

08 AUGUST 2005



The New Kids on the Block



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From Jim In Phoenix



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An eMail from Jim in Phoenix, is always an unexpected pleasure and often has something for the newsletter, below are his most recent contributions.

Pass this along to the gang...it's very interesting...get the kids, grand kids, and whoever else will watch this amazing show.

The Red Planet

The Red Planet is about to be spectacular! This month and next, Earth is catching up with Mars in an encounter that will culminate in the closest approach between the two planets in recorded history. The next time Mars may come this close is in 2287. Due to the way Jupiter's gravity tugs on Mars and perturbs its orbit, astronomers can only be certain that Mars has not come this close to Earth in the Last 5,000 years, but it may be as long as 60,000 years before it happens again.

The encounter will culminate on August 27th when Mars comes to within 34,649,589 miles of Earth and will be (next to the moon) the brightest object in the night sky. It will attain a magnitude of -2.9 and will

appear 25.11 arc seconds wide. At a modest 75-power magnification, Mars will look as large as the full moon to the naked eye. Mars will be easy to spot. At the beginning of August it will rise in the east at 10p.m. and reach its azimuth at about 3 a.m. By the end of August when the two planets are closest, Mars will rise at nightfall and reach its highest point in the sky at 12:30a.m. That's pretty convenient to see something that no human being has seen in recorded history. So, mark your calendar at the beginning of August to see Mars grow progressively brighter and brighter throughout the month.

Aging – 30 Years

The difference in 30 years...just in case you weren't feeling old today!

1975: long hair

2005: longing for hair

1975: Keg

2005: EKG

1975: Acid Rock

2005: Acid reflux

1975: Moving to California because it's cool

2005: Moving to California because it's warm

1975: Trying to look like Liz Taylor

2005: Trying NOT to look like Liz Taylor

1975: Seeds and stems

2005: Roughage

1975: Hoping for a BMW

2003: Hoping for a BM

1975: The Grateful Dead

2005: Dr. Kevorkian

1975: Going to a new, hip joint

2005: Getting a new hip joint

1975: Rolling Stones

2005: Kidney stones

1975: Passing the driver's test

2005: Passing the vision test

Aging – 20 Years

The people who are starting college this fall were born in 1985 (or so)...

They are too young to remember the Space Shuttle blowing up

Their lifetime has always included AIDS

Bottle caps have always been screw off and plastic

The CD was introduced the year they were born (a vinyl record, an 8-track...what's that?)

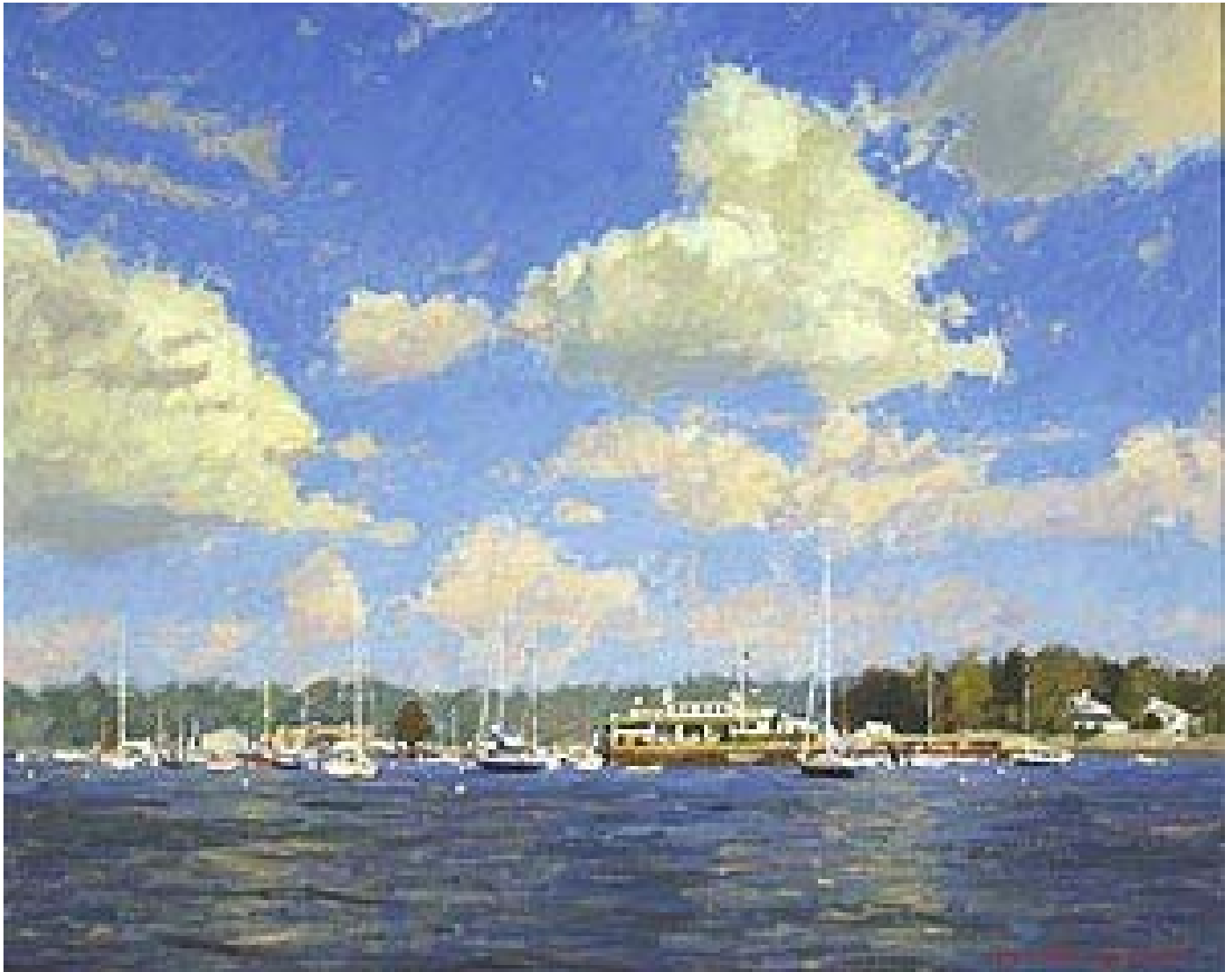
They have always had an answering machine

They have always had cable

They cannot fathom anything without a remote control

Popcorn has always been cooked in the microwave

They never took a swim and thought about Jaws
They can't imagine what hard contact lenses are
They don't know who Mork was or from whence he came
McDonald's never came in Styrofoam containers
They don't have a clue how to use a typewriter



Island Beach State of Mind

By Michael Dinan
Staff Writer, The Greenwich Time

Published 07 August 2005

The sky was cloudless and a steady breeze blew across Island Beach. Scott Rippel, 48, leaned back with a domestic beer in his hand and closed his eyes. Behind Rippel, a taxi driver from Pemberwick, stood the concrete moorings for a bathhouse destroyed by a nor'easter, gone now like the float where he and his friends learned how to swim. Those friends grew up together in Greenwich, worked, lived and had kids here.

"We're basically blue collar people and we come out here to get away," Rippel said. "We can't afford to go to Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket, but it's just as good. And we pass it along down to generations."

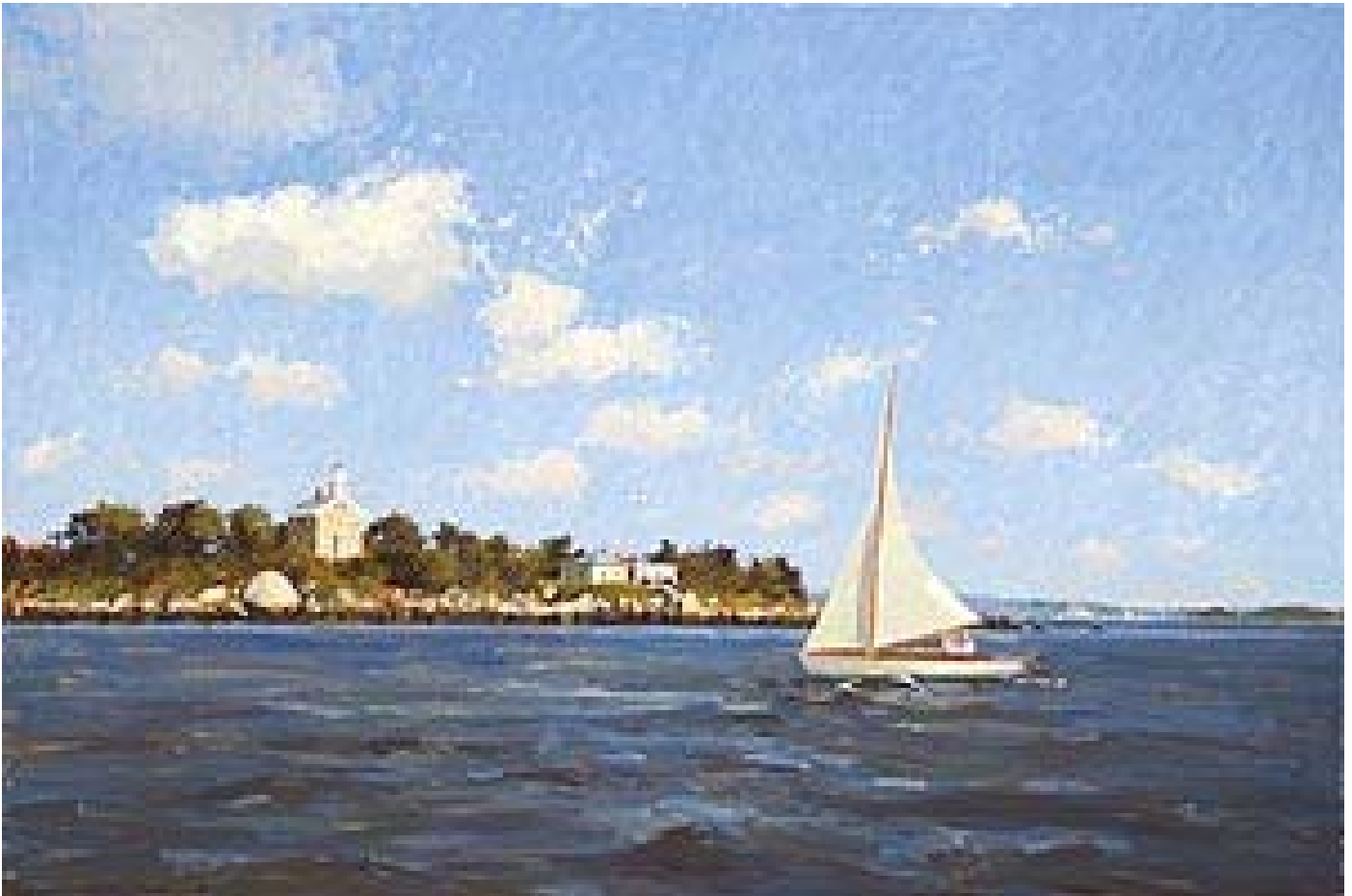
Tied to the island by deep family bonds, friendship, memories and basic pleasure-seeking, the group of roughly two dozen Greenwich natives feel connected to the town-owned property donated by the Lauders in 1918. A tightknit clan of working-class people who crawl on the beach as babies, pay the nominal ferry fee as adults and ride across Long Island Sound for free as seniors, the group now comprises the island's social nexus.

"We don't belong to a club. This is our club," said Sharon Sclafani, 47, a Cos Cob resident and former waitress whose father served as harbormaster for the town and whose grandmother used to work in the bathhouse.

Postal worker Sonny Merritt, 40, of the Fourth Ward in north central Greenwich, looked on from a picnic table littered with packs of cigarettes, macaroni salad, corn chips, marinating chicken, steak and a pot of chili, as Sharon squeezed a jet of fuel onto the grill.

"Hey, people are trying to have eyebrows over there," Merritt joked as a sheet of fire leaped from the coals. Seriously, though, it's a whole lifestyle out here. We come here to get away from that," Merritt said, jerking a thumb behind him toward mainland Greenwich. "Away from everything over there."

The meat sizzled on the grill and it was almost time for Sharon's husband of 27 years, Ray Sclafani -- greenskeeper at the Griffith E. Harris Memorial Golf Course -- to take a break from his regular horseshoe game.



Almost. "We're 58-6," Ray boasted while his longtime horseshoe partner, Rich Penn, sat on a low stone wall, just above a "Keep Off Wall" sign by the group's customary spot on the south side of the island. We

were 56-4 last weekend but we got beat by these guys I'd never seen before," Ray continued with a smile. "Rich lost for us. It's his fault. . . . But I still love you, brother."

The food was ready and George Boughton, affectionately known as "The Mayor of Island Beach," joined the group for lunch. Boughton, a 54-year-old carpet layer from Byram who grew up across the street from Rippel, recalls visiting the island with his parents as a boy.

"They used to have Hawaiian Day, with all this music, limbo, and food. It was great," Boughton said. "Look at this place. It's paradise." His wife, Jeanne, said the friends try to vacation together and gather as often as possible on the mainland. "We had families and we became one big extended family," said Jeanne, 42, draped in a gray Greenwich Department of Parks and Recreation Beach Crew shirt given to her by son Nicholas, who works at Island Beach.

A handful of children and teens, including the Rippels' and Boughtons' children, joined the adults by the picnic table. "I like coming here mostly to see everyone," said Molly O'Connor, 9, a Bruce Park resident who will enter fourth grade at Julian Curtiss School next month. "Also I like the trees because I can climb trees. . . . It's a small island, so you don't have to worry about parents wondering where you are." But when Molly attempted to climb one of her trees, wrapped in a damp New York Mets towel, Ray Sclafani hollered at her.

"Molly, what did I tell you?" Sclafani said, as sternly as he could muster. "Get down, sweetie, OK?" She did, joining Melissa Rippel, 21, a dental assistant in town, and Chris Hughes, 18, of Pemberwick, on the stone wall.

Behind them a flock of herring gulls waded in the mud flats at low tide. Jellyfish floated near the water's surface offshore, and salty air blew across hundreds of Greenwich residents, and guests, lounging on about 1,000 feet of sandy beach on the 4-acre island.



"This is what I do on the weekend," said Melissa Rippel, a 2002 Greenwich High School graduate. "It's your home away from home." That's literally true for the ladies, part of the larger group that meets most summer days on the island's eastern edge -- revered seniors born in Greenwich ("Green" pronounced like the color) the very year Island Beach became town property.

Una Frederick and Peggy "Kuppy" Koropsak, 87-year-olds who grew up across Prospect Street from each other, talked about old times over a liquid lunch with a handful of lifelong friends. By late afternoon the ladies were singing Irish ballads and discussing plans for this year's "Christmas in August" party. Since some of the ladies stay in Florida for the winter, they celebrate the holiday during the island season.

"It's paradise," Frederick said. "Ain't nothing like it."

By late afternoon, the town-bound ferries are far more popular than the ones arriving at the island. The sun-tanners' business is done, but for the ladies and the rest of the Island Beach group, there's plenty of time left for socializing.

"Look at them go," said Gracie Fox Butler, 75, pointing to the ferry from the martini-glass flag she regards as an emblem of the clan. "And they're taking my yacht. That's my yacht, you know. It comes every half-hour."