

Five (Almost) Forgotten New Bedford Landmarks

While I was born in Plymouth, I moved to New Bedford when I was 4-5 years old. I don't know that I recall very much about Plymouth. My first memory of life was when I was perhaps 1-2 years old. I have shared my first memory with friends in the past and they will ask "How do you know that you were 1-2 years old?"

Well, I vividly recall wearing a diaper (in hindsight) and playing in the grass. There was a tiny thing "playing" in the grass next to me. It approached me, so surely that meant it wanted to play. When you are new to the world, you are curious about everything. *Everything*.

Apparently, My thumb was my connection or feeler to the world. I used it to touch things. In this case, I reached out with thumb to connect with this thing and a powerful sensation of heat and pain exploded and surged through my hand. I turned, and ran towards safety, wailing as I went.

Turns out it was a bumblebee. I was so young, that I had no idea what a bumblebee was. Oddly enough, I would have never recalled that day playing in the grass if it wasn't associated with a powerful memory. Pain is an excellent mnemonic anchor.

I digress. Allow me the liberty, because it isn't altogether without a point.

Moving to New Bedford around 5 years of age meant, virtually my entire childhood is of New Bedford. While not born here, I am of New Bedford. It's instilled in me.

While I have many painful memories of New Bedford, the vast majority of my memories are positive ones. Sorry, cynics.

As I get older, my memory is not what it used to be. In my case, it's abnormal due to years of silent concussions from combat sports, but certainly, a portion of it is a product of growing older. My point with sharing my first memory is that even with normal and abnormal memory loss, I have retained many memories, even ones that would be considered "unimportant." They've been retained because of their intensity and power.

I have many fond memories of a number of landmarks throughout the city. Unfortunately, it's difficult to come across images of many of these. I remember playing tag football in the Car Barn before it was a housing complex. It was an auto salvage facility if memory serves me correctly. I remember crushed or destroyed cars stacked upon each other. They were stacked in rows along opposing walls, leaving a clearing in the center for heavy machinery. That was our football field.

At one point I lived on Clark Street, across from Ketcham Traps in 1978. I remember peering out the second-floor window and shouting to my mother "Everyone got so scared of the blizzard that they left town!! WOW!"

"How do you know that?" she said. A very puzzled mother joined me at the window. "All the cars are GONE." I replied. When she looked out along the streets from our vantage point, she pointed to a thin piece of metal poking out from the snow. "See that?" she started. "That's a car antenna. The cars aren't gone. They are under the snow." What do the youth say today? "Mind blown?" Understatement.

Any kid who lived in the city during that blizzard knows exactly what comes next. A laser-like focus on one mission: getting outside and being a kid. What followed was 3 days of festivities as the city was shut down.

In the context of winter, there's a saying "You know you are from New England when you get excited when you see a Trans

Am.”

Anyhow, that’s enough of an introduction. If left unchecked, I’ll type for a few more hours and we’ll never get to the “meat.”

So, let’s discuss 5 (Almost) Forgotten Landmarks. We’ll do a few of these. Here are just 5 that came to my head first.

1. Mars Bargainland/Cash ‘n Carry

I’ll need some help with this one. I recall bringing cardboard boxes to the mill building that is now the Cliftex Apartments. We would browse through the aisles and fill our boxes and place them on metal rollers. Moms loved this place because you could buy bulk amounts of stuff for low prices. They didn’t call it a bargainland for nothing!

2. Kinyon-Campbell Business School

This school, established in 1911, was on a hill below County Street at 59 Linden Street. I lived at 868 County Street, 2 houses away. Because it was below the street, a 12-foot wall abutted County Street. If you hopped the fence at County Street it was a 12-foot drop to the parking lot in Kinyon-Campbell. Guess what that meant after a snowstorm? The plows would drive the snow into the corners creating 12-15’ mountains of snow. Once while sliding down one of these mountains on a piece of cardboard I hit a depression in the snow and bounced. Bounced? Upon investigation, there was a piece of plywood under the snow. When I pried it up, I discovered that the mountain had been hollowed out, complete with snow support pillars!

I have a confession to make. My friend and I would pile a few score snowballs along the top of the mountain. We would prime the piece of cardboard close by. After firing 5-6 snowballs at passing cars, we would hit the getaway cardboard, race down the mountain and disappear into the secret snow cave. Anyone who was going to make us whippersnappers pay for our

Tomfoolery must have been confused to pull into the parking lot and see no one.

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3. Mitchell's Fish and Chips

Mitchell's was a genuine fried seafood spot on County Street. I don't recall if the proprietor was actually British, but the style of fry was. Not only was the batter recipe an imported idea, but the packaging was as well. Each order was wrapped in a newspaper. Can you do that today? I doubt it. We can't hitchhike, walk to school alone, or have our Fish 'n Chips served in an old newspaper.

4. Bob & Eileen's Super Variety Store

This variety store was directly across the street from Mitchell's Fish 'n Chips at 190 Weld Street. Remember penny candy? Remember when it was actually a penny? Yeah, Bob & Eileen's was the premier place to go for penny candy. Get a quarter from mom and head to Bob & Eileen's and deal with the very serious dilemma on what 25 pieces to get. Dump them into a brown paper bag and enjoy. Bob of Bob & Eileen's was Robert Antil's of Antil's in nearby Fairhaven.

5. Twinkie & Wonder Bread Outlet

When I was 5-6 years old I attended Ottiwell School. Five minutes before the bell rang, my mind was focused on one thing and one thing only. Total tunnel vision; Suzy Q's. I would walk home back then. Yeah, you could do that. I'd race out of the school fish into my pocket to confirm that my pocket change was still there for the umpteenth time and race to Hostess Twinkie & Wonder Bread Outlet on Belleville Avenue. You could get any of the baked goods that the line carried. This was my first glimpse of a first world problem. I vaguely recall a fellow one or two buildings down that would sell freshly made malasadas that I would opt for on occasion.

Which landmarks were part of your neighborhood growing up?

Please share them!
