would join me on my paper route just to hang out together. Gardner had given me my first bicycle (the bike in the earlier picture) after it had been run over by a car, and the father of another friend, Douglas Hawes, owner of a gas station, fixed it for me for \$2. One day I became ill; it may very well have been the measles. Too sick to deliver the newspapers myself, I had my sister Norma ask my two friends to do the route for me. Now they were roughly aware of who my customers were, but never paid the degree of attention to know exactly who they were. But they did their best. The next day I returned to my route to hear a comment from one person saying, "Thanks for the Newspaper" and another stating, "What happened to my paper yesterday?". But they did an amazing job, and there were no complaints registered with the newspaper office. Thorney and I discussed this event in a phone conversation in 2018, and he still remembers this incident.

One of the nicest things about having a paper route is that we had an opportunity to play organized baseball. The Little league organization was already in place but not in our area of Massachusetts. The boys were divided into branches based on the location of your route in the Greater New Bedford area; this meant I was playing on a team with many of my friends. The New Bedford Standard Times provided bats, balls, catcher's equipment and an umpire. We would play home games at Buttonwood Park, and travel to away games at Brooklawn Park and a field in Fairhaven. The problem with the league was that the only requirement for playing was that you had a paper route. Well, the ages of paper boys varied from 10 (I began playing when I was 11) to 16, maybe 17. I remember that at age 12, I faced a high school pitcher! I was so small that he probably walked me. Anyway, this was a huge highlight in my early years, as I loved to participate in sports.

The year 1947 saw the beginning of the televising certain sporting events. The hardware store in Padanaram had a television set with a large magnifying glass mounted in front of the TV screen. Whenever there would be a special sporting event, the TV would be placed outside the store for viewing by the neighborhood residents. Initially it was boxing matches with Joe Louis pulverizing his opponents while defending his heavyweight championship. Soon after, day baseball games involving either the Boston Red Sox or the Braves whose home was also in Boston until their move to Milwaukee in 1956.

I now became a sports enthusiast (Red Sox Fan) and felt I needed my own radio. I saw a miniature radio being advertised while browsing through a magazine at Brown's Pharmacy. This was long before transistors had been invented; the radio used crystals to select the frequency of the various stations as well as amplify the signal so that you could hear it. It must have been fairly cheap, or I would not have had the money to buy it. I copied the address information and sent it in an envelope along with the money to a place located in Kansas City, Missouri. Shortly after mailing it I had second thoughts. I rushed back to the Post Office in an attempt to retrieve my letter but was told by Mr. Lucas (remember him?) that this was not possible. I finally talked to my brother about it, who at this time was on leave from the Army. I told him that I wanted to get my money back because I wanted to listen to the Red Sox games on a Boston station, and, being that the radio was coming from Missouri, I had no interest in listening to Kansas City stations. This was a pretty bad start for somebody who would eventually end up in the engineering profession. My brother explained to me how it worked, and I eventually received the device. But I was part right. The radio did not have enough sensitivity to pick up the Boston stations that broadcasted the games.

When I finished the fifth grade at Padanaram School, I was ready to move up to the next level at Cushman School that included grades 6 through 8. There were two 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes, and my sisters had warned me that I would not want to get Mrs. Menard as my teacher. According to them, she was tough in both her teaching methods and her discipline. Luckily, I was assigned to the other teacher, Mrs. Comiskey. She would live to be more than 100 years old and participated in at least one function of my 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion. While in the Navy, I was hospitalized for an infection and her sister was my nurse.

But my fortunes didn't last long. About two weeks after classes started, Cushman School burned down. Rumors were rampant that the fire was the result of arson by a disgruntled



student, but nothing was ever proven. The incident caused a big scramble in the school district in order to relocate the students to other existing facilities. Well, I was back at Padanaram School, and both of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes were combined such that I had both Mrs. Menard and Mrs. Comiskey as my teachers.

It turned out that my sisters were quite correct. Mrs. Menard was a difficult teacher. She organized the classroom such that the “A” students were in the first row on her right, the next row contained the “B” students, and this continued across the room to the “F” students on the far left (I spent most of my time in the “C” row with infrequent transfers to the “B” row). Each week, we would be given five or ten words to use in a sentence, and diagram them in a sentence. When we completed the exercise successfully, we would get a star. This would go on for thirty-eight weeks until we had all 38 stars, and we would not be promoted unless we successfully completed this exercise. At least that is what she told us. In retrospect, I learned more from Mrs. Menard than any other teacher I ever had, and I had many good ones.

It would take three years until the Cushman School would be rebuilt. So, the school district continued to seek facilities for us for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. This time they put us in Bliss Corner School, an elementary school usually accommodating the first four grades. The elementary students occupied the first floor and the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders occupied the second. As you can see from the class photograph, I was the smallest person in the class. While seated in the front row, my feet could not reach the ground!



**My Eighth Grade Class**

I attended our 60<sup>th</sup> high school reunion and took the opportunity to visit my old stomping grounds. The grocery stores, barbershop, library, drug store, post office, liquor store, and fish market and hardware store are all gone! Even the Catholic Church had relocated. But the memories still remain, although perhaps I should have forgotten a couple of them!