

The Small Town Life

BY JACI CONRY

If you told me as a teenager that I would live as an adult in the same town where I grew up, I would never have believed it. Back then I couldn't wait to leave Cape Cod—it felt confining and way too familiar.

I went to college in Rhode Island and lived in Boston after graduation. Yet, as the years passed, I was drawn back to Falmouth. When the chance arose 12 years ago to work as an editor on the Cape, I leapt. The job didn't last long, but I have never regretted the move back home.

Falmouth, with its sparkling coastline and bucolic downtown, is a beautiful place. But it's not the physical attributes that I find most appealing, it's the intangible sense of belonging I feel here. Around almost every corner is a place woven into the fabric of my youth. On any given day, I may drive by my elementary school, the waterfront restaurant where I worked for seven summers, the orthodontist I dreaded going to in junior high.

I have friends who wonder what it's like to live as an adult in the small town where I grew up. I tell them I feel connected to the community. Here, my family and I are part of something bigger than ourselves. Falmouth has a strong school system, hard-working business owners, residents who readily help neighbors during a crisis.

My children will grow up in ways similar to mine—they'll have their own struggles, their own paths to forge, but I feel secure knowing I have a deep understanding of the territory. My former tennis coach now teaches my son the game, and



our pediatrician's office is the one I went to as a child. Thirty years later, the prize drawer is still located in the same spot under the orange Formica counter. Two friends who were pivotal to me at different points growing up live in our neighborhood. While I'd grown apart from both of them, reconnecting now is both familiar and new. I have old photos of us as carefree kids tucked in dusty albums; getting older is easier to embrace when I can recall these

younger versions of ourselves.

Living here isn't all about looking back. Since we became parents seven years ago, my husband and I have met and forged many close bonds with other families. I enjoy watching my hometown evolve as my generation becomes more involved in its stewardship. A high school classmate of mine was just elected to the Board of Selectmen; others are local doctors, builders, and teachers.

Living among people who've

known me my whole life is not without its awkward moments, like when I run into the boyfriend I had when I was 18. As comfortable as I am with my adult self, occasionally I'll revert for a flash to adolescence as I did when I realized the tough girl who tortured me in seventh grade was the mother of a child in my son's preschool.

Sometimes I don't feel like catching up and I avoid making small talk in the grocery store or at the gym. Usually, though, I'm happy to encounter familiar faces. Recently, a friend, a young mother, lost a long battle with cancer. I felt a sense of unity when my path crossed with others who echoed my sadness. We shared hugs and knowing looks that seemed to say: "We are in this together."

When two Falmouth High School hockey players were killed in a car accident in December, the tragically bonded residents. For the boys' wakes, thousands waited in line in the rain to express their sympathy. Before the funerals, the town's student athletes solemnly stood in rows in front of the church to symbolize their solidarity. I've never felt more proud of my hometown.

There's a 19th-century mansion called Highfield Hall in town. When I was a teenager it was derelict. Kids partied behind the abandoned structure. The broken windows and vast empty rooms spooked me. It was saved from demolition in the late 1990s and a decade later, just as the estate was restored to its original splendor, my husband and I were married there. My children now participate in activities on the property.

I was offered a job in New York City years ago. Sometimes, I wonder how my career would have turned out if I had taken the opportunity. But as I recently watched my kids running around Highfield's rolling lawn, it struck me that I couldn't imagine my life anywhere but Falmouth.

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