

**REMEMBRANCES OF SEABROOK VILLAGE OF THE 1950'S**  
**(A Newspaper Boy's View)**

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I remember delivering the Bridgeton Evening News after school and on Saturdays in Seabrook when I was twelve.

I remember walking home from Seabrook School North, unloading my books on my bed, and grabbing my ink-stained canvas delivery bag off the doorknob of my room.

I remember hopping on my maroon plain-vanilla, mail-order 26-inch middleweight bicycle that I had gotten dirt-cheap from saving thirty or so General Mills cereal boxtops.

I remember riding east down Second Street, crossing Route 77 to the older part of the village to Mr. Johnson's house, the newspaper depot of Seabrook.

I remember receiving my batch of about forty newspapers there and then sitting on the porch steps preparing each paper for delivery - a half-fold, a tuck-in of the ends, and a hardy cross-grain snap to form a crease to secure the ends - a cost-saving trick of the trade (no rubber bands needed) that I had learned from my predecessor, Harvey Morita, who had probably learned it from his brother Gerry, also a former newspaper boy.

I remember once my mother, who, worrying that I wouldn't get the papers delivered on time because I was playing in a late-afternoon Seabrook School baseball game, brought my papers home from Mr. Johnson's house and, to my surprise, folded all the papers herself.

I remember starting my once-routine delivery route. I remember turning left on Parsonage Road and pedaling toward the General Store--past the north side of the Community House, past the remodeled dormitory facing Seabrook Village, past Mr. Fujimoto's t.v. repair shop, past the old snack bar.

I remember delivering the first paper to the apartment unit on the west end of the apartment building facing the General Store.

I remember frequently seeing there the resident's brown shaggy sheep dog sitting in the middle of the porch, which made it all but impossible to toss the paper on the porch as I rode by.

I remember riding past the gray clapboard building which now houses Kiyō Okamoto's barber shop, Esther Ono's beauty saloon, and once (after the damage of Hurricane Hazel) the Seabrook Buddhist Church.

I remember riding past the corrugated-iron warehouse and wondering, just as I do now, what in the world was stored in that long, mysterious building.

I remember passing Jack Ikeda's shoe repair shop and occasionally hearing the whirl of polishing machines.

I remember tossing with a backhand flip a paper on the Kazaoka's front porch and then turning into Garden and Adams Streets to hurl more papers, both backhand and forehand, depending on which side the porches lay.

I remember going down Elm Street, the first of my former apartment residence. I remember seeing or reforming in my mind there the familiar faces of my apartment childhood - the Alfred Ishii's, the Imamuras, the Ogatas, the Hamasakis, Sadaki and Mie Ishii (the other Ishiis, who lived next door to us), the Masatanis, the Gotos, the Okinos (our other next-door neighbor), the Yoshidas, the Kurokawas, the Moris - a Japanese neighborhood teeming with the old and the new, a street of hard-working, stoic parents and their spirited, and often bewildering Americanized or Americanizing children.

I remember riding past #844 (our former apartment unit on Elm Street) and seeing again the short cement sidewalk leading up to the wooden porch, the small patch of dirt where we used to play marbles, the faded blue screen door that we never had to lock, and the gray, dusty coal bin where my brother and I sometimes used to hide from our parents or from each other.

I remember wondering who lived in that unit after our family of seven had moved to larger quarters "across the highway." I wonder now if the new residents had grown accustomed to crowded apartment life as I once had - the economy-sized bedrooms with the greenish-blue blinds and with just enough space for a set of bunk beds and a tansu, the parlor with its coal-burning stove and standardized company furniture, the small kitchen that faced the ever-present street and seemingly half-occupied with a sink, electric range, water heater, and table. I wonder now if the new residents have the same persistent memories of #844 and of life on Elm Street and if these memories later shaped their lives as they did mine.

I remember exiting Elm Street on the short, ruffed dirt passageway lying to the right of the cement drainage ditch of the end of the street.

I remember riding on Church Street past the residences of Miss Kajikawa (a stalwart in the Seabrook Christian Church), the Katos, Gunars Sietinsons (the once notorious "village bully," who later became a vice-president of a Bridgeton bank).

I remember crossing Deerfield Drive onto curving MacArthur Drive and tossing papers there to the left and right.

I remember having childhood acquaintances with those who once called this ever-changing street home - Akio Taniguchi (the hustling second-baseman on our championship Lahn Transportation Little League team), Tadashi Ogata (my conscientious field boss at Koster's Nursery), Kiyoshi Ohara (the familiar tofu man of Seabrook), Larry Wakatsuki (whose father Bill used to take us fishing on summer weekends and also sang a mean baritone), Hank Wakai (a superb softball pitcher of whom I was then too young to bag against and for whom I later collected soil samples at the Seabrook Agricultural Research farm), Minoru "Jimmy" Sakata (a top-notch mechanic who could fix anything on the third floor of the Seabrook factory).

I remember bicycling up the incline on Deerfield Drive to reach Jefferson Street to toss more papers from my now half-empty bag. I remember reaching the top of the incline at Harrison Street and seeing to my right the huge nondescript white building that housed or generated many of my early childhood activities.

I remember attending nursery school there with hordes of other local children while our parents labored in the factory. I remember resisting vehemently the daily afternoon naps and the awful tomato juice.

I remember attending the Buddhist Church there just about every Sunday without realizing the subtle bonds being formed that were to link me to my parents' culture.

I remember sitting with other Japanese American children on the hard benches, fiddling with my ojuzu, smelling the pungent wisps of incense rising and spreading from the cast-iron urn before the obutsudan, and listening to long sermons only half understood.

I remember watching the church Fujinkai prepare delectable dishes of sushi, teriyaki chicken, chow mein, miso soup, yokan, and manju on festive occasions. I remember attending in this building one wedding and several funeral services conducted by black-robed Buddhist priests chanting sutras in unison.

I remember walking to this building with Hanayama vigorously striking the church gong with a wooden mallet to ring in the New Year.

I remember participating in English and Japanese skits on a makeshift stage in the large room in the back, viewing full-length, unsubtitled samurai movies, and watching elder issei men play go with restrained intensity.

I remember tending the snow-cone counter during Obon night when seemingly every ethnic group in the village, beckoned by the resounding music over the loudspeakers, turned out to watch and even join in to dance the tanko-bushi.

I remember going to Japanese school in this former nursery school building with my brother and older sister, first, each day after Seabrook School classes had finished and, later, on Saturday mornings. I remember questioning my parents constantly why I had to learn this mysterious Japanese script that I would never use in Seabrook School and why I had to attend another school right after regular school when all my friends were out playing baseball or basketball.

I remember descending the steep hill on Deerfield Drive, a welcome break from the prior half mile of steady pedaling. I remember seeing on my left more rows of apartment buildings and, on my right, the grassy hill, where, in summer, we used to roll down like loose boulders and where some of us would try to hide from the other team during a game of jin-tori. I remember sledding down this hill after a heavy snowfall, sometimes on a real sled, sometimes on sheets of cardboard or tops of garbage cans. I remember more daring kids sledding directly on Deerfield Drive when the surface turned icy or sometimes running full speed down the slipper street and sliding on the soles of their shoes. I remember engaging in awesome free-for-all snowball fights in this area and getting pelted many a time on solo sled runs down the hill.

I remember coasting in and out of Van Buren, Roosevelt, Flower, and Juniper Streets to finish the last of my paper deliveries to the apartments. I remember seeing at the ends of these streets little vegetable gardens the residents had planted and, beyond that, the woods where the Seabrook Boy Scouts and Explorers sometimes used to camp. I remember swerving left at the bottom of the hill onto a dusty unpaved road that led to Hoover Annex to deliver just one paper, to a Mr. Matsumoto, who lived by himself in a unit at the southwest corner of the complex. I remember riding through the dirt passageways of Hoover Annex and experiencing a sense of

apprehension and mystery since I recognized no one of my own age in this area. I remember weaving between the tightly packed rows of rectangular buildings, where rows and buildings seemed almost indistinguishable from the next, where gray skies seemed to blend in with the gray buildings and their black-tarred roofs. I remember sometimes seeing residents (Germans, Japanese, Polish, and other displaced peoples of World War II), mostly adults, emerging from the buildings and heading to the communal washrooms and showers or returning home with bags of groceries from the General Store. I remember wondering what would it be like to live in Hoover Annex day after day, what unexplored secrets its somber living units held, what its residents were really like, what stories they could tell of their former and distant homelands. I remember seeing to the south of the Annex buildings, across a stretch of vegetable gardens, the stark outlines of Hoover Village, a place perhaps just as mysterious to me as Hoover Annex, but where my paper route did not extend but secretly wished it did. I wonder now, just as I did then, who could speak for these residents of Hoover Village and Hoover Annex to make known their past and daily lives.

I remember leaving Hoover Annex and turning again onto Deerfield Drive to deliver a few papers to the dormitories. I remember riding past the oblong remodeled dormitories that lined both sides of the street, each living unit with a series of entrances and separate porches to throw papers on. I remember having to ride up closer to these porches than those of the apartment buildings because the porches were smaller and farther from the street. I remember riding up the individual sidewalks that led up to each unit and seeing compact petunia or tomato gardens next to the doors. I remember seeing as I biked along the dormitories the large grass-covered spaces which lay behind some of the buildings and which served as neighborhood playgrounds. I remember venturing during my apartment days to these grassy areas, sometimes to watch people fly kites, sometimes to play some tackle football with other Japanese kids, sometimes to engage in game of lively Estonian dodge ball with Estonians, Germans, Latvians, and Poles.

I remember finishing the final stretch of my route in the old Village. I remember riding up Deerfield Drive past the abandoned Infirmary Building (where our summer day-camp counselors once lived), past the parking lot and the two benches of the Community House (where, in summer mornings, we used to gather at dawn to

wait for Seabrook Farms tractor trailers or buses to take us to the fields for a day of bean picking), past the Seabrook Housing Office (where villagers visited once a month to pay their rent), past the roadside South Jersey Transit bus stop (where we could catch on hourly bus to Bridgeton for about 20 cents or, in the opposite direction, to Philadelphia for under two dollars), past the public telephone booth (where teens could call and talk without their parents overhearing), past the Community House gym (where I used to shoot some hoops in stockinged feet and older kids attended school or community dances and where in summer mornings we used to gather to catch a bus driven by Mayor Sasaki to day camp near Parvin State Park.). I remember approaching at the intersection of Route 77 and Parsonage Road the only traffic light in the village and seeing on the left of the highway snap beans or corn growing in the field and, further in the distance, the red brick smokestack of the Seabrook Farms factory and, behind it, the rocket-shaped silver water tank. I remember seeing along the ginkgo-tree lined road leading up to the factory white-capped women in blue uniforms and T-shirted men with lunch pails working to and from work.

I remember crossing Route 77 and pedaling into West Village, the newer part of the village. I remember delivering only a few papers in this area because most of the delivery here was handled by Mr. Johnson, who drove down First, Second, Third, and Fourth Streets, tossing rubber-banded newspapers onto lawns from the front window of his car. I remember riding to the end of First Street and seeing the large dirt lot half-filled with rows of empty brown-canvassed trailers and ten-fifteen-foot high stacks of wooden packing crates. I remember some of us West Village kids playing sandlot baseball games here, using the crates and trailers as natural and enticing left field and centerfield fences. I remember us youthful trespassers being chased away two or three times from this lot (we always came back on another day) by Harry Hoffman, the only police officer of the village, much to the silent protest of the workers on the second floor of the steam plant, who enjoyed watching our games from out the windows. I remember seeing at the end of Second Street the large dirt mound where we sometimes dug shallow caves or played "King of the Mountain." I remember sitting on the top of this mound and seeing to the east the varicolored houses of West Village and the vague outlines of the sycamore trees bordering Seabrook School, and, to the north, the

woods surrounding Flood Gate (where we sometimes fished for shiners and carp with balls of bread stuck on bent needles, hunted for inattentive turtles and frogs, or gathered little crayfish), and, to the west, the Seabrook Farms greenhouses and mechanic repair shops (where we sometimes went to buy six-cent bottles of Coke), and, to the south, the ever-present hustle and bustle of the Seabrook factory.

I remember final leg of my deliveries in West Village. I remember speeding down Third and Fourth Streets with a now near-empty bag and delivering the last paper to Jacob Hammer, a Dutch man who lived with his family near the end of Fourth Street. I remember always checking my paper bag three or four houses beforehand to see if I had enough for that one last deliver (otherwise I would have to return all the way Mr. Johnson's house to request an extra copy). I remember putting the last paper inside Jacob Hammer's door and then heading home to the familiar haunts of Second Street. As I neared #1407 (our residence). I remember being little aware of the striking differences of life on Second Street from my former life on Elm Street--larger living quarters, real lawns that needed to be mowed, more and taller trees and wider spaces between residences, brighter colors on housing units, asphalt-paved roads with curbs, more cars parked next to homes, yet, at the same time, seemingly, fewer kids playing outside, less a sense of daily excitement, more predictable, more suburbia-like than the tenement life of the apartments and dormitories, and, yet, surprisingly, nearer to the sounds of the factory. I remember passing or reforming in my mind the diverse neighbors who also made Second Street their new home--Mrs. Morano (whose family recipe for spaghetti made it a clear weekly favorite in the Seabrook School cafeteria), Ulo Kart (who at 6'6" was an unmovable force in basketball and football at Bridgeton High School and an ideal summer bean-truck loader), several blue-capped Seabrook Farms foreladies (Vera Aoki, Chiye Furushima, Mutsue Ogata, Ichiyo Nakai, Mrs. Tanimae, and Mrs. Virunurm), Peeter Vilms (who cut off part of his big toe in a lawn mower accident but which never prevented him from playing tennis or gaining acceptance to Harvard University), Carl Holm, Jr. (who, along with my father and some Swedish agricultural trainees from the Seabrook research farm, drove to New York City to watch the Swedish challenger, Ingemar Johansson, win the world heavyweight boxing championship), Ray Bano (who, in his lifetime, must have trekked several thousand miles delivering mail for the Seabrook

branch of the U.S. Postal Service), Liina Keerdoja (who consistently outpicked her brother Juri in the bean fields), Rhoda Smith (who knew all the latest dances from the jitterbug to the cha-cha to the bunny hop), Werner Freyman (whom we heard diligently practicing the piano as we bumped and tackled on another in after-school football skirmishes behind his house).

Finally, I remember reaching our dark-maroon house on Second Street. I remember cutting through the lawn to the back side, taking my empty paper bag off the handlebars, and laying my well-traveled bike on its side to give it a little rest.

