

# How I livened up dull Newport winter

**A**nother grey winter day in Newport before the bridge and the good Saturday morning cartoons and shows were over. Might as well grab the basketball and head down to the Ferguses'.

The Ferguses lived two doors down and had a backboard mounted on their garage. I bounced my ball sullenly down the sidewalk, bounced it along-side their house, arrived at the cement apron in front of the garage and took a shot.

Bwong — off the rim, ran, grabbed it, hook shot from the corner ... Swish! Backward shot off the backboard ... miss ... grabbed it, turnaround jumper ... bwong ... layup — Good!

Bounce-bounce-bounce-bounce ... Cousy sets, shoots ... It's Good! Mrs. Fergus tapped on the kitchen window and smiled.

And on it went with the great Bob Cousy ... Oscar Robertson ... Bill Russell. More often than it should have, the ball bounced off the rim, hitting the broken cement spot and caromed sideways, triggering a lunge to the sidelines, a miracle save and then the hook ... Nooo! But he was fouled!

After lunch I banged a tennis ball up against our garage door. It was uncanny how often, without trying, I could hit the raised strip in the middle where the two doors overlapped, the ball ricocheting into our hedge on one side, or into the neighbor's driveway on the other.

Jayne, a woman with Down Syndrome who lived next door, watched me from her living room

window and every time the ball hit the center strip and went flying, she clapped.

I let my wooden racquet drop straight down on the top edge of the head and it bounced back up. I grabbed it and did that a few times. Jayne clapped.

I went into the house and down into the cellar where I played with the road racing set I'd gotten for Christmas a year ago. Bored after 10 minutes, I imagined shooting the BB gun at a target. The gun had been confiscated over the summer because I took a potshot at Piper Haynes, the dog next door. Piper piped and Mrs. Haynes, who was hanging clothes, caught me pulling the barrel in through the cellar window.

I went up to my room and handled my baseball trophies. I cruised into my older brother's room and examined the top of his bureau and sniffed his bottle of Royall Lyme aftershave. I peered inside his top desk drawer. I grabbed a couple of his Mad magazines and took them into my room where I lay down on my bed and read them. Afterward, I returned the magazines to his room and put them precisely as they had been in the rack next to his bed.

I walked over to the window next to his desk and looked into the backyard. I turned to the bookshelf above his desk. I touched the spines of "Animal Farm," "House of Mirth," and "Bleak House."

On the top shelf of the bookcase, up near the ceiling, was a blue Maxwell House coffee can.

Standing precariously on his swivel chair, I stepped up onto the desk and reached for it. Barely within my grasp, I pulled the can forward and it tumbled over. The plastic top popped off and I shrieked, instinctively dropping my head as a putrid, lumpy liquid poured over me.

My mother rushed in, followed by my brother.

"What have you done?" screamed my mother.

"Moron!" yelled my brother.

"What is all of this?" demanded my mother.

"It's a pregnant rabbit I dissected in biology class," said my brother.

"What? The smell!" cried my mother.

"It was in formaldehyde," said my brother.

My mother rocketed into the far reaches of incredulity. "Why did you bring it home? Why did you have it up there?"

"What difference does it make? It belongs to me! It's mine!" yelled my brother.

Yanking me by the arm, my mother dragged me into the bathroom. She turned on the shower. "Get undressed," she said disgustedly.

"Teach you to snoop around my room, dorkoid!" shouted my brother.

Let me tell you, I looked like hell, I smelled like hell, but inside I was laughing and happy, but I didn't dare show it. Finally — some excitement around this place!

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