

I left Massachusetts, ergo the South Shore in August of 1985. My plan was to go away for a year or two, prove to myself that I could stand on my own, then move back. I ended up in Arizona, and twenty-four years later I still haven't made it back. But I have an end date, May 2015. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say I have a re-begin date, June 2015.

Around 1990 I was working in an Arizona hospital as a medical photographer, and my position was eliminated. Between jobs I was killing time in the Scottsdale library and came across an Edward Roe Snow book about the islands of Boston Harbor. I knew the Snow name and had an inkling of what he wrote, but I hadn't paid much attention to him or his subject matter. Twenty-five thousand miles away, in a place of very different geography, the subject matter was now fascinating and struck me deeply. I read many of the books the Phoenix area libraries had about Boston and New England, and, pre-internet, I read more books via the inter-library loan program. As interesting as research is, and as pleasing as discovering some obscure fact or bit of trivia might be, the most important thing I discovered through all of my reading was that, although I lived in the Southwest, my heart never left New England, particularly Massachusetts and the South Shore.

I had a pretty good life on the South Shore. I was born in Quincy, raised in Weymouth, graduated Emerson College, and was working an interesting job with a good company in Boston. My brother and I were renting an apartment in Quincy, after we had been not-so-politely asked to vacate the house we and a couple other guys had been renting in Hingham. We regularly raided our parents' house for food, tools, and the washing machine. We went to parties, had girlfriends and jobs, and young male junk. I had a license to catch lobster, a Bachelor of Science degree, and absolutely no meaning in my life.

Growing up I had unknowingly but thoroughly explored the South Shore; Sunday drives up and down Route 3A with my family, bicycling out to Point Allerton or Scituate Harbor, cruising Jerusalem Road, exploring earthen paths in the woods, and walking the Greenbush railroad bed from Braintree to Scituate. Surf casting at Marshfield Beach, blue fishing off Webb Park a few long luscious nights on various beaches watching the sunrise over the Atlantic. It was magnificent.

With hindsight being what it is, I see that Greenbush was the thread that wove the South Shore together for me. It's no wonder that I used Greenbush to move the protagonist in my first novel, "*Walking Greenbush*," around the South Shore.

The South Shore is defined by who is defining it. Some might consider only the towns inside Boston Harbor as the South Shore, others would include towns like Milton, Abington, Pembroke, Norwell, and so on as part of the South Shore. Before the carving of the Cape Cod Canal the Cape was considered to begin at the North River between Scituate and Marshfield and run around the Cape to the top of Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island. Samuel Morison in "*The Maritime History of Massachusetts*," defined the South Shore as beginning at Nantasket Beach in Hull and ending in Plymouth at "the armpit of Cape Cod." For this article I define the South Shore beginning with the Neponset River in

North Quincy and include the rest of Quincy, Braintree, Weymouth, Hingham, Hull, Cohasset, Scituate, Marshfield, Duxbury, Kingston, Plymouth ending somewhere between Plymouth Plantation and the logical cut off, the Cape Cod Canal, plus a few of the Boston Harbor Islands. Plymouth, however, is its own entity, indeed. All of these communities meet the Atlantic and are south of Boston.

I met Bill C. here in Arizona. He was from the Houghes Neck section of Quincy. He left to fight in Korea. When he was discharged in California he met his wife and ultimately they established their life in Arizona. We talked about the South Shore. He knew the South Shore is special, like I know it is special. What really impressed me was the fact that he told me he swam back and forth from Squantum to Houghes Neck regularly.

Following my conversation with Bill I wanted to publish a coffee table style photo book about the South Shore. I flew back home and ran around the South Shore for a couple days taking pictures. I typed up a manuscript, glued some photos to paper, and sent it to various Boston area publishers. Twenty-four years later I'm still at 0% response rate.

The slides hid in a box for years. Every time I moved from apartment to house to apartment I took the box of South Shore slides with me. Last year I started scanning all of my old images and came across the South Shore manuscript and images collection. It had been ten years since I had last looked in the box. Rather than let them continue to deteriorate I decided to put them out on the web. I found the old manuscript and discovered how profoundly crappy it was. (I like words and the best word to describe the original manuscript is bathetic.)

This piece of writing is a truncated and soundly scrubbed iteration of the original manuscript. Perhaps someday I will publish a coffee table style photo book about the South Shore in which I can include many of the obscure facts I found in my original research.

Most of the images on this website were taken in 1991. I wish they were better pictures. I've worked as a photographer for 25 years now and, like the sophomoric manuscript I wrote years ago, I wish I understood the value of correct exposure, crisp focus, and a tripod as much then as I do now. Oh well, at least I took the pictures.

I doubt I would have come to appreciate the South Shore as much as I do had I not moved away. I missed a lot of change while I've been gone. Interesting places like the Hingham Shipyard, NAS South Weymouth, various lots of woods, and freight trains are gone. Weymouth became a city. Illegal immigration and heroin are problems. Suburban sprawl consume more and more land, but I still think it is a fascinating place.

I know the South Shore has changed, and change on the South Shore has been lamented before. In the *King's Handbook of Boston Harbor*, M.F. Sweetser wrote in 1882,

*Forever gone are the days he [Peter Peregrine] chronicled when the Norfolk County and Old Colony farmers and villagers drove down the fragrant country roads to the lonely beach [Nantasket] with their old fashioned families, and make a huge kettle of spicy chowder over driftwood fires, while the delighted children raced barefoot over the wet sands, and*

*bathed in the gentle waves. All is now changed; and the beach has a half dozen crowded hamlets, a score of hotels, a daily newspaper, an aquarium, a score of shops, avenues and parks, sewer and aqueducts, and other appliances of our luxurious, complex, and painful modern civilization.*

Similarly, it is hard to picture East Braintree as "...the farming section of Braintree," as it was described in 1893 in *The History of the Old Colony Railroad*.

Like my friend Bill, many people leave the South Shore never to come back except, perhaps, for occasional visits. Jobs, careers, marriages, retirement and so forth take us away. Some leave for military service or college and others realize it's not the place for them, but that's not the case for me.

I will move back in the next few years.

I need to be careful that I don't put a nostalgic glow on my memories of the South Shore. I need to not get too mad at the physical change from developers who filled in swamps and bulldozed the wooded lots, or looking at colonial architecture and thinking it's ugly because I've become accustomed to other architecture styles. Or worse, being disenchanted because the South Shore may strike me as ordinary because I have to work and act as a grown up and a parent like most everyone else. Of course, after two decades of living in a place where there is sun roughly 355 days a years and daytime temperature in winter plunges to a bone-chilling 65°, I need to be mindful of the fact that on February mornings while I'm chipping ice with a blade at the end of my driveway and it's been dreary for a week and my wife is glaring at me through the window I might think to myself, "What have I done?"

I doubt it.