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Opinion

Hide and seek at the Double Beach Club

By Vinnie Penn Jul 16, 2019

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Greetings From Double Beach Branford
Contributed photos

A few years back I did a segment on my radio show about the summers of my youth and the various beach clubs that I'd either sneak into with friends or my parents would score a guest pass from theirs.

The former was Colony Beach Club in East Haven (now Silver Sands Beach Club) and the latter was Branford's Owenego (still going strong).

But there was another nagging at me, its name eluding me, and for some reason I was stuck on it being located somewhere in the vicinity of Hamden/Cheshire, which didn't help things, as I would soon discover I was way off.

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Keep in mind, I'm talking about that time in a child's life when any ride in the car that isn't one you do on a regular basis, and while fairly short, can feel like you've actually crossed state lines. With Lighthouse Park literally down the street from where I grew up in the Morris Cove section of New Haven, and Misquamicut Beach being the family annual two-week getaway every summer, those were my two points of reference: Ridiculously short or an hour away. Everything in between looked different every time out and was just long enough for my brother and me to get into a fist-fight in the backseat.

As I struggled to recall this beach club of days gone by, frantically typing words into Google while live on the air, listeners began calling in to aid me in my quest to remember this particular piece of my — and, presumably, many other Connecticut residents' — past.

But, all I kept getting was Sleeping Giant or Holiday Hill, and despite my repeatedly saying it definitely wasn't either of those, more kept calling in to say one or the other and hang up in my face. Loudly. Good radio.

Sleeping Giant definitely wasn't it, the still-popular hiking destination a place I continued to frequent well into my 20s. It actually recently reopened to the public after over a year of being closed, due to damage heaped onto it via a tornado touching down in early 2018.

Holiday Hill could have been it, but my gut said no. On the Cheshire/Prospect line, the location fit what my admittedly poor memory was coughing up, even if the name didn't ring even the tiniest of bells. One caller proudly declared it "a dream spot for kids since 1954!" But in that same call referred to it as a day camp. What I was remembering was no day camp. My parents were most definitely there.

That's when a caller suggested Double Beach Club. Ding! I typed those words into the ol' Google search engine and there it was in all its glory, grainy black and white photos transporting me to a time in my life filled with one-day summer getaways, the locations interchangeable. But in Branford? Less than a minute from Owenego? That was a shocker. My, what the memory does!

PREV

uble Beach Surf and Pool Club opened in 1964 and lasted some 15 years. oto, in particular, jogged a specific memory, and in ways more eerie than ot. It was of a fairly significant drop, off a somewhat grassy hill and down a good distance to big rocks with waves lapping relentlessly against them.

NEXT

As I looked at the photo, I was immediately reminded of a time my siblings and I were playing hide-and-seek and me being the youngest, between 6-8 - I thought of actually hanging off this 'cliff' as the perfect hiding place.

It sure was.

Nobody saw me. For a good minute or two at least. That's when I looked below and registered just how big a drop it was, just how large the rocks were, just how large the chance was I would not survive such a drop.

I began screaming. Top of my lungs screaming. My mother would later say how she had just finished lathering herself up with suntan lotion when she saw people rushing over to that area and overheard one of them say that a kid was hanging off a cliff and without a second's hesitation said my name aloud and began rushing over. Not my brother's or either of my sisters' - she knew it had to be me.

But a short, stocky, mustachioed man in a red, collared shirt - maybe with a cigarette dangling from his mouth? got to me first, and hauled me up onto the lawn where everyone gathered around me to both hug me and chastise me for being the worst picker of hiding places in the history of hide-and-seek.

At the computer, looking at that picture, there was more to it, though. It was familiar for still another, equally eerie, reason. But I could not pinpoint it.

It was around this time that I was at the exact location of the old Double Beach Club. It is where Hospice stands now. I had looked out off that hill one day, back in early 2005, my father in a wheelchair before me, and stared at those same waters, stood in that same spot.

But, it was lost on me at the time that this was the place where I had hid some 30 years earlier.

On that day I was not hiding, but instead seeking.

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