

The Kissing Hut

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When I was 5 and my sister 2, our family moved to a typical Cape Cod house in Newington among a streetful of similar houses, a classic suburban environment. There were kids on both sides, across and down the street, a magic situation for growing up in the 50's. We had no TV, no cell phones — in fact we had 5 digit numbers and party lines — one car per family, a short walk to school, a market and drug store just around the corner for after school vanilla cokes.

We were in a row of houses where the moms were at home with their kids during the day. They would signal us for supper, each with a different whistle, after our long days of street and backyard games, wandering in and out of each others' houses or even out of the neighborhood. We'd ice skate on a nearby pond, go to the 5 and 10 to buy trading cards or to the local farm's ice cream bar, and we'd bike for picnics in undeveloped woods or to visit neighboring kids who had moved to other towns. All this was often without our parents knowing where we'd gone for the day! Truly "free range kids" as they say now, no helicopter parenting!

With Deb and Steve next door, Sandy, Linda and Frankie on the other side, Paul, Michael, Mary and Carol across the street, we had a rich world right at our doorsteps. We played Kick the Can, Mother May I, jump rope and hopscotch, marbles in the gravel driveways, street softball, Monopoly games that would last for days, croquet games — I once got two black eyes on an aggressive back swing by Steve. We built snow forts, had sleep outs in tents in the backyards, made tin can "telephones" that spanned our adjoining driveways, had birthday parties with neighborhood-wide treasure hunts, performed amateur costume dramas.

We also shared first kisses and crushes. Spin-the-bottle was a popular game until we were caught by Steve and Deb's father in one of our backyard tent sleepovers and the sleepovers came to an end. However, Spin-the-bottle just took a new form.

Right cross the street was an empty lot. With a few shovels and the appearance of diligent creativity, we dug a rectangular pit about 2 feet deep and used sticks around the edges to support a canvas roof. We could take our comic books and games in there, creating a kind of club house. But it evolved.

We would read the comic books until we came to a picture of a couple kissing. If the guy had black hair and the girl was blond, someone would call out "Paul and Debby" and they would have to kiss each other! Two brown hairs gave more room for multiple options, so we could engineer the pairing we'd been hoping for. It even evolved into a contest to see who could kiss the longest, often with one of the kissers asking through the side of his or her mouth, "Did we win yet?"

The lot now has a house on it, the residents probably unaware of the rich heritage under their foundation. No couples resulted from all the early flirtations, but Steve married my classmate

Sue and they live right up the road from me today. A couple of months ago we all went together to Frankie's funeral. He had recently moved from upstate back to Newington where he lived in a condo complex on one of the hills we biked to for picnics in the Kissing Hut days.