

So You Want To Go To Truro

By May Orton Westheimer

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Several summers ago we picked up our telephone in Cincinnati and listened to the pronouncement of friends at Cape Cod that they had just tracked down the completely perfect house there for our family – to purchase. From their tone of voice you'd have thought they were telling us we had just won the Irish Sweepstakes. It had never so much as crossed our minds that we wanted to buy a summer cottage. Although we tended to gravitate back to The Cape, despite vacations elsewhere, renting houses had proved most satisfactory. We thanked them politely for their concern over our welfare and hung up. Thus was planted that amazing seed of discontent. Two days later we were on an airplane heading for The Cape and a quick look at the cottage, lest we (might) pass up this one-of-a-kind chance.

Our appointment to “be shown” the house was set for 2 o'clock Sunday afternoon. The Shusters and Bradfords had been alerted to our visit. Later I tried to envision how the place would have looked if they hadn't known we were coming. As we ventured into the living room we witnessed a large gathering of convivial summer people, glasses, tinkling ice cubes and alcohol. We were cordially invited to join the group for drinks and/or the ensuing brunch. ~~(The latter looked to be a fairly dubious offering for in our subsequent tour of the premises we noted no evidence of forthcoming victuals.)~~ The general tenor of the partying suggested it was really a continuation of a Saturday night blast which had never quite dissolved. Be that as it may, we pressed on with the task at hand, wading through heaps of soggy towels, up and down stairs, sidestepping empty beer cans, ignoring unmade beds and phenomenal disorder, trying to visualize the physical plant lying beneath this magnificent chaos. A cursory tour was enough to convince us that it was a complete nightmare. The derelict housekeeping could be written off but the basic impression of the structure could not. The entire building suffered from a total lack of alignment: Nothing but nothing seemed horizontal or vertical in the entire house. It was wrong, completely disoriented. It was also dark, of flimsy constructions and in total disrepair. It needed a water well. To top it off the magnificent view and beach were invisible from the house. A month later it was ours.

Between the inspection tour and the signing of the final papers, the encouraging comments of friends and relatives gave us great strength and courage. Streams of clichés flowed at us, such as “Why not just rent other peoples' troubles?” “Why buy a cow when milk is so cheap?” or direct queries such as “Are you insane?” The first summer we occupied the cottage my brother and family came to visit. As they left, we were thanked politely and profusely. But when he was off-limits and safe in his own automobile he ventured “If I were you, I'd scrap the whole place and start from scratch.”

Well, improvements we have made and roots we have set down. The most offensively sagging spots have been shored up; the front of the house has been opened to the view of the Bay and Provincetown, including a sun deck; another bathroom has been added; the master bedroom has been enlarged to include a

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clothes closet and enough space to walk around the bed as well as lie in it. The well was drilled and furnishes limitless amounts of ecru-colored water. At the same time we still enjoy many of the original touches. An antlered deer head watches over the wicker platform rocker in the living room. The matchless sets of china still remain. One of these years we may get around to fixing the drawer of the orange dining room sideboard, though we might miss the fun of watching and hearing the silverware crash down as part of the mealtime floor show. Andirons that aren't a pair add a special bit of tone.

These five years as property holders in Truro have certainly been instructive. Our vocabulary has been enlarged to include terms like "septic tanks" and "littoral erosion." We have learned the skills required in sea clamming, to distinguish a true blueberry from a huckleberry and how to read a tide table. But the most active field in which we have labored has been in human relations. Little did we realize at the outset how wonderfully our circle could broaden. The natives we met must have been too far out to be inhibited by the famous New England reserve. In fact, fraternizing with the local workmen was the only way we knew to lure them on a job. In Truro it is accepted procedure to invite the plumber and his wife for some enchanted evening before even mentioning any serious business. Then, when everybody's feeling pretty congenial it's permissible to hand the distinguished guest his third can of beer, pass the pretzels again, and broach the subject of the non-draining bathtub. If you carry off the coup pretty well, Mr. Snyder will appear for work early the next morning, albeit with a slight hangover, but you knew you've made the grade.

One of the by-products of the well digging was our friendship with Mr. Daisy. Our relationship burgeoned from casual to full blown on his frequent visits to correct the vagaries of the water system. Mr. Daisy originated from a very elegant Boston family but chose to escape the city bustle with a permanent career and residence on Cape Cod. The well business obviously suited his purposes for it provided easy entrée into a wide range of homes. His calls were invariably entertaining and we enjoyed our relaxed chats over scotch and soda (I note he never drank our water.) He seemed as much at home at his first stop in our well-house, as he did in our living room, his longer stop. We discussed Thoreau's life on the Monomoy beach, chowder recipes or American foreign policy. Memories of his enrichment of our lives quite overshadows his exorbitant bills. The rustic renewal program also involved other local people such as Dorothea Smith the cock-eyed wall-eyed real estate agent, Ernie Rose the general contractor, and Frank David, our taciturn ex-caretaker and his blowsy alcoholic spouse, plus streams of unseen cleaning women and their friends who yearly grant us the special favor of their service at astronomical rates to shovel the sand out of the cottage. Mrs. Adams and friend, Mrs. Hall and friend, Mrs. Sears and friend are mere links in the endless chain of ladies who have labored over the formal spring opening of the cottage. Our relationship has been a strictly pencil and paper one: their bills and our checks. Annually we receive a semi-business-like memorandum to the effect that Mrs. Belladonna (\$2.50/hr) and friend (\$2.50/hr)

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have worked shoulder to shoulder for 33 hours putting things to rights. They would also like to be reimbursed for two new mops (\$3.28), lots of soap (\$6.33), cleanser (\$2.75), a new broom (\$1.79) and miscellaneous cleaning supplies totaling \$23.84. The mouse poison is meticulously itemized separately – probably for shock effect – ~~(or perhaps chastisement)~~ at \$1.29 per box – but only 6 boxes were needed this year. After four cups of coffee and home-made blueberry muffins, Mr. Wilkerson, the electrician, can hardly refuse our request that he rewire the entire house. The atmosphere is so effete it seems positively indelicate to speak of money changing hands, ~~(but we risk it, recalling three fuses we had just blown.)~~ Last summer we established such perfect rapport with Warren Ellis – a thereabouts handyman – that he cannot forget our hour long conversation, nor can he remember to fix the living room windows, or where he was to have applied the paint we mentioned over the long cold winter he's also decided we didn't really want the shelves in the upstairs bathroom anyway.

Last summer we believed our reconditioning efforts had progressed so satisfactorily that we might even extend a few invitations to family and friends to share our vacation pleasures. Upon acquiring the cottage we had sentimentalized over the joys of spaciousness: our friends and our children's friends could join us practically slipping in unnoticed, the house was so roomy. Our first opportunity to test this theory came a week before we left Cincinnati when an emeritus college girl helper called long distance from Truro. She, her husband and two year old son were there to visit and where were we? They couldn't wait for us but promised to come back another year.

One of the firm arrangements we made during the 1965 season was a joint tenancy of the house by Springers and Westheimers at the end of their official lease and the beginning of our stay. When not using the house ourselves, we rent it. But with the friends from Cincinnati we had devised a unique contract to include our 16 year old son John. In the spirit of reciprocity we expected to lease their sixteen year old son Reppie after they left.

If John Donne believed that "no man is an island, entire of itself" our geographic analogy conceded that "On this Cape Cod peninsula it is very hard to be insular." We knew our basic contingent to lead off the vacation was to consist of the Springer complement of Cubby and Jean, Rep 16, Lissie 12, and Barney 10 and the Westheimer supplement of May, Charles, Diane Lundin 21, Tom 18, his friend Denny Jahnighen 18, John 16, Bill 12, Mary 10, Duffie 7, and Puffin the dog. We had not reckoned with the possibility of two additional houseguests before we even reached the cottage. An hour away from Truro we stopped for two hitchhikers who hailed us down, screaming "Mrs. Westheimer." Frank Simon (aged 16) and friend and one gigantic suitcase swelled our ranks in the station wagon which was already sagging under a sailfish on the roof, 7 passengers inside and a Boston Whaler runabout behind, and everything crammed to the gunwales. "What luck!" Frank asserted with a big grin "We need a ride." "Where are you going?" we asked. "Why to your house – to visit." was the matter-of-fact

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reply. It was unbearably hot and crowded coming down that home stretch and nerve endings were getting a little ragged. In between sporadic attempts to be cheerful I began to match up bodies and beds in the cottage. A little mental exercise conjured up visions of forms other than the dog's sleeping on the floor – in which case where were the sleeping bags in all that steerage? Eventual arrival in Truro was a gala affair and after cocktails and lobsters everything resolved itself very neatly, especially the exhaustion and worries. The population explosion was actually no problem at all and with some relaxed sighs we bedded down that first night in Truro, fifteen strong.

The next morning matters had deteriorated considerably. When I saw the dog piles and puddles on the living room floor I know why I had subconsciously blocked out the presence of Laszlo. Knowing better than to criticize guests, I'll limit my comments about the Springer's dog to the facts. The most immediate one being the excretions on the floor had to be cleaned up. After a little banter between the dog owners trying to pin the blame on each other, the solution was simple. Both dogs were guilty and everybody started scrubbing. Puffin, our sullen neurotic Welsh corgi and Laszlo, a bounding and exuberant vizsla hit it off like flint and steel. When they weren't actually fighting they were growling at each other provocatively. Laszlo was an especially graceful creature and we couldn't help but admire his magnificent leaps through the screen doors. Luckily we had only four screen doors and by keeping the windows shut the rest of the screens remained quite intact.

Frank Simon's visit was pleasant but so brief – less than 24 hours – that I don't think we ever knew – or needed to know – his friend's name, nor what was in that tremendous suitcase that came with them. We happen to know they slept in their clothes. Their flying visit did leave quite a lasting impression with us though, in the shape of a dented and sprung door on the Springer's car. Frank was so eager to catch a toad on the road that he jumped out of the car before it stopped.

The season officially opened – a traditional high point every year – when Denny climbed the 30 foot flagpole and replaced the broken halyard. The flag waved protectively above our fortress and we glowed with pride. Then we scattered to the different activities – beach combing, sailing, clamming, kite flying, water skiing, swimming, or basking in the sun with the NY Times crossword puzzle. At the end of one whole leisurely day we knew it was too tranquil to last. About 5 in the afternoon we gathered on the front deck to watch the sunset and review the events of the day. The teenagers busied themselves with a telescope and some binoculars scanning the beach, It seemed a cold and scientific appraisal of the magnificent blazing colors. A couple of minutes later when the teenagers raced down to the beach we realized what the objects of their scrutiny had really been. ~~Some comely young girls on the beach.~~ Their technique, if brash, was definitely effective and thus Pam and Gunilla and Eileen etc, the comely young ladies came into our lives. Just stalking one's prey is not enough for a really dedicated hunter. To know the thrill of complete capture a sport needs equipment like

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telephones and automobiles. The rest of the summer is somehow a blur of our teenage boys involved in a tumbling triangle of girls, telephones and cars. Although the boys monopolized our automobiles they were not willing to transport the laundry or groceries between dates. Especially since we stayed home and took their phone messages. Happily the girls had marvelous names like Sandy and Heather which rang appropriately along the dunes. But a certain ethical consideration had to be faced: the cars were ours outright but the telephone was technically only 1/8 our property. I can't and don't want to imagine what the other seven telephone parties thought was going on at our house. We tried to limit the telephone use but it was a pretty sticky proposition. Even though our appropriating the phone was inconsiderate to outsiders it was almost more so to us insiders. Teenagers seem incapable of using that instrument without clandestine maneuvers. The phone was mounted on the wall between our bedroom and the bathroom, either of which could be adapted as a telephone booth. Getting dressed requires the skill of a circus acrobat, shoving a boy from one room to the other avoiding tripping over the wires and still maintaining the desired sound proofing.

However the real prize of the summer was the billiard table which Tom found in a hidden wall compartment in the upstairs dormitory. How long it had lain fallow there I wouldn't know, but we felt terribly smug discovering it just as family billiards came back into style. The moths and mice had eaten their way through the green felt playing surface and the net pockets. But a bit of ingenuity had a lively pool game under way in no time with several trunk drawers strategically placed on the floor to catch balls. The ramifications of this windfall proved stupefying. The boys promised they had not posted official notices about the pool table but I don't know how else the word could have gotten around so fast. The teenage overflow from the crowded pool table and front porch soon pre-empted the living room for a refreshment canteen (beer, pop, cigarettes and ice cream) as well as the dining room where the monopoly game could be spread out properly. For a while (there) we felt that divine providence had singled us out to entertain, quench the thirst of, and feed the entire Truro population from the age of 15 through 19. (The pool games went on day and night until we got wise and occasional relief by unscrewing the light bulbs on the porch.)

After a lovely week together the Springers left on Saturday morning. We were ahead in the running bridge game but I don't think they went away in anger. With precise timing and teamwork we stripped the beds, washed and dried everything and had all back in order by the time Ruth Bob and Sally Westheimer (aged 17) arrived the same Noon. I think Chris Crawford, a sixteen year old friend of John's appeared from Cotuit about this time, too. He was such a self contained, self possessed, self sufficient paragon, supplying his own sleeping bag and towel that we entered him on the positive side of the ledger. We also had regular visits from the Hoffheimers next door for their ration of our well water and ice, which doesn't say much for their water. We also had a visit from the Feingolds who had rented our house last year and hoped we wouldn't return in August next year

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so they could have the house back. Another former tenant, Mrs. Cappers wanted to meet us in person and fill us in on the background and history of our house. David Leith, a friend of Tom's, had a day off from his job as camp counselor in New Hampshire and dropped in to spend the day with us. We also had two boys who dropped out of the house after spending the night with us, but we didn't get the whole story until some weeks later. I think it went like this: our teen-age contingent had met Roger and Gregory at a beach party, where some overindulgence in beer had left them objects of pity. The only humanitarian road open to them was the one back to our house where they were given sympathy and beds. The next morning they jumped out the second floor windows before any nosy parents could find them. Apparently they ran down the hill, climbed back up the steps and joined us for lunch, an invitation having been arranged by our boys. Ruth Bob and Sally survived a week with us and the one teen-age girl in the midst of a pack of boys added a new dimension and spice to the household

Herby Janet and Ann Hoffheimer breezed in and out for an afternoon's swim and sail on our beach. At this juncture the visitations seemed to gather momentum. Charles and I had thought we'd like to take a side trip by ourselves to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. We soon abandoned this scheme, for how could we leave all these guests much less (even) stay at home by ourselves. As the Robert Westheimers left, Charles' mother-in-law, Bando arrived, so our roster included almost every age from 7 to 70. Since the desire (need) for respectable surroundings runs in almost direct proportion to the age figure, we put in a lot of work in her honor cleaning up and beautifying the cottage, even unto flower arrangements. ~~About an hour after Bando had unpacked her suitcases, a long-distance all came from my father and his second wife to say they wouldn't be arriving this week after all.~~

Easy come easy go was true of most of our guests, but to a point Phil Trounstone – another 16 year old – was no mean feat. John and Reppy drove to Hyannis, a mere 35 miles, to meet Phil at Noon at the Nantucket Ferry. Transporting oneself from Wallingford Connecticut to Truro via Nantucket is hardly the bee-line route, but if a friend's father offers you a ride in his private plane, it's the best and only way. The reasoning behind all this is a great example of teen-age logic. Meanwhile back at the establishment the phone was behaving very strangely. Although it rang, only two words could be heard on the receiver and then it would go dead. This made it ring a great deal for it takes a lot of calls to try to finish a conversation with only two words per call. About one o'clock a neighbor came with the redundant information that our phone was out of order, that John had called from Hyannis on their phone to report that he could not find Phil, that he had 10 cents to last him until 6pm when the next Nantucket Ferry was due, and that Reppie had just decided he had a dislocated shoulder and was hitchhiking to Provincetown to see Dr. Hebert.

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At the same time the Truro Sheriff, whom we'd never been privileged to meet before, drove up with the emergency light flashing and delivered a message from Phil who had read the ferry schedule incorrectly, but didn't want us to worry – he'd be along soon. The day had a happy ending about 11pm when we ate the last of 16 lobsters which we had been cooking to order since 6 o'clock – as the various factions returned from Provincetown Hyannis and way points.

Wanting to give credit where credit is due, it seems fitting to explode loud salvos of praise for Diane Lundin, the college girl who accompanied us as “baby sitter” and ended up playing the role of general factotum. She was as intelligent as she was attractive and especially starred in the art of getting along with everybody in every circumstance at all times, which is a lot more than I can say for myself. Having grown up with only one older sister, Diane might very well have panicked at the sheer numbers with whom she was thrown. No so Diane, who was great building sandcastles with the younger generation, taking walks with my mother or being a sounding board for the teenagers. She even thanked us for the privilege of the temporary brothers and sisters. (We were all very excited one evening when Diane announced she had a date with a German boy she had met at the beach. At 9 pm as the clock was striking, we heard a bell ring at the front door. We deduced that with typical Teutonic thoroughness Siegfried had brought along his own doorbell – just in case. In the light of the next morning it turned out that we'd just been unobservant and the bell had been there the whole time.)

Late in August, Mike the son of one of our friends who was working in Boston called to say he'd be arriving Friday evening about 6. The weather had been quite good all summer – very little rain; the only real drought had been in Diane's social life. But I didn't think that was responsible for Diane & Mike's long after-dark walks on the cold windy beach, or the hot sunny excursions over the sand dunes. Having contended with the teen-age shenanigans for weeks, we could recognize this as absolute love at first sight. We all had a lot of vicarious pleasure out of the week-end. Sunday night Mike announced that with a little juggling of schedules he ought to be able to make it back to Truro by Wednesday, even though he had to leave for Boston and his job at 6 am Monday. I was excused from fixing his breakfast as Diane had beaten me to the draw and volunteered for the early morning KP shift. Wednesday afternoon, as advertised, Mike reappeared and stayed to the bitter end of our summer in Truro, even to the final fare well wave.

The spiraling events of the summer indicated we were building up to a major climax and we were not disappointed. It started with a phone call at 1 in the morning, from –of all people – the Provincetown Police. Their first request was to speak with the pretty blond baby sitter, but since she was asleep they had to settle for “John Westheimer's mother.” The gist of affairs was that I was to come to Provincetown immediately and identify my son, who was being detained there. Or else there might be some big trouble I was told. Snatching Tom away from his date – they were talking in the living room – I pressed him into father

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substitute service to drive the 11 miles into Provincetown, Charles being away, natch, on business business. Having no clue as to the reason for John's visit in the P'town jail, as we drove along we speculated as to the offense. Then Tom gloated over the fact that his younger brother had "arrived" – that is to say been jailed – before he had known such joys. Fervently I pleaded with Tom to maintain complete silence during negotiations: no comments and certainly no laughter. After a twenty minute drive, I composed myself and marched down the steps into the basement jail. There sat three sorry looking sixteen year old boys huddled on the bench like see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil. I was the first to crack up and then everybody started roaring in laughter including the arresting officer, the lieutenant behind the desk and the three culprits: John Reppy and Phil. The story came out in spurts: John had been stopped by officer Christopher for car theft and brought back to the police station for questioning. The same policeman associated the automobile with the pretty blond Diane who had driven our two young daughters to Provincetown early in the evening, blinked her eyes and asked his permission to park in a no-parking zone. He was obviously disappointed when later on the same night the same car was not bearing the same girl. The driver did not have the legally required car registration with him and ended up a victim of circumstance. So, we haven't met the entire law enforcement staff on Cape Cod , but we're getting close.

Flashbacks of our Cape Cod retreat come and go, as have most of the inhabitants and transients, moving so rapidly it's almost impossible to make a real inventory. If any of you should happen to be in the vicinity this summer, I regret to say we won't be in residence – we're giving it back to the Feingolds.