July 4th, 2015 (Remarks by Martha Barton-Rivera)

There are always lots of references on this day to our forefathers, but today I would like to talk a little about our foremothers, specifically some of those here on Thompson’s Point. I have long marveled at the fact that there are so many women on the Point who are named after their mothers. It seems to me it is a much higher percentage than in the general public, though I can’t find a number for that on the Internet. We have Dorothy Rutter and young Dorothy, Evie Mahairis and Evie, Carolyn Coleburn and Carolyn, Liz Gilroy and Betsy, Alice Outwater and Alice, Nancy Sackett and Nancy and the triumvirate of Peg Reid, Peggy and her daughter Margie! This is a recognition on the part of the men involved that they were in the presence of strong women!

My mother taught us early on that we were to cross out “housewife” on any form that asked for her occupation and list her as “homemaker” instead. The women of Thompson’s Point should be listed as “community builders “as well. They had amazing individual talents and expertise, yet chose to share these to help develop the entire community here on the Point.

First a disclaimer! It would take days to talk about all the strong, amazing women who have made up the TP community over the years. I am just going to focus on a few in those generations who were here in the 50’s and 60’s as I grew up on the Point. This was a time when most of us spent the whole summer here. Our moms or grandmothers were here full time, while our dads worked and spent weekends or their vacation here. One of the first brave things these women did was to raise their kids for a month or more under the watchful eyes of their mothers or mothers in law!

By example, they developed an intergenerational respect among Pointers. Not only did I respect them, but they were interested in and attentive to the youth on the Point. I remember going to visit Mrs. Kennedy and being served lemonade as we chatted, the thrill of visiting Mrs. Hicks and being allowed to see her mounted butterflies and bats, the sense of belonging when Mrs. Ward told you to just help yourself to the popsicles in the freezer on the porch and the sense of honor when Nana Currier called you by name.

They encouraged activities that most of us still gather to do on the Point today. It was always a thrill to watch Anne Paul or Carolyn Coleburn on the tennis courts. They helped plan and run our annual kids tennis tournament each year, complete with real trophies. Later, ladies tennis became a weekly event and even beginners were encouraged to join and play.

Many of us learned to swim at Red Cross classes at the Charlotte Town Beach, which meant getting there and back daily. Instead of each mom going every day, Alice Outwater, Jane Barton, Mrs. Townsend and others took turns filling a station wagon with Point kids and getting us all there. Liz Gilroy instituted the annual swimming races from the sandy beach to the raft, with so many ribbons that each participant must have gotten one. The grand finale was always a performance by the Gilroy golden retrievers, swimming for sticks and tennis balls. We learned to swim and play tennis, and about competition and fair play as well.

A deep appreciation for nature is another thing that connects us on the Point. Madge Hawley was an amazing naturalist, who knew homeopathic uses for almost every plant on the Point, how to hunt and fish and generously ran a craft class for kids on the Point for years. Many of your cottages still have the real beeswax candles or the candle holders made from cedar slices decorated with pinecones we crafted under her tutelage. More important were the lessons about caring for and protecting the earth and the space around us.

One could not talk about strong women on the Point without mentioning Opie! We did not have many single role models at the time and here was a professional woman supporting herself and living among us. This community meant so much to her and she spent a lifetime supporting it. Just as many of us learned to swim at the Charlotte beach, many of us learned to fish (and to clean your own fish) at Opie’s side. No matter how noisy or unschooled the youngster, she was always ready to take them fishing when they asked.

The chance to “buy local and eat local” while at the Point is a highpoint of our summers and Peg Reid did this before it was a catch phrase. For most of the many years she spent here she planted her own garden, tended it and shared its bounty with all. She had a garden in Charlotte, at Foster’s house when he was caretaker, or in Ferrisburg, that she nurtured daily. She shared the pleasure she got from growing her own berries and vegetables. The year Dick Tonino bought his house, I remember him going over to learn how to make jam from her, and the smell of fresh bread wafting over the cove was always an invitation to stop by for a piece!

Breaking bread together is another way to build and sustain community and we had many who helped us do this. Pot luck club suppers still had to be organized and for years, Jane Price, Jane Barton, Annie May Hicks, Barbara Colby, Carolyn Coleburn or Kay Teetor made sure that they happened. The first 4th of July gatherings were not at the club, but at the Teetor’s house and it was a party to which all ages were invited.

Finally, these women encouraged and fostered an appreciation of books, learning and new ideas. This too is woven into the fabric of our community. Barbara Colby planned their trip up each year with an historical visit along the way. We would always wait to learn about it vicariously when they arrived. Alice Outwater, Jane Barton and Janet Kuenne often took classes in the area during the summer. Many of these women continued their formal education after their kids were grown and we have as example Alice Outwater and Barbara Colby both getting a doctorate and a masters degree as adults. Janet Kuenne is still auditing courses each year. No wonder the conversations and discussions here are so rich!

So here’s to the ladies who are not just part of the history and lore of the Point, but helped construct the culture of our community. We see their influence in the current generation’s appreciation of “Point traditions” one of which is gathering here each July 4th to celebrate as a community our shared love of the lake, sports, food, reading, eating, and each other. Thanks, Nana Currier and Mary for this tradition! - Martha Barton-Rivera