

A Morning in Woods Hole

by Clara Gray

The following essay was written by the granddaughter of Mary Lou Smith, our founding editor, and of Paul Ferris Smith, a leader in establishing the Woods Hole Museum and creator of its outreach programs in boat building and the Model Boat show. The portable house described in the essay was featured in the Summer 2004 Sprintsail, Vol. 18, No. 2. Clara wrote the story in 2007 as a narrative essay for her 9th grade English class at Woodstock Union High School in Woodstock, VT.

“Science School.” Even before I opened my eyes this is the first thing that popped into my head. “I don’t want to go! Why should I have to? It’s summer vacation!” Reluctantly, I blinked my eyes open. The early sun shone through the window, bathing the room in a fresh glow. The white walls, white curtains, and white bedspread were all that decorated this little room, but to me it was the best place in the world. They all seemed to shimmer in the early light, and the sea breeze flooded through the open windows. How could I bear to get up and leave this heaven so early?

I rolled over, across the pillows, sinking into the crack where the two twin beds met to form one huge, cozy nest. The lump across the bed began to stir. I nudged my friend Sydney, who sleepily opened her eyes before diving back under the cloudy blankets. Laughing and stretching, she emerged again. Pushing aside the many stuffed animals that adorned our bed, we gathered next to the window. The chipping paint on the window frame was so familiar, so were the many seashells collected on the sill. Although the huge rose hip bush outside our window hid Little Harbor, we could still hear the sound of the

waves lapping the shore, and the gulls’ playful cries to one another.

“Do you really have to go? You’re sure?” asked Syd, “Maybe if you ask one more time...you can skip the first day can’t you?” “Ugh, no,” I replied, “I’ve asked Mom about a million times, and probably more. I wish you could come! It would be so much better! But I guess since you’re only here for a week you can’t take the three week class.” I reluctantly sank further into the blankets, silently defying all the forces that would soon try to pry me from my bed.

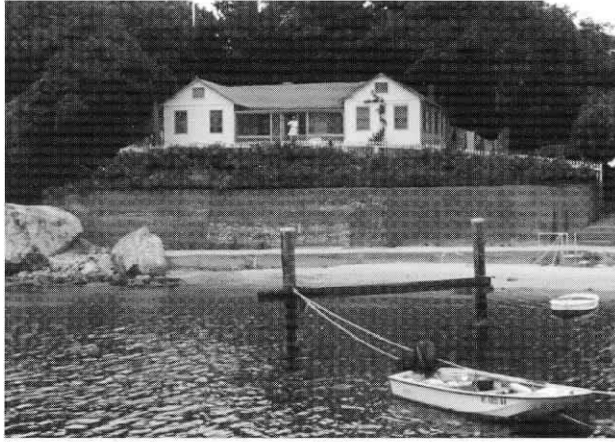
Soon enough this force arrived. It came in the form of the aroma of pancakes from the kitchen. “I guess we should get up,” I said as my stomach rumbled. We hurried to get dressed, pulling on bathing suits and sweatshirts. This was the principal outfit of our summers in Woods Hole. Noah and Julian were eating when we went out onto the screen porch. Sydney and I filled our plates and jumped onto the porch swing. A few pancakes later, Syd and I were down at the beach. Wading our toes in the water, we watched the waves slowly crash and ebb on the beach. We stood there, just sinking into the sand. “I have a feeling that this day will be no fun at all,” I said.

Then we heard the sounds of Mom, Noah, Julian, and our dog Laila coming down the path to the beach. Sydney sighed, “They’re probably coming down to get us to the car.” However, Mom was carrying the bag with the life vests with her. “We’re going to take the Whaler to Science School,” said Mom. She said it casually, but I could tell she expected our reaction. Racing up the beach to meet them, all us kids went wild. The Whaler belonged to Vinney, the

caretaker. It was a little motorboat and was probably the most fun thing we could imagine.

It took a little preparation to get the Whaler to the dock. This involved climbing on the crumbling wooden pilings whose sides were covered with barnacles and sea life. The Whaler was tied to the pilings to keep it from being carried away by the tides. The boys got the honor of untying the little boat and hopping across the wooden posts back to the dock, dragging the Whaler behind them. Sydney and I waited impatiently on the dock, practically jumping with excitement. Mom was busy preparing what we needed. "Could they please hurry up?" I thought. As soon as we could, Sydney and I jumped into the bow of the boat. We pushed aside some of the ropes, Mom started the engine, Julian sat in the middle and Noah pushed away from the dock. Waving, and calling goodbye to Laila, who was running up the beach barking her reply, we were off.

As soon as we left the harbor we picked up speed. The cool breeze whipped our faces. As the waves grew, we bounced along on our natural roller coaster ride. I could taste the salt in the spray splashing our cheeks. The blue green water sparkled in the bright sun. I watched the reflected clouds pass under the boat as we crossed this second sky of the sea.



This 1920s Hodgson cottage overlooking Little Harbor was rented by Paul Ferris and Mary Lou Smith from G. G. Whitney. Their daughter, Charity Smith Gray, took Clara to Science School in the Whaler tied to the wooden piling "whose sides were covered with barnacles and sea life." Courtesy Paul Ferris Smith.

Sydney and I had the best seats on the boat, right in the front. Here we could look out at all the other boats on the water. Their grand shapes in the distance bobbed happily in the waves. We passed a fisherman's boat and waved until he returned the courtesy. This is the important job of those who sit in the bow. We also waved a good morning to a cormorant, catching his breakfast nearby. He replied by slipping under the water in search of the fish he had spotted. Cheering

in delight we raced across the water. The boys took turns steering, but Sydney and I were lost in our world on the bow. Occasionally, we would hit an extra big wave. The momentum flung us into the air inches above our seat. Bouncing back down, we waited in anticipation for the next wave, hopefully even bigger than the last.

All too soon the boat slowed to a dull purr. We slowly moved into the town harbor, our hearts still racing from the excitement of the ride. "This has been the best morning EVER!" I exclaimed as Syd and I tried to tame our hair, which had become wild from the salt and wind. The dull engine sounds died to a halt as we pulled up to the dock. Noah and I hopped out. "Promise to pick us up in the Whaler after Science School?" "Of course!" replied Mom. As the boat hummed out of the harbor, I waved to Sydney until they were out of my sight. As Noah and I began our walk to the school I thought, "What a great day! I can't wait to get to the school, I bet it's fun! Even more, I can't wait for the ride home! Ha-ha!"