



My Thanksgiving in Little Compton

I raced past the pastures and farms that lead out to Sakonnet Point and the ocean, knowing there was no prettier drive anywhere.

I'd left Baltimore early in the morning in my old Jaguar sedan, which was performing admirably (knock on the walnut dash), and now under a darkening royal blue sky I no longer chewed upon the guilt of not spending Thanksgiving with my family back in Virginia, but pressed on with a mindless glee toward Little Compton and the expansive compound of my girlfriend's family.

There was Bonnie, willowy in her bell bottoms, and there was her scrawny sister, Suki, and her preppy brother, Rex, and their handsome mother and father.

I put the special chipotle cranberry sauce I'd made before leaving Baltimore into the fridge and Bonnie and I took a walk to the beach with her sister.

Leaving the house, her brother said, "What kind of car is that anyway?"

"It's a Jaguar," I said. "Mark Nine." I'd bought it used for \$600 when I was in high school, but no need to divulge that.

I'd brought a borrowed Canon camera and asked Suki to take few pictures of Bonnie and me.

"This is a pretty fancy camera," commented Suki.

Her parents seemed to have forgotten that although I attended college at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, I was not studying to be a doctor. Rather, my interests were writing and acting. I reminded them I'd spent the summer doing summer stock just down the road at the Carriage House Theatre.

"Right-o" said Mr. Fort.

I'd met Bonnie in June at Wilbur's General Store. She was buying chicken salad.

"Is it good?" I asked her.

"It's the best," she said.

Then I saw her at the beach. Heart attack!

Bonnie went to Brown in Providence and we bounced back and forth a few times after school started.

I spoke of George McGovern, whom I'd just voted for in my first eligibility, against Nixon, and how the Vietnam War had to end. "So much stupid, needless death!"

After dinner, I read a little story I'd written about meeting

Bonnie at Wilbur's then at the beach. Mrs. Fort complained about the annoying sticky door at the foot of the back stairs leading up to the bedrooms and the popping sound it made.

First thing in the morning, I grabbed a tube of Door-Ease out of my toolbox and took care of the sticky door and its popping sound.

At lunch I passed around my cranberry sauce. Suki said, "What's this?"

"Cranberry sauce," I said. "It has a little kick. You'll like it."

The family talked about their upcoming Christmas trip to Bermuda.

I excused myself and went up the backstairs to my room to get a ceramic bulldog I wanted to give to her mother and father. The family had strong Yale ties and when I came back down through the door that no longer made a popping sound Mrs. Fort was talking.

"I just don't like him, Bonnie. That car he drives is so ostentatious and —"

"Making us listen to that story," said Suki.

"He always needs to be the center of attention," said Rex.

"He's arrogant," said Mrs. Fort. "He thinks he's smarter than everyone else. And why isn't he having Thanksgiving with his own family? Doesn't he have a family? Who are they, anyway?"

I waited for Bonnie to say something in my defense. Nothing came. I drew a deep breath and walked into the dining room.

"I'm going to be leaving now," I said, and I handed the little bulldog to Mr. Fort. "This is for you. Thank you for not speaking ill of me."

He looked down at the table, nodding his head. He died the following Christmas. Mrs. Fort lived on another 30 years. Rex fatally contacted a tree skiing Gstaad, and Suki married a wealthy Mexican avocado grower.

Bonnie ... Bonnie and I still enjoy swimming in Little Compton whenever possible. It's taken us awhile to understand each other, but we've persisted and have largely found it a worthy effort. Regular pilgrims we are, I suppose.

— Charles Pinning, an occasional contributor, lives in Providence.