



### Moving to Coventry in 1939

#### Fond Memories of Coventry in the Early 1940s

When I was nine, my father made yet another momentous decision. We had already moved 6 times and we were four children. But there was a war in Europe and Dad needed to help. He actually volunteered to serve but was rejected on the grounds that he had too many children.

At the time, we lived in Ashton, RI, on Railroad Avenue at the bottom of several streets of brick row-houses built for factory employees. All houses were exactly alike except that the next block would have a flipped floor plan. All children played on the sidewalk. Oh, to have had roller blades in those days. What a deadly menace we would have been.

As soon as school let out in 1939, we moved to Coventry, CT. We had our own house with acres of land and neighbors so far away that we could not see them. With some rules and instructions, we were let loose: Bobby was 7, Hazel was 5 and Teddy was 3.

Our house had a separate garage, a well at the foot of the hill in the back yard and a stream. My father's first order of business was to build an outhouse behind the garage and then to block the stream creating a swimming hole for us. I suppose it was cold, but we certainly didn't notice. As it was summer, the well soon dried up.

By then we had met Mrs. Hansen from whom we had bought our new and single-family house. She was a great lady with a perfect house, at least to us. That meant lovely things and everything in its place. Her house, much like ours and with only one person living in it (WOW!) was several hundred feet to our west through a wooded patch.

We could use the stream for drinking and cooking and except for night-time the outhouse for the necessities, but Mother needed water for laundry. So, Mrs. Hansen advised us to go to the lake like everyone else to get our laundry water.

When Dad arrived from work at night, we children would all pile into his car (having a car was most unusual in those days but our father always had one) and drive the 2 miles or so to Lake Wangumbaug. First we'd all have a swim, lathered up with shampoo for our hair, and then we'd find some clear water, fill the pails and take the lake water home to Mother.

We loved our freedom and had a lot of it as our mother was expecting her 5th child. We were all curious and afraid of nothing as we had never been told to be afraid. We all knew the rules... never talk to a stranger, never get into a strange car etc. But given the times and location those possibilities never presented themselves.

We could roam the woods as we wished providing we ate only blue berries and nothing red and we ate only purple grapes and nothing green. We were warned against poison sumac and three-leafed ivy. We had to think about the trees we climbed: could we get down after we climbed up?

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## Birthplace of Nathan Hale

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We had a really wonderful summer. From living on a sidewalk, we had so many places to go that the days were never long enough. This was one place that we were going to like. Little did we know that we would live there until 1946.

Respectfully submitted, Jean Thibault Castagno

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