

Monticello Memories  
by Allen Kurtz

It is a time proven aphorism that when you're a kid, the school year seems interminably long and the summer endless.

Never was this truer than the summers spent from 1958 through 1963 at Pine Grove, a bungalow colony in Monticello, New York. In that lazy late Eisenhower era year of 1958 I was all of 10 years old. During that last hopeful Kennedy Presidency "New Frontier" summer of 1963 I was 15, a few months short of my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. I did a great deal of growing up there, transiting uneasily and uncomfortably from childhood to teenager. My love of the outdoors, of mountains, of a life away from the hustle and bustle of the city, all have their roots there. In many ways, the person I am today was forged there.

From the end of school in late June, to the day before Labor Day in September, I led a Tom Sawyer like existence, free to roam the fields and woods around Pine Grove and to play baseball for hours without end. Weeks, and sometimes the entire summer, would pass without even a glimpse of a television screen. In an era before computers, video games, MTV, and Walkman, my friends and I were thrown unto our own devices to entertain ourselves. And though we often complained, as kids frequently do, that we were bored, that we had nothing to do, and that "old man" Kazansky, the owner of Pine Grove should take some of the fortune [!] our parents were paying him to "fix up the darn place," the truth is we were rarely, if ever bored, and we were forever finding new things to do and new ways to have a good time.

All winter long, I would think of Pine Grove; covered with snow and with the wind whistling through its trees. Like malarial fever periodically returning and the sap rising in maple trees in early spring, each turn of a calendar page served to remind me that summer and Pine Grove was out there, somewhere in the murky distance, pulling at me, invading my thoughts with its ever-present siren call. When the calendar read June, I would begin counting down the days, growing increasingly restless and antsy. I never knew whether I was happier that the school year was finally ending or that the "real" year, the important part of the year was beginning. I suppose that they were one and the same and inseparable. I didn't need a fantasy world to escape to [even though I've always read and loved Science-Fiction and Fantasy], my fantasy world existed in actuality, just 90 miles away.

Even after the passage of four decades, Pine Grove is always with me. Rarely does a day go by when I am not reminded of it and something, a sight, a smell, a sound, a certain intensity of sunlight, will send me, as on a virtual time machine, rocketing back. The sound of my porch screen door slamming or the sirens and alarms of my town's volunteer fire department heard in the distance, the smell of pizza in a car [even though, to be precise, the particular event that evokes that memory occurred in the summer of 1957 at another bungalow colony in Woodbourne] or meat barbecuing on a charcoal grill, a Japanese Beetle buzzing across my lawn, the new start freshness in the air of an early suburban or campground morning, a particular slant of light through the trees while hiking, being stuck inside on warm rainy summer days, the increasing coolness of August nights, even the smell of mildew when

entering a musty, stale room are among the million and one other things that bring me unfailingly and instantly back. As Ebenezer Scrooge says to the Ghost of Christmas Past in A Christmas Carol after she takes him to his boyhood school and asks him whether he can recollect the way: "Remember it?..... I can walk it blindfold," so can I see every inch, every building and tree of Pine Grove. My brother Ellery once told me that one of the techniques he uses to fall asleep at night is to imagine himself walking out the front door of our bungalow, hearing that screen door slam, turning left and walking down the flagstone path, going by the Casino and walking into the field towards the swimming pool. As a relaxing visualization technique, it is a method that I have found rarely fails.

Though the social history of the Catskill Mountains famous "Borsht Belt" hotels such as the Concord, Grossingers, Kutchers, and Browns have seemingly been well chronicled, a similar, definite history of the bungalow colony, catering to those young working class parents seeking to find something, anything, for their rambunctious young children to do for a longer period of time than the weekend or one or two week stretch typical of the more well known resort hotels, has not. For these harried parents, the thought of a summer to be spent in a small, oppressively hot walk up apartment could not compare to the space, fresh air and relative coolness of "the mountains." To go away meant sacrifice; not only in the additional hard earned money entailed in keeping what were essentially two residences, but also in the possible loss of a job worked at by the woman of the house during the winter months. On a personal, intimate level, it meant spouses separated from each other during the workweek, and fathers likewise separated from their children. In a small bungalow, privacy was almost non-existent. Only as an adult, a husband and a father myself, have I begun to appreciate the sacrifices that my parents made for my brother Ellery and me during those years. The thousands of Jewish families, mostly from Brooklyn, occasionally from the Bronx, and less commonly from Queens and Manhattan, who took their kids away for a month or the entire summer, were the bedrock and a large part of the economic engine that drove the entire Catskill region.

In actuality, Pine Grove was not the first place my parents had rented for the summer. When I was an infant, they had rented a bungalow in Rockaway Beach, Queens, seeking out its refreshing ocean breezes. For my Dad and Grandfather [my Grandparents were there too], traveling there each night meant a long subway ride and a trip over the Howard Beach causeway on the Long Island Railroad's Rockaway branch.

During the summers of 1954 and 1955, my folks rented a room for a few short weeks at Sobel's, a rooming house with a few bungalows on Revonah Hill Road in Liberty, New York. The rest of the summer was spent at the P.S. 64 day camp on Walton Avenue. Once, Mr. Sobel himself drove us from Elliot Place in the Bronx to Liberty. We made the trip in his black, late 1940s sedan. New Route 17, the Quickway, hadn't been completed as of yet and the trip, made in the pouring rain, seemed to take forever as we climbed the hills and stopped at the traffic lights that caused perennial backups and bottlenecks on old Route 17 in Bloomingburgh and Wurtsboro. Our room was upstairs, with a shared bathroom at the end of the hall. The community kitchen, shared by all renting rooms, was downstairs. A wrap around porch was a great place to play on rainy days. Sobel's was surrounded by farms, and it was an endless source of amazement for a city boy like me to wake up each morning, look out the

window and sees real live cows munching on real grass, right outside that window and seemingly close enough to touch. For me, though, the absolute highlight of Sobel's was its close proximity to a branch of the Erie Railroad. Mine was perhaps the last generation to be universally fascinated with trains: at the very dawn of the Interstate Highway and jet ages, a train whistle in the distance was magic, and had the power to evoke images of far off vistas and exotic places and certainly was far more exciting than yet another ride on New York City's subways. I had been bitten badly by the railroad bug: in those days, there was just no way I could ever get enough of trains and railroads to keep me satisfied. If I ran up the hill behind the house, there was one spot from which I could see the steady passage of long Erie freight trains passing through a dip in the hills in the distance. I would first hear their whistles from miles off, echoing and reverberating through the hills and valleys, giving me plenty of warning to drop whatever I was doing and sprint excitedly up the hill. Once, after hearing a train's approach, I even managed to drag my father down Revonah Hill Road to the roadway over the railroad cut just as a train roared loudly and scarily beneath us.

On another occasion, the four of us, Mom, Dad, Ellery and I had hiked into the town of Liberty. On our way back it started to rain; a rain that soon turned into a summer downpour. By the time we finally made it back to our room, we were all drenched; our clothes soaked through. Ellery and I were quickly put to bed to warm up and I recall lying in bed looking at the baseball cards we had gotten that day. Only six years old during the summer of 1954, I don't have many other memories of Sobel's: there is a fleeting image of going raspberry picking with my Grandmother, another of being allowed to fire an older boy's BB gun, still another of catching grasshoppers and putting them in a jar, and yet another of hearing about a very bad truck accident on Main Street in Liberty.

In the early 1990s, on one of the many summer occasions that Mom and Dad came north from Florida to see their grandchildren, all of us, Mom, Dad, my wife Linda, my three kids, Gillian, Brian, Ethan, and myself, took a ride to Liberty in the family minivan [a far cry from Mr. Sobel's sedan!] to see if we could locate Revonah Hill Road and the house outside of town. Though 40 years had passed, it was still there, right where we had left it, and immediately recognizable. I was shocked by how small it seemed. Amazingly, it now seemed to be a single family dwelling, leaving us to shake our heads and wonder how so many people had lived there during those long gone summers. The Erie Railroad also was long gone, a railroad "fallen flag;" the place where I had seen that freight train rumbling beneath me now appeared to be occupied by a small apartment complex. That stretch of line itself had only been taken over by the Erie upon the failure of the even older New York, Ontario, and Western Railroad. Nevertheless, this trip down memory lane was well worth it: the house was still there, just as I had always pictured it and remembered it.

During the summer of 1957 the family, along with my Aunt Helen, Uncle Harold and cousins Linda and Mitchell, rented a bungalow for two weeks at Rosenbaum's, a small bungalow colony on Route 52 in Woodbourne, just down the road from Brown's Hotel. In many ways, this short stretch of summer served as a testing ground for the six summers to follow. My Mom, Sylvia, had always been close to her sister Helen, and the two husbands-in-law, Eugene and Harold, had likewise always gotten along. Linda and Mitchell were more like siblings to me than cousins. At home in the Bronx, they lived within 15 minutes of us, and

along with my grandparents, Leon and Frieda Wonchotsky, formed my extended family. Whenever the family went to the “mountains,” and the “country,” my grandparents were always nearby. But visiting at our respective apartments was one thing; living together for a fortnight or possibly longer, something else altogether. Thus, the two weeks spent at Rosenbaum’s. Our bungalow had a common entranceway, but our rooms were through a door to the left, and the Nadler’s through a door to the right. I have one enduring memory of that summer: a memory that always brings a smile to my face and that I recall practically weekly. On night we had gone to a restaurant in Loch Sheldrake and taken out pizza to be eaten back at our bungalow. When we entered the kitchen and turned on the light, a couple of mice scurried across the floor. In stereotypical fashion, my Mom and Aunt Helen were quickly up on the kitchen chairs and if not screaming, were certainly making sounds that indicated their unease and displeasure with the furry creatures who had dared to invade our space. To this day, the smell of pizza in a car never fails to revive the memory of that night. As pizza has always been a staple of our Friday night dinners, as it is all over suburbia, that memory has been revived countless times.

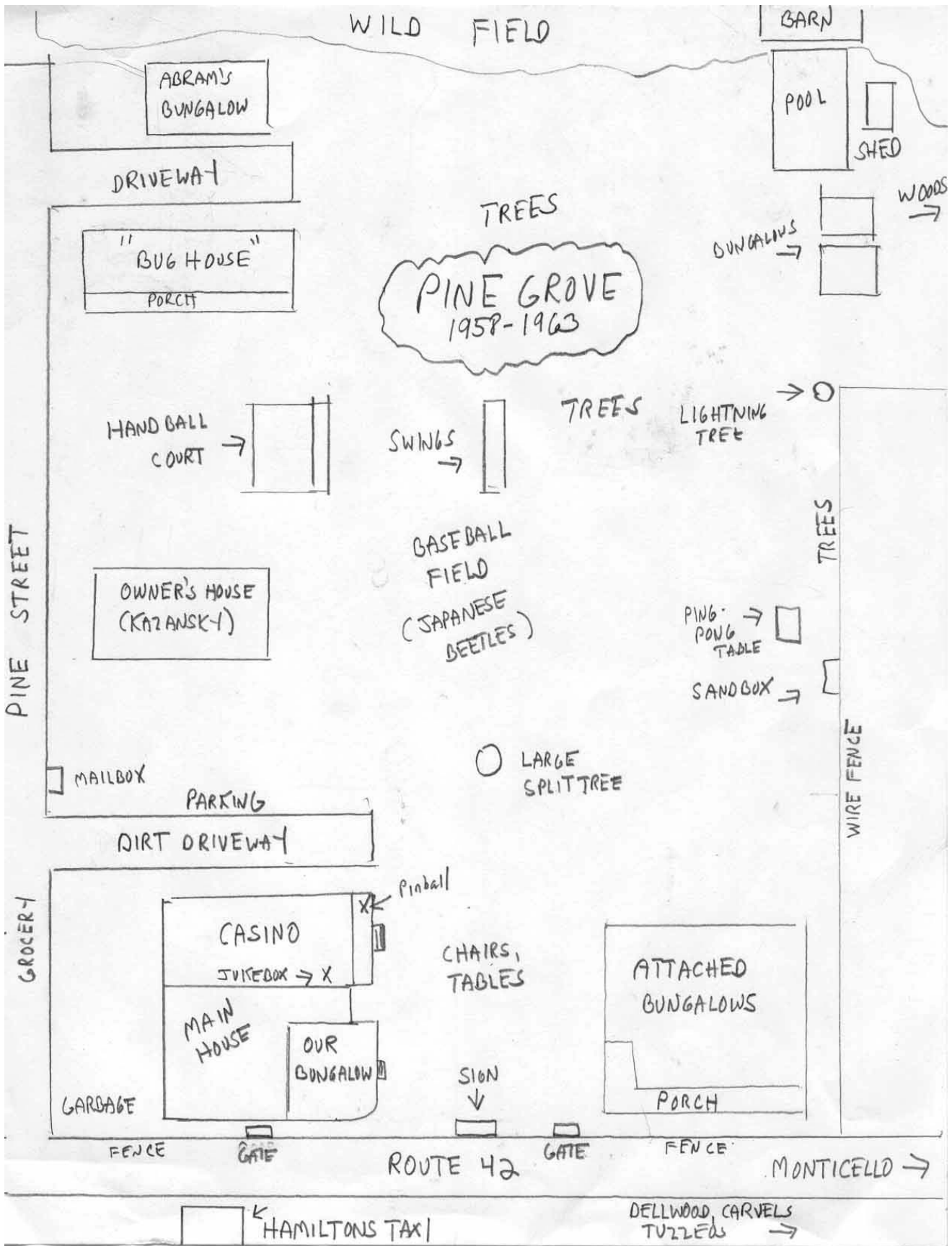
The trial run successful, Mom and Dad and Aunt Helen and Uncle Harold set out in the spring of 1958 to find a bungalow with a unique setting: one we could share but still left for privacy between the families. We looked at many places, but there are only a few that I remember: one in Bridgeville just south of Monticello, and one that was either on the road to Cold Spring or perhaps somewhere in the Monticello, Liberty, South Fallsburgh triangle. I have just a faint and vague vision of seeing Pine Grove, the place where we would spend the next six happy summers.

Pine Grove, owned by the Kazansky family, was on Route 42, Forestburgh/ Port Jervis Road, within walking distance of town. Its proximity to town was one of its attractions, as neither family would have access to a car during the week. It is hard to estimate from the distance of over forty years, but I would guess the bungalow colony was perhaps five to ten acres in size. It was made up of many different kinds of housing units, no two the same and in total there were maybe 50 families in residence. The main house, painted white and of two floors, contained our bungalow plus others on the ground floor, a second floor with other bungalows, a large room which we called the Casino with single rooms above it, and a community kitchen for the renters of those particular rooms. The design of the main house always led us to speculate that at one time Pine Grove was a small time hotel. We were never able to ascertain the truth of that speculation. Part of our bungalow had been the house’s porch before being enclosed, electrified and furnished with a gas stove and oven, running water and plumbing. Directly across from us was a one level house that also contained a number of attached bungalows. The space between was always full of chairs and tables, frequently filled with adults playing cards or women playing Mah-Jongg, my Mom’s favorite recreational activity. The rest of the housing units were towards the rear of the colony: two very traditional Catskill Mountains style bungalows near the swimming pool, one small house which was the home of the Abrams family during our entire stay at Pine Grove, and another rooming house of single rooms that we called “the bug house,” most probably a corruption of back house. Between the colony’s front and rear units was the Kazansky’s house, a one level ranch house that fronted on Pine Street.

The only other structures on the bungalow colony were an old gray barn and shed in the overgrown grassy field behind the swimming pool; structures that indicated that at one time the land we were living on had once been a farm. That barn was always a source of fascination to us: it still contained fragrant dried hay and a hayloft reached by ascending a narrow ladder. As we got older, it was the place we stashed our forbidden copies of Playboy Magazine, safely hidden under that very same hay. Some friend, usually one with an older brother always seemed to be able to get his hands on a used copy of Playboy. The barn was also a place of mystery and our avid imaginations were always conjuring up images of escaped murderers hiding out there during the day and awaiting nightfall to escape and wreck havoc and mayhem elsewhere. We were forever hearing strange noises emanating from the barn and tossing rocks at it hoping to scare the mysterious stranger away: what we would have done if someone had actually come out of the barn after us, I can't possible imagine.

Behind the barn was a wild, overgrown field and beyond the field were a few acres of woodland. It was in those woods that my love of hiking and the outdoors was born. We were forever walking its trails and building forts out of sticks and branches found on the ground. Those forts were central to the attack and defend plans of our endless water gun and water balloon wars. The woods also supplied the branches used in the brief period each summer given over to making bows and arrows.

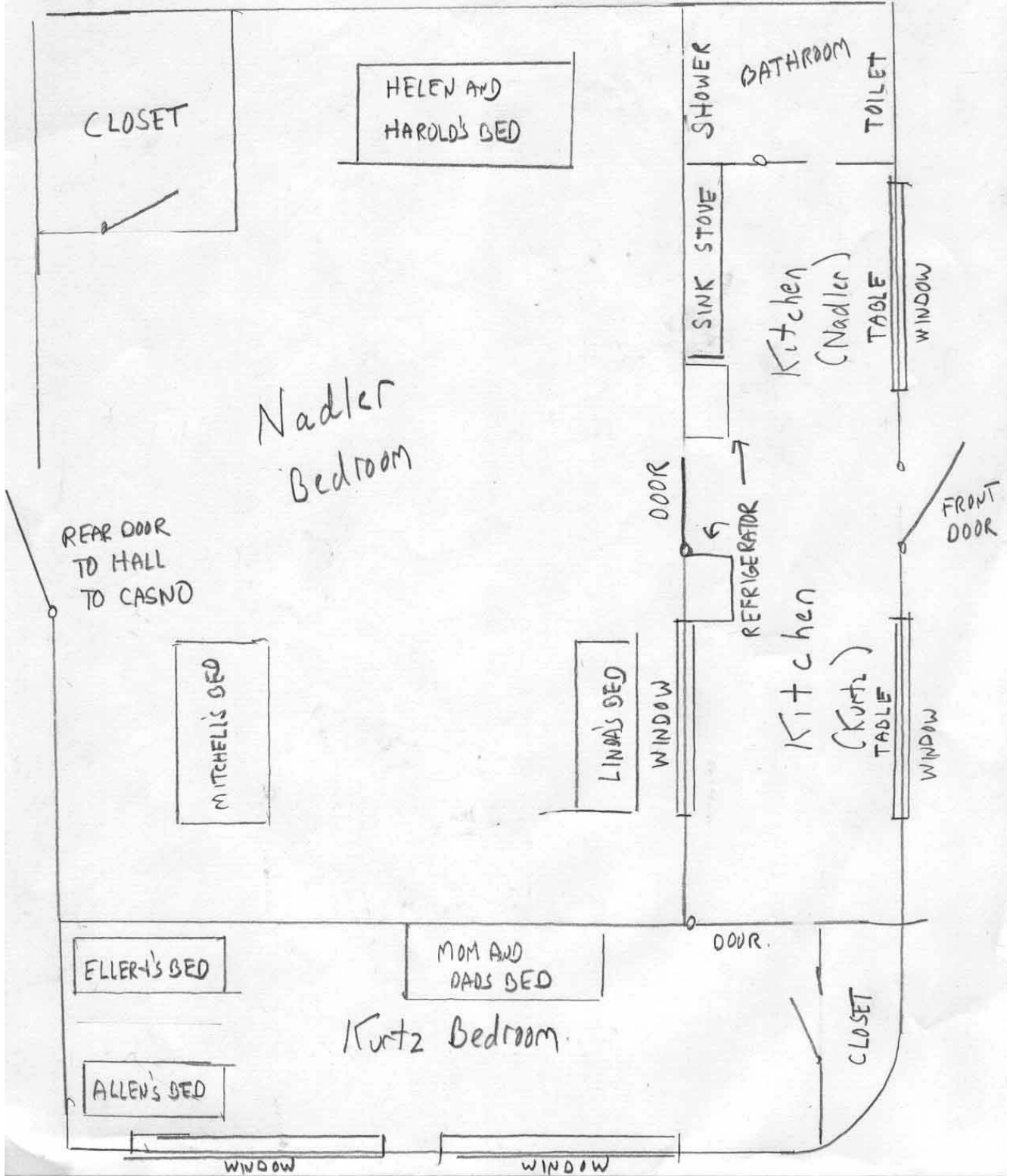
Pine Grove's swimming pool was one of its greatest attractions and during the afternoon most of the colony's residents could be found there, sunbathing, swimming or just passing the time. The pool did have one major drawback: it was unfiltered. Even though fresh chlorine was frequently added and dead bugs and insects scooped out daily, one week during the summer was given



over to draining and refilling the pool. Unfailingly drainage week was the hottest week of the summer. The pool was my Uncle Harold's bailiwick: he loved swimming and most often could be found there slathering himself with an iodine laced suntan concoction that turned his skin a deep, bronzed brown. Elsewhere on the grounds were a handball court, swings, a sandbox, and a ping-pong table. Tall trees formed the border between Pine Grove and the private home just to its north, and those and other trees which dotted the property gave it its name. One tree, set almost in the middle of the property was a large split pine tree. One year, I found a strange looking rock at its base. The rock was shot through with what looked like a darkish red crystal and soon our active imaginations were calling it "the blood rock," and concocting a tale that it had once belonged to the storied legendary American frontiersmen Jim Bowie, the inventor of the long-bladed Bowie knife and victim, along with Davy Crockett, at the Alamo. One night, during a violent thunderstorm, one of the trees along the wire fence separating Pine Grove from its neighbor was hit by lightning. I was sitting in the kitchen at the time and was convinced that, after the tree was hit, the lightning bolt passed horizontally by my window. The crack of lightning and of a tree branch splitting was distinctly audible. The next morning revealed that the tree had been split in two near its top and it was forever known as "the lightning tree."

Our bungalow had four rooms. Our bedroom formed the upper end of the L that was the old wrap-around porch; the other end was the bathroom shared by the Kurtz's and the Nadler's. Between, was the kitchen, split into two sides by the main entrance door. Behind the kitchen and the inside wall of our bedroom was the Nadler's bedroom. Taken all together, the bungalow was basically a square. When the porch was enclosed, some of the interior windows were left in place and were still there, separating the kitchen from the Nadler's room. At the rear of the Nadler's bedroom was the bungalow's back door that led to a passageway which eventually led to the Casino. On rainy days, that rear door was in constant use. Each bedroom had one closet Ours was at the junction of the L of the old porch. Its rear wall was curved, conforming to the exterior wall of the house. We stored many of the dishes, supplies, and toys used only during the summer months in that closet. One of the very first things I did each summer upon arrival at Pine Grove was to dig out any old comic books left there the previous year and quickly reread them. It was like meeting old, dear, and missed friends again. Though our bungalow was locked and closed during the winter months, one year we returned to find a woman's bra in on of our dressers. The window of our room looked out onto Route 42 and directly across the street was Hamilton's Taxi. Mr. Hamilton's home had a loud telephone and

# Kurtz / Nadler Bungalow (not to scale)





whenever it rang, we knew that Mr. Hamilton would soon be heading out to pick up another fare. The window ledge was also where I kept my rock collection.

Everything about Pine Grove was magic to me, even the trip there. After loading up our belongings on Elliot Place and finally leaving [once, I believe in 1963, we left from the Nadler's house on the Grand Concourse, where we all had to wait for Dad to come and get us], we would wind our way through the streets of the Bronx and cross the Washington Bridge over the Harlem River. A long, sweeping ramp would take us to a tunnel under Manhattan and, a short minute or two later, deposit us at the eastern end of the George Washington Bridge over which we would cross the Hudson River to New Jersey. That tunnel would eventually be closed when the Cross Bronx Expressway and the Alexander Hamilton Bridge were finally completed in the 1960s, but, over the ensuing years, I would always look for its concreted closed portal when traveling down the Major Deegan Expressway and fondly recall trips to the Mountains. Interestingly, in 2002, New York City officials were exploring the possibility of reopening the tunnel as a way to perhaps alleviate the constant bottleneck of traffic caused by the convergence of the Deegan, the Cross Bronx, the Harlem River Drive, and the George Washington Bridge.

Once in New Jersey we would pick up Route 4 and take it to New Jersey Route 17. Both byways were just beginning to show the unfettered growth that would make them, at the turn of the century, an endless, garish strip of shopping centers, malls, and restaurants, with traffic that can only be kindly described as forever bumper-to-bumper. We would leave New Jersey at MawWah, home of a Ford Motor Company Assembly plant, a source of fascination and wonder that was only relieved by a trip there undertaken by my Boy Scout Troop.

It almost seemed that the trip really didn't begin until we reentered New York and headed north on Route 17, then a two-lane road. Most other travelers eschewed 17, preferring to take the more modern New York Thruway north to Harriman, but my Dad always took 17, a choice for which I was forever thankful. Old 17 was full of interesting sights: the Motel on the Mountain in Suffern [I always looked for the entrance road that would lead up to it], the signs for Sterling Forest, and the small town of Tuxedo. Small towns were outside of my big city upbringing and Tuxedo always reminded me of the make believe town we constructed yearly for our model Lionel Trains. Tuxedo even had a railroad station! Another branch of the Erie Railroad ran along side 17, and though I always looked, seeing trains on those tracks was quite rare.

Route 17 also had the "famous" Red Apple Rest. After half the trip and all of 45 miles it was an absolute necessity to get out, go to the bathroom and stretch our road weary legs. There was no better place to do this than the ideally situated Red Apple Rest, part luncheonette, part restaurant, part bathroom, complete with a large, round red apple on its roof. We would begin seeing signs for it as soon as we hit the New York line, and we'd count down the miles until we got there, growing increasingly restless. The parking lot was always filled with fellow travelers in cars and Short Line and Intercity buses. I look back now in amazement at our absolute need to stop and shake my head at how far we thought we were away from home. My commute to work is 45 miles each way and I have made at least a dozen trips to Florida by car and crossed and re-crossed the United States and Canada many times by car, my

family in tow, to visit my parents or on our summer camping vacations. Days of at least 700 miles driving with stretches of two to three hours without stopping were not uncommon.

Back in our family car, we would continue north on 17 and shortly be at Harriman, New York, where we would leave old 17 behind and enter “new” 17, the newly finished Quickway, a modern four lane, divided, controlled access highway. The days of hour upon hour spent trying to trudge and pass through Bloomingburgh and Wurtsboro had thankfully passed forever. Heading northwest on the Quickway, it truly seemed like we had entered another world. Much of the area was still quite rural and farms were common. It amazes me that in the year 2002 people actually commute to mid-town Manhattan from Monroe, Washingtonville, and Middletown. In the late 1950s and early 1960s even the air seemed different, fresher, as we motored steadily closer to the Catskills. The sights and signs were like old friends: Museum Village, the horse racing track at Goshen, the Middletown Motel, the oddly named town of Florida, and soon the endless signs for the famous hotels and resorts of the Catskills. Throughout the entire trip we would carefully observe roadside cows: hoping that they would be standing, signifying fair weather rather than lying down, a surefire portent of rain later in the day.

At Wurtsboro, 17 passed through a large cut blasted out of the side of a hill and swept around a valley high on a hill. On a clear day you could see for the proverbial miles in every direction. Leaving Wurtsboro behind, we would begin to slowly ascend in elevation and I knew we were steadily approaching our goal: Masten Lake, Yankee Lake, Lake Louise Marie, Rock Hill, exits that would take you to South Fallsburgh, Woodridge, Woodburne, Loch Sheldrake, Hurleyville, Mountindale, passed in quick succession. Rather than leaving the highway at Exit 104 by Monticello Raceway, an exit that bypassed town and left us closest to Pine Grove, we always exited at Exit 106, on Monticello’s east end. Exit 106 was the site of Cimarron City, an early theme park that we never, for some reason, visited. Heading west on Broadway, we would climb the hill to the traffic light marking the junction of Route 42 heading north to Kiamesha Lake and the Concord Hotel. As we passed the intersection, the entire town of Monticello was spread before us, and I would hungrily drink in the familiar sights and sounds: the Rialto Movie Theatre, Davco, where we would buy so many “goodies;” baseball bats, balls, arrows, models, then the Post Office, Kaplan’s Deli and the Capri Motel. At an intersection at the west end of town, at what is today Old Liberty Road [then old route 17, bearing to the right and north to Liberty, Livingston Manor, and Roscoe] and Route 42, we would continue straight on West Broadway up a short hill before turning sharply left. In a blur, Carvel, a Dellwood Dairy, and Tuzzeo’s Italian Restaurant would pass on the left hand side before, there on the right, with its familiar white picket fence and yellow sign with red lettering, was Pine Grove. A right turn on Pine Street, a quick right into the driveway, and we had arrived. As much as any place I have lived in my life, I was home.

Thought it might sound maudlin and overly sentimental, Route 17 is still a magic road to me, my yellow-brick road to Oz and my magic carpet. Just mentioning its name or having its familiar vistas pass before my mind’s eye unfailingly brings a smile to my face. For many years I hadn’t a need to be on its well-known roadway and it’s twists and turns resided only in memory. More recently, when my daughter Gillian was in college in Western New York, we would travel 17 all the way to Jamestown, New York, thereby satisfying my curiosity as to

what lay beyond Monticello. I would spend the stretch between Harriman and Liberty lost in thought, recalling those halcyon days and thinking how lucky I was to have had them.

Life in Pine Grove followed a comfortable rhythm. My Mom was always an early riser and as a result Ellery and I were usually dressed, fed, and outside long before the rest of the sleepy bungalow colony. We certainly were up hours before Aunt Helen, Linda and Mitchell. I grew to love the early morning crispness in the air and the feeling of being out and about when everyone else was still in bed. Early morning became my favorite time of day. I am still an early riser, a fact that drives my wife Linda crazy. Even in summers and on weekends I am the first up in our house and I have no need for an alarm clock during the workweek. My love for the peacefulness of the early morning is part of the Pine Grove legacy.

One morning in Pine Grove, however, the early morning became frighteningly dangerous. Ellery and I were playing ping-pong, and as was the norm, we were the only two astir. An unchained, un-collared dog, seemingly huge, approached the ping-pong table and started growling. Whether he was upset by the sound and sight of the balls being hit across the net, whether he was rabid or just plain ornery, I would never know. As his growls became louder and louder, Ellery and I became first wary and then just plain scared. Frightened, we sprinted back to our bungalow, a run of maybe 200 feet. Reacting to our fear, the dog began running madly after us. Just before I got to our door, I fell, and looking back, saw the dog bearing down on us, his mouth open and sharp teeth clearly visible. Somehow Ellery and I managed to scramble, untouched and unharmed, inside. It was hours before we would venture out, and even then, I wouldn't go out without my trusty bow and arrow. How I ever would have hit a moving target didn't seem to matter much: what mattered was I had some kind of weapon with which to protect myself. A few days later, I thought I saw the same dog in town and quickly went the other way. It took me many years to overcome my fear of dogs: a fear only eradicated by a series of friendly canines Ellery would have as an adult.

Sometime around ten, other kids would start to appear. I usually didn't see the inside of my bungalow again until lunch time, and, once lunch was finished, was frequently outside until dinner. Often, an ice cream truck would come around during the afternoon. Many times I was more interested in the free airplane cards [collected similarly to baseball cards] distributed with each purchase than in the ice cream itself. Dinner usually found me barbecuing on our charcoal grill right outside our front door. After supper, I was gone again until bedtime.

One night a week was always "movie night." A man would regularly come around with a movie projector and a show a reel-to-reel movie, generally about five years old, in the Casino. I imagine he had a steady route of colonies he hit on a weekly basis. At a small bungalow colony like Pine Grove, his nightly take couldn't have been all that much. The Casino was a large room in Pine Grove's main house and in many ways, the heart of the colony. A short flight of steps led up to a narrow but wide anteroom that you passed through in order to get to the Casino. On this room's left was a staircase leading up to the single rooms above the Casino. In a room under the staircase was Pine Grove's lone telephone. Bungalows didn't have private telephones and the only way to reach someone in residence was by calling this pay phone, hope that someone was nearby to hear its ringing, pick it up, and then announce over the loudspeaker that "so and so" had a telephone call. Opposite the telephone and

staircase, on the right, was a Pinball Machine. Rarely a day went by without us gathering around the machine to play, or more commonly, to watch someone else play. Every summer saw a different Gottlieb and Company machine occupying that spot, and the sounds of bells and flippers hitting balls were a normal and everyday part of life at Pine Grove.

There were windows between the anteroom and the Casino, and once a year, on a Saturday night, an “adult” show was put on in the casino. The windows were news-papered over as parents trying to keep secret what was going to go on during the show. Of course the more they tried to keep it a secret, the more we were determined to somehow sneak in and find out exactly what we were missing. As far as I can recall, we were never able to secret ourselves in a place where we could see the show: but while rumors of strip-tease artists abounded, probably the “wildest” thing that happened at those shows was a comedian telling off-color jokes.

In one corner of the Casino was a jukebox, a staple of American life in the 1950s and 1960s. Filled with 45 RPM records of the day’s hits, the jukebox was a source of entertainment and a place for socialization, especially as my friends and I got older. Off course, the best times were when the jukebox was “conveniently” broken and a mere 25 cents would get you an endless series of records. The music would reverberate off of the walls of the Casino, giving the music a deeper, more resonate and robust sound. Sometimes, when I hear a song from that era and the early days of Rock and Roll, particularly “I Only Have Eyes For You” by the Flamingos, “Since I Don’t Have You” by the Skyliners, and “In The Still of the Night” by the Five Satins, my mind immediately associates it with the Casino [in my mind, I call them jukebox songs] and that ever present Pine Grove time machine sends me instantaneously back.

The walls of the Casino were also the colony’s unofficial “graffiti” site where colonists would pencil their names and record the years they were at Pine Grove. One of the first things we would do upon arrival at the beginning of the summer would be to find our previous year’s scribbling and record a new year. The more years you had written on the wall, the more prestige you had. The only family with a cachet equal to ours was the Abrams family: mother, father, and six children: Charlie, Phillip, Harry, Maxie, Pearl, and Annie. From Brooklyn, the Abrams clan lived in what must have been a very crowded bungalow at the very back of Pine Grove and beyond the bug house. The bungalow overlooked the barn and wild overgrown field and was convenient to the swimming pool. Our Monticello history and theirs were quite intertwined, as members of the family were our closest friends and companions. Pearl, a skinny, lanky girl, was the oldest at two years my senior. Charlie was my age and for five of the six years at Pine Grove was my closet boon companion. Phillip was two years younger, Harry two years younger than that, and so on down the line until your came to the youngest, Annie, an infant and toddler during our first years there. One of the things that amazed me about the boys in the family was how they appeared to be alternating doubles of each other. Charlie was outgoing, friendly, talkative and open. Phillip was more introverted, moody and had a personality that I always thought of as somehow “pinched.” Harry seemed a clone of Charlie and Maxie a duplicate of Phillip. It almost seemed as if they had been cut out by cookie cutters. I didn’t know Pearl very well: not only was she a girl, something I had little interest in during the first few summers in Pine Grove, but she was older and with little

interest in what her younger siblings were doing. I actually became quite close and attached to Annie, frequently playing with her and keeping her company when she was a bit older. The younger Abrams boys were more Ellery and Mitchell's friends. Friendships and clicks at Pine Grove were severely stratified by age: it's amazing how little we had to do with each other. For my group of pals, any group that contained our younger brothers was forever "the little kids." I'm sure that if Ellery or Mitchell were to write their own memoirs of their years at Pine Grove, they would be quite different from mine. And, honestly, I can't begin to tell you how my cousin Linda spent her days.

Movie night was always special; not necessarily because of the movie itself, which was often a romantic tear-jerker of little interest to young teenage boys, but for what would happen as a result of the movie. Refreshments were essential and that meant a short walk to the Ma and Pa grocery store across Pine Street. That store was quite familiar to me as I was always running errands there for Mom to get milk, bread, or some other needed staple. I often fantasized that the older couple running the store were the proprietors of a grocery store in the Bronx during the winter and the store in Monticello was their "summer" store. Most certainly this was not the case. To get to the store I would cross Pine Street and walk along a short path with tall grass on either side. The path couldn't have been more than fifty feet in length, but the tall grass always fascinated me and made me think I was on safari in Africa. The path ended in a dirt parking lot right outside the store. At the store's front was a cooler filled with soda and many afternoons my friends and I would repair there and sit in front of the store drinking Mission Orange or Cream Sodas. On movie nights we would load up with candy, red licorice, and sunflower seeds. Of the three, the sunflower seeds were most important. Sitting on beach chairs brought into the Casino, as soon as the lights were turned off and the movie began we commenced eating the seeds and dropping the shells on the floor. It was always an unofficial contest to see who could make the floor the dirtiest: the highlight of the evening always occurred when the lights came on and we saw how covered the floor was with the detritus of our feast. Movies were also the time for pranks. Usually someone would have access to some firecrackers and would manage to set them off outside the Casino while the movie was showing. Though this never really appealed to me, probably because I was frightened of being caught, I was once a willing participant in trying to disrupt a movie. I had illicitly purchased some cherry bombs from a classmate in my 9<sup>th</sup> grade class [and boy was I scared that I would be caught with the illegal contraband], and had smuggled them home in my briefcase. The only reason I purchased them was to use them on movie night that coming summer. I remember sneaking out of the movie and, after igniting the cherry bomb, running for all I was worth. To my relief, I wasn't never caught and soon sneaked back into the Casino.

On rainy days, the Casino became the center of activity at Pine Grove. Everyone would bring their beach chairs inside and attempt to entertain themselves by playing games and reading comic books. On rare occasions it would rain for a few days in a row: a situation that taxed everyone's patience as we tried to stay out of each other's hair. Particularly irritable were those fathers for whom those few lost days constituted a large chunk of their summer vacations. Over time I began to really appreciate those stormy days and even secretly wished for them. On those days, your whole world, your whole existence was focused down into that very small area. It was almost as if nothing else in the world existed or mattered. I found such

days cozy, warm, and comforting. Even now I like stormy days. It may be a stormy summer day or a winter snowstorm: without fail, the inner warmth of those days always makes me think of Pine Grove and its Casino.

For some strange reasons we always associated the end of rainy weather with salamanders and believed that they were easiest to catch after the rain. Out we would go to the fields and wet areas where we knew they lived, trusty jars in hand, to catch them. Back in our bungalows we would put them in a cardboard box and fill the box with moss and grass in an attempt to recreate their natural habitat. In a few days they would all be dead and in our naïve city stupidity, we never could quite understand why they had died. How were we to know that salamanders ate insects and that we were slowly starving them to death?

Another rainy day activity, especially during the first few summers at Pine Grove when I was younger, was to assemble long lines of cardboard, cut out milk trucks that we had gotten from the Dellwood Dairy just down the road. It was a very satisfying feeling to walk out of the store with a stack of these cardboard templates and know that they were just waiting for a rainy day to be brought to life. After assembly, I would line them up on a window sill.

Weekends were always special at Pine Grove. During the week, Pine Grove's driveway, which doubled as its parking lot was generally devoid of cars. There wasn't a single family that could afford more than one, usually used, car: Most families sacrificed much to have even the one. By bedtime on Friday night, a few cars had made their appearance, harbingers of the many yet to appear. Saturday morning would find the driveway full. Late at night Pine Grove's fathers had arrived en masse from New York City. As a result, Saturdays always had a gala, holiday feeling to them. Saturdays were for quality family time, with fathers catching up with the doings of their kids and trying to find some quiet times with their wives. Unfortunately, weekends were short and by Sunday evening, most of the cars were gone. When my Dad would get back to our apartment in the Bronx, he would place a collect call to Pine Grove and have Mom paged over the loudspeaker. The page was Dad's signal that he had arrived home safely. By mutual agreement, as a way to save money, Mom never responded to the hail.

Evenings inevitably meant a five minute walk down Route 42 to the Carvel Ice Cream store at the corner of Broadway and Route 42. Carvels everywhere always make me think of that particular one. There was no better way to mark the end of another long, warm summer day than a Carvel. Usually it would be dusk when we started out and just growing dark when we returned and so we were always sure to carry flashlights that would make us visible to drivers and to walk on the side of the road facing traffic. Some kids favored Flying Saucers and others ice cream cones but my favorite was always a hot butterscotch sundae over vanilla ice cream.

More than anything else, for me Pine Grove meant baseball. There is no more ardent and fanatic baseball fan in the world than a boy in his early teenage years, and I was a baseball fan to the absolute nth degree. For me, baseball was life itself. My obsession with baseball took three forms: actually playing it, watching, listening, and talking about it with my friends, and playing what today would be called fantasy baseball.

I was a San Francisco Giants fan. Though the Giants had moved from New York after the 1957 season, I saw no reason to give up rooting for the team my Dad had always rooted for; the team of my boyhood idol Willie Mays. Being a Giants fan presented a unique problem at Pine Grove due to the fact that most of the other kids were from Brooklyn and thus diehard Los Angeles Dodgers fans. There was a small scattering of New York Yankee fans in residence that we Giant and Dodger fans unfailingly looked down upon as not real, legitimate baseball fans. The Yankees always seemed to win and, in our eyes, a Yankee fan couldn't comprehend the real devotion of a fan that had to stick with his team through thick and thin, winning seasons and losing seasons, triumph and disappointment. We actually felt sorry for Yankee fans and never included them in our endless discussions and heated arguments as to which teams and players were better. As far as we were concerned the Yankees might just as well have been from another planet. "Real" baseball was the decades old rivalry between the Giants and Dodgers, recently transplanted from Ebbets Field and the Polo Grounds to the far reaches of the West Coast. Even after those teams had left New York, there was just no way under the sun, or any amount of money, that could ever convince us to become Yankee fans.

Countless arguments ensued between us over the merits of our two teams and ballplayers. This rivalry hits its peak during the summer of 1962 when the Giants and Dodgers battled tooth and nail the entire season while contending for the National League Pennant. Back in the early 60s 24-hour sports radio didn't exist. Neither in fact did 24-hour all-news radio. Finding out the score when the Giants and Dodgers played each other, games that started at either 10:30 or 11:00 P.M., New York time, was a major task and normally took the majority of the following day. First thing in the morning we would rush to the grocery store to get a copy of the New York Daily News or New York Mirror. The back page of the paper always had line scores which showed inning by inning results for the first few innings of all the game played the night before. A typical line score might look like this:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E
Los Angeles	0	0	1	0	3			4	6	1		
San Francisco	2	0	1	1						4	5	0

Drysdale and Roseboro  
 Marichal, Bolin[5] and Haller  
 Home Runs: Mays [SF]

It seemed that whenever the Giants and Dodgers played each other that summer, the games were either very high scoring or pitcher's duels. A good part of the rest of the morning and early afternoon would be spent speculating about the result of the game and it wasn't until the arrival of the late day New York Post that we would finally find out the final score. Elation or despair followed in the wake of the result. The race between the two bitter rivals extended to a playoff at the conclusion of the season; a playoff won by the Giants during the last inning of the final game. Unfortunately, the Giants would lose a hard fought seven game World Series to the hated and despised Yankees.

1962 also brought the birth of the New York Mets and complication into the lives of New York's intrepid young Giants and Dodgers fans. At first, we were thrilled that we would be able to see our old teams play again, and games between the Mets and the West Coast teams played at the Polo Grounds found the large majority of fans rooting against the home town team. Along with most of my friends, I found myself rooting for the Mets when they played every other National League team but our own Giants or Dodgers. But we all found the idea of having a team we could easily follow on a daily basis, give our emotional commitment to and listen to on the radio nightly, quite compelling. Over the next few years the vast majority of Giants and Dodger fans slowly but inevitably became Met fans. For me, who had really grown up to late to experience their inter-borough rivalry in New York, the summer of 1962 was the apex of that rivalry. That summer frequently found us listening to Mets games on the radio [the more transistors your radio had, with 8 as the max, the more status you had]. One Met I particularly liked was a journeyman utility player by the name of Rick Herrscher. I have no idea why I was attracted to him, but there was something about his name that I appealed to me. When we returned to the Bronx at the end of the 1962 summer, the first thing I did was run upstairs and turn on the television to see the Mets. The very first thing I saw was Herrscher being picked off second base and killing a developing Mets rally. Very appropriate for the team that won only 40 games while losing 120 that year: one of the most infamous records of futility in baseball history.

Entire summers would go by without seeing a baseball game on television. One year, determined to see the mid-summer All-Star game, I walked into town where an appliance store had placed a TV in the window and tuned it to the game. I wasn't the only boy there: there was quite a large group of young, fanatic baseball fans pushing for the best view.

Though we didn't have a television at Pine Grove, there was one year in which we did win one. The Woolworths Department Store chain had just opened a store on Broadway and as an opening promotion was giving away a portable TV. Small, portable TVs were rare in those days; most TVs were large console models. You entered the contest by filling out an entry blank. My Mom filled out multiple entries under her name, Dad's name, my name, Ellery's name, her sister's name, and I'm sure many other names. Of course, Aunt Helen won the television set. Though she never said anything, I think my Mom has always harbored a grudge regarding that set and believing that even though the entry was in her sister's name, she was entitled to it. For years I recall watching TV on that set while visiting my cousins at their apartment in the Bronx.

Every bungalow colony had its own softball team and played against the teams of other colonies. The kids themselves wholly ran these teams and there was no adult supervision; we made our own arrangements to play, established our own rules, set our own lineups, policed our own games and settled our own disputes. For kids to handle all those chores was not unusual and can be seen as just an extension of the countless games played on the streets of the Bronx and Brooklyn. Why we played softball and not real baseball [which we called hardball], I've never quite been able to figure out.

I was our team's first baseman. Though I was small I was extremely fast and was our team's lead off hitter. I was only an average hitter but was considered to be a great fielder with an



uncanny ability to stretch to reach balls thrown by our infielders and scoop up errant throws. I took tremendous pride in my fielding and like most boys, fantasized about being discovered and playing in the big leagues. One summer, one of the fathers, a fat, coarse, gruff man who we dubbed "Freddy the Freeloader," and who reminded me of Jackie Gleason, spent much of his week's vacation trying to give us unwanted advice. He lived in the bug house, didn't have any sons old enough to be on the team, and thought he was the world's greatest expert on baseball. The entire team resented his interference. He particularly liked to get on my case, making fun of and insulting my hitting. To say I "hated his guts" and wished him dead, was an understatement. Unfortunately I would often run into his type in later years when my own kids played, and I coached, Little League Baseball. However I did find that by taking his advice and changing the position of my hands, holding them further back, I could generate more power and begin to drive the ball. My hitting improved immensely.

Often we played on the field that separated the front of the colony from the back. Japanese Beetles loved that field and were forever a nuisance when we played there. As we were under the strange impression that they could bite or sting us, I would have willingly killed every Japanese Beetle on the face of the earth. One of my earliest Pine Grove memories occurred on the baseball field when I turned over the large flat rock that we used for first base and saw thousands of upset ants beginning to carry their eggs to safety elsewhere. At night real bats would fly across the field and we would try to hit them with our baseball bats. Needless to say, we were never successful.

Sometimes we played on a real baseball field at the Rutherford School, a fifteen-minute walk from Pine Grove. I think we discovered that field on a walk to Monticello Airport, a small airfield with a grass runway that we periodically visited. On other occasions we played at municipal and public fields elsewhere in the area. One year I had made arrangements with a boy in my Junior High School class to have our respective teams play. His bungalow colony, in Sackett Lake, was much larger than ours, had many more players and they simply slaughtered us. Pine Grove was small enough that almost anyone who wanted to be on the team was able to.

Most of our games, however, were played against our bitter rivals, the hated Raiders; a team made up mostly of local boys living on Hay Street just to the south of us. For the boys of Pine Grove, those games were our Giant-Dodger games. We practiced daily and were forever tinkering with our lineup and trying to come up with strategies to defeat them. For a while, after we had imported a kid named Dave Siegal, a left-hander power hitter from the nearby Hillside Hotel on Broadway where he lived a good chunk of the summer while spending his time at Pine Grove, we seemed to have the upper hand. Over the years, I imagine that we won as many as we lost.

When I wasn't actually physically playing or arguing baseball with my friends I was more likely than not playing one of the endless fantasy baseball games I had invented. Most of these games involved using dice and charts I had developed in order to set the rules and keep the games flowing. I kept endless list of statistics and played season after season using current major leaguers. Sometimes I played All-Star Baseball, a game bought for me by my Grandparents in South Fallsburgh. White discs, representing ballplayers both past and

present, were divided into segments and each segment was either a hit or an out and was based on the players actual statistics. The discs were placed on a spinner, and the place the whirling spinner stopped determined the outcome of each at bat. Another year I saved up to purchase an expensive and widely known fantasy game and actually tried to simulate every game played in the major leagues that season. I quickly found that, unless I wanted to spend every second of the summer playing, was impossible. It was at a store in Monticello, however, that I discovered The Sporting News, the weekly "Bible of Baseball" newspaper that was filled with the stats I needed to run my games. One of my favorite times to play was in the afternoon when everyone else was at the pool. I never particularly liked swimming and was much happier staying back in the coolness and quiet of my bungalow to play one of my games without interruption. Often this became a source of tension between my parents and me: they much preferred me at the pool. After all, they were paying hard earned money so I could spend the summer outside. If all I wanted to do was stay inside and play dice baseball, I could have just as easily done that at home. I never accepted their argument and found if I dragged my feet enough, I would be granted my wish to stay behind.

One of the more interesting characters to inhabit our Pine Grove world was the colony's handyman. Each summer the Kazanskys would hire another man to take care of maintenance and repair. The handyman would live in the basement of their home. Usually itinerant drifters, most certainly always alcoholics, seemingly right out of a Steinbeck novel with seamed and craggy faces that made them appear to be a million years old, they were a constant source of fascination to us and represented a world we were barely aware of. In our eyes, the best handymen were the ones who talked to us and entertained us with their wild and certainly exaggerated stories. One summer, our handyman was a friendly guy named Larry. One day we awoke to find him gone and rumors were flying that he had left to return to California to be with his sick wife who needed an eye operation. Apparently, Mr. Kazansky had given Larry money to help with her medical care and sent him on his way with his blessing. A few days later gossip was rife that Larry had been seen in town at various bars and the story about a sick wife was just that, a story. Soon out of funds, Larry was soon back begging for his old job. Understandably angry, Mr. Kazansky wouldn't rehire him even though he had not been able to replace him and maintenance problems were backing up. Upset by the seeming injustice of it all, the kids of Pine Grove were galvanized into action and before the day was out we had made up signs and were picketing the Kazansky's house and chanting "we want Larry, we want Larry." Within short order Larry was rehired and he was soon once regaling us with more of his bottomless barrel of stories.

One rainy day during the summer of 1960 my friends and I went to the movie theatre in town and saw the original version of "Ocean's Eleven," starring Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Frank Sinatra in a tale of a complicated scheme to break into a series of Las Vegas casinos and make off with millions of dollars. It was just the type of movie, with its camaraderie, wily strategy, adept planning, and "us versus them" mentality to appeal to teenage boys and we came out of the movie inspired and motivated to somehow do something similar. In reality, breaking the law was not something we would ever seriously consider, but causing some kind of similar but innocent mayhem was definitely called for. At the same time we were being hounded by an older man in the colony who derided us as soft at the same time he told us stories of his supposed youthful involvement in the Chicago

Mafia. A fold in his belly was supposedly a bullet wound. We didn't know whether to be skeptical or scared. Nevertheless, our collective pride was hurt and we knew the only way to win his respect was to pull off some "Ocean's Eleven" type heist ourselves. A gauntlet had been thrown down and we felt compelled to answer the challenge.

After much brainstorming we hit upon a convoluted scheme to steal all the chairs and benches from the swimming pool. An elaborate plan was developed that called for precise timing and the assignment of various jobs. Some of us would be lookouts, some of us what sneak under a hole in the swimming pool fence and lift the benches up and over to others who would stash our "loot" in the barn and shed near the pool. Our moment of triumph would come the next day when the colony's adults would arrive at the pool and have no place to sit. Anyone who spent the time to observe us the day of the planned heist couldn't help but notice that something strange was up: we were all scurrying around in small groups with watches and papers upon which minute by minute plans were written and assignments noted. We even took into consideration the moon, cloud cover and the weather. I was one of the boys outside the pool whose job was to pass the purloined benches onward and into the shed. Everything went exactly as planned. Exhilaration ruled. The next day we tried to make it look like we were just hanging around as our "crime" was discovered. Of course it wasn't long before the chairs were found and order restored. But for a brief period of time chaos, every teenage boy's best friend, ruled. A few days later we repeated the robbery. On this occasion I was a lookout, a job that called for lying prone in the wet evening grass. When I entered the bungalow soaking wet later that night, Mom questioned me as to how I had managed to get so wet. I told her that we had come across a skunk and to avoid getting sprayed, I had fallen to the ground and hidden in the grass. Did the Kazanskys know who had taken the chairs? I don't see how they couldn't. While there was some grumbling and accusing eyes seemed to follow us everywhere, nothing much was said and we felt like we had accomplished our mission: we had lived up to the ideals of the movie and vindicated ourselves in the eyes of our local Mafioso.

Summers at Pine Grove were ruled by fads. Activities would seem to spring out of nowhere, totally consume us for a week or so, and then die quickly away only to be resurrected the following summer. Whether it was ping-pong, chess, model airplanes, pinochle, bows and arrows, sling-shots, hiking, water balloon fights or a thousand and one other activities, we rarely knew what our next obsession would be or where it would come from. One summer we spent an endless amount of time playing a game we called "Ishy Gishy." Ishy Gishy was a variant of the time-honored game of ring-a-levio. In that game, which I had played on the streets of the Bronx, players were divided into two teams with one team seeking to capture all the members of the other team and return them to base. The game was over when everyone had been captured. You captured someone by grabbing them and yelling "ring-a-levio 1-2-3, ring-a-levio 1-2-3, ring-a-levio 1-2-3." It was a game that involved much running and dodging over the small area designated as in-bounds for the game. Ishy-Gishy was a similar game; the major difference being that ours wasn't limited to a small area. Not only was the whole bungalow colony in play, but so was the fields and woods, and even the entire town of Monticello. As a result a game could [and did] take an entire day to play. Once, when I was one the team being hunted I became tired and actually went into my bungalow and took a

four-hour nap! While not exactly “kosher” such deviations from the rules [the few that there were] were what made Ishy-Gishy so much fun to play.

One year we played a game that tested our skill at being quiet. The kid who could last the longest without talking would be declared the game’s winner. I lasted until nightfall and was only eliminated when a kid tapped me on the shoulder and I turned to him and said, “leave me alone, can’t you see I’m trying not to talk?” Boy, did I feel stupid when it instantly dawned on me that I had eliminated myself.

If there was any staple to life at Pine Grove beyond swimming and baseball, that staple would be comic books. Comic books and superheroes were an intrinsic and absolutely necessary part of our fantasy lives and many trips were taken into town with the sole purpose of buying new comics. Luckily Monticello had many stores that stocked desirable comics. The late 50s and early 60s were a golden age for comics with old standbys like Superman, Batman, Superboy, and the Flash being joined by new heroes Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four of Marvel Comics. A large majority of the comic books we purchased during the summer were not brought home but left in Monticello for use the following summer. The one exception to this rule was Classics Illustrated; comic book versions of classic books. We all strove to complete our collections of these books because they proved invaluable during the school year for doing book reports and fooling our English teachers into thinking that we had truly read the original. Even with this ulterior motive in mind, we devoured and enjoyed them immensely. Sometimes we would even go on to read the actual books. I’ve always defended their worth: it would be unrealistic to expect a ten or eleven year old to read Macbeth or Hamlet but our introduction to Shakespeare and other writers frequently came within the covers of those books. The Classics Illustrated adaptation of Frankenstein always scared the living daylights out of me. One dark night during one of our first summers at Pine Grove, we were hanging out near the wild field and thought we heard a strange noise. Though it was surely a deer, raccoon, a skunk, or simply the rustling of the wind in the tall grass, we quickly scattered to the winds and I spent the rest of the night inside in the safe company of my Mom’s nightly Mah Jongg game.

In many ways, the summer of 1963, our last summer at Pine Grove was both the oddest and the best. Never have I looked forward more to a summer than I looked forward to that particular one. Though we had left both a deposit and many of our summer belongings behind at the end of 1962, there was a real doubt as to whether we would return for a 6<sup>th</sup> summer. Most of the uncertainty came from my Aunt and Uncle who seemed to want to do something else with their time. It was also uncertain whether my parents could afford the rental of a bungalow by themselves. One Saturday night during winter, while sitting in the Nadler’s living room on the Grand Concourse, Dad asked Uncle Harold whether we would be returning to Pine Grove that summer. I was never more relieved to hear the simple word “yes.”

My desire to return sprang from a very simple source. I was now 15 years old and a student at Taft High School in the Bronx. Shy around girls and generally introverted, Pine Grove would place me among the “in crowd” where I was known and accepted. A social life would be ready made for me. For two months I could lead the life I could only fantasize about at

home. In addition there would be baseball and all the other craziness and freedoms that typified normal life at Pine Grove. I could still be a kid while experimenting with being an adult. I recall walking on 170<sup>th</sup> Street a few days before school ended feeling absolutely giddy with anticipation.

Much was different about Pine Grove that year. Charlie Abrams was staying home and working and I wouldn't see much of him that summer. Sometime during the winter the barn had been demolished and Pine Grove just didn't seem the same without it. My best friend that summer was Jeff Hutterer who stayed at the Majestic Bungalow Colony at the end of Pine Street. Jeff, who lived in Queens, was a piano student at Julliard in Manhattan. Though he didn't care for baseball, he loved wrestling and boxing. All teenage boys go through a period when wrestling just consumes them: mine was that summer. The Majestic Colony also had a television set and on Friday nights we would occasionally watch "Friday Nights at the Fights."

A favorite activity that summer was to go beyond the pavement at the end of Hay Street and on to a dirt road until we came to a private lake owned by a man named Bergman. Mr. Bergman owned canoes that we rented and rowed out to an island in the center of the lake. At the end of our allotted time he would blow a whistle to inform us that we should return. Though we sometimes went in groups of four or five, the best times were when couples rowed out to the island by themselves. The first time I was ever truly alone with a girl happened on the island in Bergman's Lake. Sometimes we played spin-the-bottle, that ancient rite of American teenagers, in one of the bungalows down by the pool when the parents of the kid who lived there where out. I had my first serious crush on a girl that summer. Laurie had stayed at Pine Grove the year before but was now staying at another bungalow colony within walking distance. I also found myself making daily plans to play handball with a girl named Marsha who lived in the main building and whom I had ignored for years. Marsha's father played the Hawaiian guitar and occasionally he would take it out and entertain us. Sometimes at night a whole group of us would take a long walk around what we called "the horseshoe." Down Route 42 to Broadway, west on Broadway to Hillside Avenue to Dunbar Road and then north again until we re-encountered Broadway not far from the site of Monticello Raceway. The roads were empty and dark and were a good place for teenagers to talk and mull over life. As Bob Seger said in his classic rock song about adolescence "Night Moves," "we were working on mysteries without any clues."

I wasn't the easiest teenager to get along with: I had a bad temper and didn't get along well with adults, authority figures, or anyone else who told me what I had to do. Once I remember getting into a shouting match with some adult in the colony. I have no idea what we argued about, but I'm sure it was over something trivial. My Mom was so angry with me that she threatened to send me home the next week with Dad. My punishment would be to go to work with him daily. Luckily, this never came to pass. There were also long stretches in which I refused to talk to my Uncle Harold.

Still, with all the raging hormones of the teenage years, Pine Grove acted like a soothing balm. There was still movie night, comic books, Carvel, ping-pong and all the other old

standbys that made Pine Grove so special. That was one summer I surely had no desire to see end.

There are so many Pine Grove memories that just don't fit the flow of this narrative. Here is a smorgasbord of them. They are not in any particular order and could have taken place in any one of the six years spent there.

- We were forever talking about hitch-hiking all the way down to Port Jervis just to "see what it was like" but never did so.
- One evening we walked all the way to Sackett Lake and hitch-hiked back.
- Watching for a Russian Sputnik satellite in the evening sky.
- Watching for shooting stars during August's Perseus meteor showers.
- Seeing the Northern Lights flickering in the northern sky.
- Camping out near the Abrams house in a tent and using the board of the ping-pong table for the floor of that tent. Walking into Monticello early the next morning for fresh bagels.
- Accidentally breaking a dozen eggs while carrying them into our bungalow from the car. Uncle Harold never letting me live that down [even to this day]
- Grandma Frieda and Grandpa Leon renting a bungalow on Pine Street across from Pine Grove. Another summer they rented a room at the Washington Manor Hotel somewhere down Route 42 and often we went there at night to play Bingo. Another summer they rented a bungalow on the other side of Monticello [perhaps on Bennett Street or Carpenter Place?] and I walked there once a week to have lunch.
- Some of my pals catching bullfrogs and killing them by impaling them on trees and throwing darts at them. Though I refused to participate, the sight haunted me for years.
- Trying to eradicate a bee-hive in the ground by the bug house by pouring boiling water down the hive's entrance and running away when the quite upset bees came swarming out.
- Hanging out by the mailbox awaiting the day's delivery of mail.
- Hanging out by the swings, just passing the time.
- Having an infected toe taken care by a doctor on North Broadway.
- Dragging Dad into the woods one Saturday morning and proudly showing him a fort we had constructed during the week.
- Watching a U.S. Air Force team of acrobatic fighter jets roar over Liberty after performing a fly by over Liberty. That summer they flew over every town in the United States with that name.
- Trying to decide how we would conform to President Kennedy's call for increasing physical fitness and his recommendation that all Americans should go on a fifty-mile hike. We never took such a hike.
- Listening to Joey Reynolds, the disk-jockey on WKBW in Buffalo at night and everyone agreeing that he was better than any of New York City's rock and roll disk-jockeys.
- Crab-apple fights using the apples growing on the trees in front of the Abrams bungalow.
- Earning some cash by baby-sitting for various parents. Baby-sitting for two twins named Faith and Hope in their mother's room over the Casino.
- Taking the only drag on a cigarette I have ever had in my life one dark night by the swimming pool in 1963.

-Drawing endless diagrams of highways on paper and connecting the papers to each other in order to make long roads. My favorite part of the drawing always being where 4 lane highways ended and 2 lane county roads began.

-Going to the movies to see "PT-109", the story of President Kennedy's heroism during World War Two, a Hercules movie, and "Lolita."

The fast approaching end to each summer was not something we particularly talked about. Though aware that there were only a few weeks left, avoidance was preferable to active recognition. During the last days the conversation inevitably turned to the question "are you coming back next year?"

For us, the last day was always the Sunday before Labor Day. Traffic would inevitably be lighter on the day prior to the traditional ending to summer. Packing up meant deciding what games, comics, and supplies to take home and what to leave behind. The trip was made in reverse order of our arrival in June: through town on Broadway and onto the Quickway at Monticello's east end, new Route 17 to Harriman and then through Tuxedo [with the unavoidable stop at Red Apple] to New Jersey Routes 17 and 4 until the George Washington Bridge. Crossing the bridge and the seeing the apartments of Manhattan on the left side always brought home strongly and sadly to me that the summer was indeed over. We always had one week to adjust to life back home before school started. Though it was always good to see our "year round" friends, find out what new shows would shortly be on television and actually be home, it was never an easy week. Everything always seemed so small and cramped and I missed the space and openness of the Mountains terribly. The courtyard of our apartment building had a few small strips of grass that were protected by a wrought iron, spiked fence. One year I recall stepping over the fence and on to the grass just so I could feel real dirt and grass under my feet again. The next Monday school would start and we would be quickly thrust into our school year routine. Pine Grove would slowly retreat in everyday importance but was never totally out of mind. Before long, I would be marking time until the next summer.

Over the years several desultory attempts were made to keep summer friendships alive during the winter. Once, I went to visit the Abrams in Brooklyn and once Charlie came to see me in the Bronx. In September of 1961, a bunch of us got together for a ballgame at Yankee Stadium where we, of course, booed the Yankees. In the game, Roger Maris hit one of his last homeruns in his pursuit of Babe Ruth's homerun record. After the 1963 summer, there was a big get-together at Jeff Hutterer's house in Forest Hills, Queens. I seem to recall occasionally meeting in Manhattan for movies. These get-togethers were rare however. It's quite strange and inexplicable how Brooklynites and Bronxites consider the other's borough to be so far away as to almost be in another country. Perhaps it's because the subway ride, which had to pass through Manhattan, sometimes might take the same amount of time as the car ride to Monticello itself. If the motivation was there, this could have been a problem easily overcome. Perhaps Pine Grove was so special in all of our minds that we deliberately wanted it separate and kept apart from everyday reality.

The summer of 1964 just felt wrong. I went to work as a delivery and stock boy in a local neighborhood grocery. Ellery went to camp. That summer I could watch all the baseball I

wanted to and even got to attend the All-Star Game in person at the newly opened Shea Stadium in Queens. During Dad's summer vacation we went to Washington D.C., the Amish country and the battlefield at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Somehow I heard that not only had the Abrams family returned to Pine Grove but that they had left their long-time bungalow at Pine Grove's back and rented "ours." It gave me a weird, disconnected feeling to think of Pine Grove going on without me and the Abrams's actually living in "our place".

A few years later, Pine Grove itself was gone; demolished to make way for a supermarket. In the six summers my family spent there, major shopping was done at either one of two supermarkets. One, a large supermarket was just outside of town on the road leading northward to Liberty. The other was on a side street in town. This second supermarket was always cramped and crowded with exceedingly limited parking. For years we had heard rumors that the market's owners were looking for a site for a new market somewhere outside of town. Never could I have imagined a reality in which that projected supermarket would be built on the very site of Pine Grove. A few years later even that supermarket was abandoned: a victim of the collapse of the summer resort industry in the Catskills.

At least once a decade I have made the wistful yet nostalgically happy journey to the former site of Pine Grove. Standing in the supermarket parking lot and gazing about, I would shake my head in resignation and disbelief. How was it possible that the paved ground under my feet was the site of my precious memories? Each time I returned there seemed to be less and less of Pine Grove. The Abrams bungalow was now a single family home. The Kazansky's house had been picked up and physically moved further down Pine Street beyond the former site of the bug house and the Abrams's bungalow. For a while, Hamilton's Taxi still operated and the lightning tree still stood in its spot, stunted and tall. For a while, the abandoned swimming pool was still visible. Eventually some of the area north of Pine Grove was converted into apartments and the woods and fields where I spent so many happy hours disappeared forever. During our 1990s trip to find Sobel's we stopped at the Carvel on Route 42 and reminisced. I've always wondered if other ex-Pine Grovers have made a similar pilgrimage.

From a perspective of forty years, what is the lasting legacy of the six summers spent there? It is simply this: childhood summers are special and their memories are life-long. They are perhaps the most endearing and enduring memories a person possesses. For my own kids, growing up in a house in a part of the world that some would still consider "country," there never was a need to get away and escape the city. Fresh air, tall trees and green grass were a normal part of their lives. From the time they were little however, Linda and I took them on long-camping trips: Cape Hatteras, the Adirondacks, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, the Black Hills, Yellowstone National Park, National Parks in the South West, across Canada to the Canadian Rockies, the Pacific Northwest, Northern California, and Colorado. I hope that when they are older, they remember these camping trips with fondness and nostalgia and they cherish the memories of all the many adventures we shared as I cherish my years at Pine Grove.

To me, summer is still the most important season of the year. As a schoolteacher it sometimes seems like I have been on the same schedule for the last fifty years. I still find



myself getting antsy and counting down the days in June just as I did all those years ago. As I once explained to someone “the school year is just a blink between summer vacations.” Summer is still magic and it isn’t hard to conjure up the same feelings and emotions I had way back then. With my kids now grown and out of the house, summer vacations frequently mean winging across the Atlantic Ocean with my wife Linda to Europe, but the anticipation and excitement is the same.

Summer evenings often find me barbequing in my back yard in much the same way I did almost daily while standing near the front door to our bungalow in Pine Grove. Often I need to go inside to retrieve an item or to bring food in or out. When I hear the screen door on my porch slam the feeling of déjà vu is frequently overpowering. I know if I just blink my eyes I just might open them to find myself back in Pine Grove during those wondrous, glorious summers from 1958-1963.

Allen Kurtz  
Mahopac, New York  
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Postscript: Spurred by the memories that have come flooding back since I began writing this memoir, on October 5, 2002 I made my first 21<sup>st</sup> Century journey to the former site of Pine Grove. In the last ten years things have changed very little. The economic boom of the 1990s seems to have bypassed Monticello and much of the town seems to be in a sad state of disrepair. Riding down an eerily quiet Broadway on a beautiful, summer-like Saturday afternoon, the feeling of malaise was palpable. Monticello reminded me of a small southern town that time and progress had passed by. Perhaps somewhere outside of town were new, modern malls and shopping centers. Pine Grove is essentially unchanged. A fitness gym [“The Fitness Factory”], Ellery’s Cleaners and Laundry [a certain irony is to be found in the fact that these business’s have my brother’s name], occupy the former supermarket building. The lightning tree amazingly still stands, now dead and stripped of most of its bark. One lone pine tree remains, on the border of the parking lot and property to the north. Both the Abram’s bungalow and the Kazansky’s house are still there and occupied. Pine Street has an anomalous combination of run-down and boarded up homes and others undergoing major renovation. The house that Mr. Hamilton lived in is gone and directly across from Pine Grove is an auto parts store and a gas station. Across Pine Street, the old grocery store now houses an Italian Restaurant, Buona Fortuna. The former Dellwood Dairy is now, fittingly, an ice cream parlor, while Carvel is the site of Mario’s Island Cuisine. The greatest surprise came as I rode down Hay Street. That street has been extended and currently ends in a quite attractive town park named after long time Monticello mayor Luis deHoyos. The park has tennis courts and an outdoor pavilion but most interestingly, has as its centerpiece a small lake named after deHoyos. Though significantly smaller than I recalled it to be and without the island at its center that we often rowed to, there can be little doubt that this is Bergman’s Lake. As I have gotten older, I have frequently found that places that seemed so large when you were young seem so very small when you are older.

As I have been in the past, I was profoundly moved standing on the “sacred ground” that was Pine Grove. Though almost all is gone, just enough little slivers remain in place to picture it as it was in actuality and, how it will always remain in memory.

### The Great Water Gun Fight by Ellery Kurtz

Those long hot summer days hold as much magic for me today as they did back when I was a young boy. The slight breeze blowing in the pines was never quite enough to cool you during the day. How I remember those tall pines with a fondness. Thankful for the shade they provided from the summer sun, we rallied to them. Aptly named Pine Grove, this small bungalow colony in the Catskill Mountains town of Monticello, became a haven for myself and other young boys from New York City every summer.

The families who took up residence for the summer were mainly from The Bronx and Brooklyn. Arriving before the July 4<sup>th</sup> Holiday and departing by Labor Day Weekend, it was home to us for that short period of time.

All year long I would wait for the exciting day that we would be “going to the country.” Escaping the humidity and heat of the Bronx in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s was a great event. Anxious to get started, and ever more anxious to be finished, we would crowd into the car with all the various possessions that would be necessary to while away July and August. The two-hour car ride was in an interminable event. Familiar landmarks flashed by as my father drove, until those wonderful words would issue forth from him or my Mom...”we’ll be there soon.”

The magic started the very moment I would step out of the car and placed both feet on grass and earth instead of concrete. All that open space in which to run. No cars to watch out for. Why I could practically fly! The smells of the city disappeared in just one breath. And a new smell entered my body and took over. It was the invigorating smell of freedom. Unsupervised during much of the day, with hours to fill, Pine Grove was an enchanted kingdom.

Of course there were the “summer friends.” Those kids, that like myself, had the privilege of returning year after year to this haven. Naturally there were always a few who were new, and a few who never

returned. But all were accepted, and all became fast friends in those two short months of summer. We banded together like mountain goats, jumping from one activity to the next.

I remember the preparations for what I like to fondly remember as “The Great Water Gun Fight”. Water guns were always popular and you could always have fun with just 3 or 4 kids drenching each other on a hot day. But imagine 20 kids all “armed” to the teeth.

Planning was started that afternoon. Captains were picked; sides were chosen, territory mapped out, and a showdown time set. The excitement was near feverish. Everyone had a water gun of course. Some of the kids were in possession of larger black water guns manufactured to look like machine guns. Back in those days no parent was concerned about their children playing with toy guns. These coveted toys easily held three times as much water as the smaller “space gun” or “luger style” and could shoot further and gave you instantaneous power and status in our group.

It seemed like the leaders always had these prized treasures. However, there was the great equalizer, the water balloon. A good balloon could hold about a quart of water. And what a splash they would make when one found its target. The “grenade” effect of being thrown and popping against your enemy was deeply satisfying when they found their intended targets.

The showdown was set for after dinner just before twilight. Parents would still be occupied with cleaning up from the day while we would be free to run out to meet our co-conspirators. The summer days were long and daylight was only beginning to wane by the time dinner was finished around 6:30 and we could regain our freedom. Free again to roam the property of the bungalow colony once again with our friends my brother and I quickly removed ourselves from under the watchful eye of my mother.

Out the screen door we ran, barely hearing the reassuring slam of it behind us as we ran quickly to the staging area by the meadow’s edge where the “woods” gave good cover. I was to be on the team defending the small wooden fort we had constructed out of fallen branches earlier in the day. I was probably on that team because my older brother was on that team. In truth the fort was not much more than a mere resemblance to a broken log fence. But the natural barrier of the surrounding trees gave us plenty of good cover. All that afternoon we had worked to put up a barricade of loose branches across the trail that led into the woods where the high grass of the meadow gave way to the cooler, darker recesses of the wooded area.

There were plenty of places to hide in that field, but only one clear passage into the woods. It was determined that the kids on the other team would come at us through the field using the tall grass as cover until the last moment when they would break from hiding and come at us head on. We would only be able to see them when they were practically on top of us. So we set a lookout to warn us of their approach.

We were well prepared. Our few pennies had bought about a dozen balloons at the small general store across the road. They were filled to the bursting point and strategically placed near at hand just waiting for our victims to arrive. Everyone's water guns were filled to the brim. Some of the kids had more than one gun. These would be tucked into our dungaree pockets or waistband. Inevitably they all leaked a bit and our pants would be dampened with dark splotches as they slowly dripped.

And... we had our secret weapon! Since balloons cost money and we only had enough money for those few I have already mentioned we came up with the idea of folding paper in such a way that for a short period of time they would hold water. By doing this we had easily tripled our supply of ammunition! We intended to wreak havoc on our friends when they arrived. We were ready.

We waited nervously as the remaining daylight softened to twilight. Shadows lengthened across the meadow and the air started to cool a little. There was a little bit of a fog just starting to hover over the marshy meadow. The first fireflies appeared and began their nightly dance. It was a perfect evening. The chirping of the birds slowly gave way to the croaking of frogs and the high-pitched sounds of the crickets. The air practically shimmered with the sound of crickets. And then they went silent!

There was our lookout running up the trail toward us. "They're coming!" he yelled. He scrambled frantically to get around the barricade and into the safety of his fellow campaigners. Out of breath, panting, he dropped down on the ground amongst us, pulled out his water gun, took aim and waited.

Then they came at us, yelling and screaming as they charged the barricade. They came at us.... with their secret weapon...raincoats!!!! Our water guns were practically useless unless we aimed directly at their heads. Our balloons had a bit more effect as they splattered against them and the water ran down inside their yellow slickers. On they came though, scrambling over the barricade amidst a virtual waterfall. Splashes and splotches of water sprayed every which way. Water guns blazing away. Our paper balloons were practically useless in the end as most of the water had seeped out and when you tried to pick them up to throw it was more like handling paper mache but we threw them anyway. We grappled hand to hand with them, trying to stick our water guns down their collars, inside their raincoats to return the soaking we were now getting. Hands up, trying to ward off the seemingly

endless stream that came at us, we shrieked and hollered as only kids can do when participating in a game with total abandon. Ammunition ran out within minutes and both sides were thoroughly soaked. Everyone was laughing and having a great time.

All our preparations and planning for the Great Water Gun Fight had paid off. It was a huge success and as we started walking back through the meadow together we cheered each other, clapping each other on the back and recounting our heroic efforts. Arms around each other, comrades, exchanging tales of individual bravery in the aftermath of the battle. Bragging and false bravado, and friend jibes put the final touch on a most exciting day. Both sides, enemies just moments ago, now the best of friends again.

By this time the sun had disappeared below the horizon of the treetops and twilight was slowly giving way to the deep indigo of the evening sky. We all separated outside the field where the grass was mowed and headed back to our bungalows to change into dry clothes. All of us trying to get a good story ready for the parent who would inevitably ask, "What happened?" All of us trying to think up the next game that would make the summer complete. But the "Great Water Gun Fight" would live in my memory for many years and could never be outdone.