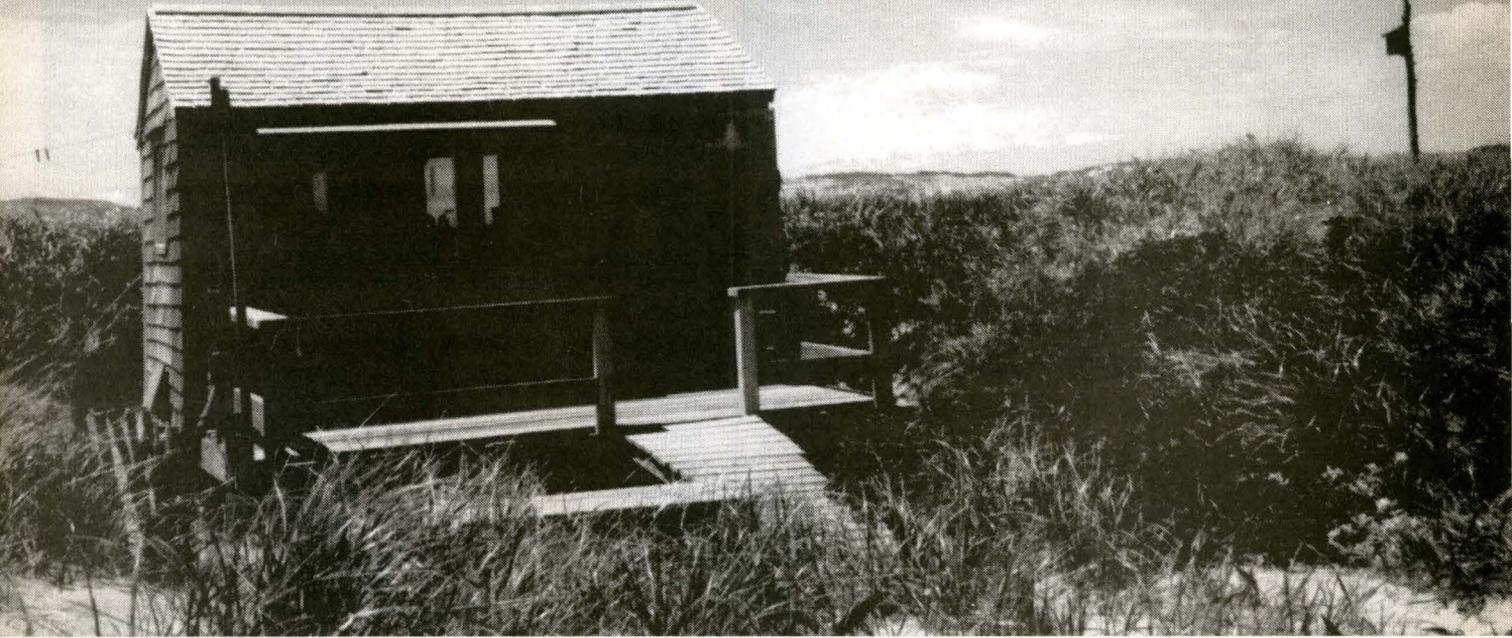


With Summer bubbling over, here in town. Jan Kelly ventures to the edge of the land, seeking the restorative calm of the dunes and another world of thoughts and day-dreams.



AWAY IN THE DUNES

ADRIFT TO YOURSELF

By Jan Kelly

IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO STAY IN EITHER BORIS, EUPHORIA, THALASSA OR ZARA THE FOUR DUNE SHACKS OF PEAKED HILL TRUST. I WAS GIFTED WITH A STAY AT THALASSA AND WOULD LIKE TO SHARE THE EXPERIENCE WITH YOU

Thalassa was once a coast guard refuge stocked with food, water and fuel for those stranded by shipwreck. When more modern methods solved the problem, these huts or shacks were no longer needed—Helen Valentine's father purchased the shack for \$40. His family enjoyed their Sundays and holidays there for years. When their tenure ended, he sold it to Hazel Hawthorne for \$75 and Hazel maintained it until age prevented her and thus gave Thalassa to Peaked Hill Trust. Thalassa is a Greek word meaning "of the sea."

When you first arrive at your one-room shack, by the trust's vehicle or on foot, you unpack and get everything in order: books, writing materials, bedding and food. The water has been pumped for you. Your duty is to refill what you use. Then you set out to accomplish all the activities you have planned and packed for with

great care. Always to your non-surprise you seem to do little; read, sleep, swim, dream, day-dream, sleep some more. What you do mostly is come back to yourself calm your waters and let the sand settle just like the sea around you. Walking the beach, viewing the nature around you, well, absorbing it mostly—quietly absorbing.

Thalassa has two look out chairs. No finer view, no reason to do anything else. And there is a stone bird bath dedicated to Hazel Hawthorne who spent so much of her life on the dunes and made it possible for us to be able to spend that precious time also. There are tree swallow boxes around you too. And they are very busy this time of year. New moon in June was my stay...mating everywhere and plants just beginning to flower. The tree swallows were particularly busy and close to you in bird houses begun by Charlie Schmidt so long and now maintained and built by those passionate for the dunes. Charlie Schmidt lived in a triple-decker shack, here, in the 60's. He made his own wine out, played trumpet loud and fierce to ward off the sightseeing plane which disturbed his hermit life. Charlie became so involved with the tree swallows that he was invited to Switzerland by Conrad Lorenz (Austrian zoologist credited with identifying the behavior of imprinting in animals and the theory of instinct.) to read the paper



he'd written on tree swallows. Charlie spent his springtime as an anxious midwife. First greeting the swallow's return, supplying housing for his avian family and then patiently waiting through their cycle. They mate for three days, lay 7-8 eggs two weeks on the nest unto hatching and two weeks to fledgling. I remember Charlie telling of the first successful mating. The tears of a curmudgeon can have such an effect on you, sealed to your memory. When Charlie died, his shack was destroyed. Too bad, it was it's own museum.

Musing in that lookout chair, I see the fog bank has come in quickly and all consuming. You see no ocean. It all looks more like mountains. It's eerie to hear the waves, the draggers and whale watching boats and to see only grayness. New mood the tides the is changing with vigor spring and neap tides, highest and lowest of the year. It has its own music; there is sound but no sight. The sand settles down each wave, as your thoughts do within you.

A lowering sun, time to walk the shore, pumice the feet and see what changes these big tides have caused at the wrack line. On the path June bugs lie belly up bequeating heaven. They weren't here in May and won't be here in July. They are June bugs. They fade daily.

So much to discover and study on a beach. The wind turned east. The fog bank slips silently off, and the sandbars bare themselves to you. It reminds you how easily 3500 shipwrecks could happen from the Peaked Hill Bars to Chatham. No sonar, nor radar. Only a plumb line to guide you. The loud and hushing sounds of the waves, crashing and then receding, the force they present you with sets you humble and careful. Not how you felt perched above it all, viewing. The water is cold and the waves garb at you. A short swim this day. The water temperature and East wind remind you of a cool night coming and thinking of fleece, fleece, wool and more fleece. A loon, heavy-winged, flies into the east wind determined.

You wonder why there is so much manufactured detritus here. Birthday balloons, water jugs, oil bottles. Will we ever learn how destructive this is? Or did we just unlearn? The plastic bait bags released from destroyed lobster traps seem the only legitimate plastic found on the beach. I heard a tern call. I must be near a nest. Suddenly, the male swoops from out of view to exactly in my view. The female silences. The male arches his wings menacingly, demanding my departure. I speak low and softly to him and depart. Just one more peek like Orpheus and Mr. Tern is arching again. He flies up at me and over me and I swing the bait bag over



my head, apologize and head home to cozy Thalassa. It's not good to be disrespectful.

A delicious, long heavy sleep is exchanged for brilliant and warming sunlight from the east another full day at Thalassa. Gift of gifts and you can't wait to get started. I release a wood bee who spent the night on the window ledge. Large and buzzy noisy, they drill perfectly round holes on the undersides of the railings. That keeps the water out of their nests. They're harmless and keep you company. There are mice tracks all round the shack and on the path to the beautiful dory-shaped and hygienic outhouse designed by Bill Fitts. A song sparrow "Strikes up the band" with his call. The tree sparrows are chirping and wildly amorous. The day passes in lazitude and random thoughts, some creative, some nostalgic, some philosophical...all restorative.

Two hours before sunset the daily ballet begins. Six loons are choreographed diving and rising, swimming eastward. Herring gulls and black backs are dancing in and out of the crashed waves, searching for tidbits. The swallows are out of their boxes hunting insects. A sulphur butterfly, by my feet, is plucked by a swallow. It all seems such a social, anti-social game. The two black heads emerge, same time as yesterday. Two seals cavort and dive and drift. They seem more interested in each other at the moment. They stay between the gull and the loons. A tern flies over them, a slippery sand lance in his beak intended for his mate on the nest. What would it be like to be any one of them?

The sun is near setting. The gulls arise and fly to the bay for the evening. The Towee is calling. The song sparrow ends his day in joyful song. The peepers being to call. And now the night. All the unseen will emerge. The nocturnal shift takes over the dunes and you will hear more than you see. Some clues in the morning will let you speculate. And Thalassa hold you for another night of peace and dreams.

CORRECTION: In my last article on the poetry reading of Ruth Littlefield and Mary Oliver at the Red Inn to benefit the Portuguese Festival, the words *tough* and *whimsical* were to go with the paragraph before, commenting on Ruth Littlefield's poem about being children in the movie theater banging their feet and then quieting to the signal of lights on. It did not refer to Mary Oliver. That sentence should have been "Mary Oliver sat on the floor among us," only. Sorry Mary, and thanks to P'Town Magazine for this correction.