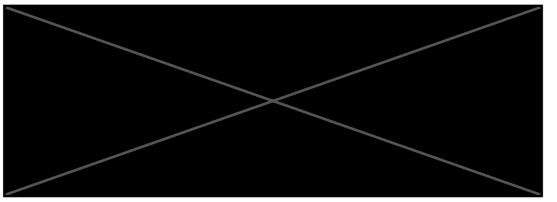
Celestine (Sally) Boisvert O'Connor



Coney Island Lighthouse

Sometimes you don't know what you have until it's gone. I felt this way when I was 15 years old and moved away from the ocean.

One July 8, 1960 - my Dad's sixtieth birthday - we began a new life in rural upstate New York. Dad retired from 34 years of service as a lighthouse keeper. After my initial culture shock resulting from the move from New York City to the suburbs, I found that I liked the slower pace of life, but I never stopped missing the ocean.

I missed seeing the ocean outside my front door. As children, my six brothers and sisters and I would play on the large boulders that lined the ocean of Norton Point.

It was thrilling to see the heavy surf that always came with storms. Coney Island Lighthouse Station sits on the very southwest corner of Brooklyn. We would often watch the approach of rain as it crossed the three and one-half mile channel that separated us from Staten Island.

Compared to other children living in New York City, we had a massive front lawn to play on. Dad always had a large vegetable garden and every time I see blue hydrangeas, I think of the bushes in front of the cottage.

The art of building light stations was perfected during the 1800's. When the lighthouse and cottage were built in the 1890's, they were made to last. The slant of the cottage roof, the way the tops of the second story windows slant towards the sea and the heavy brick walls were designed to prevent damage from the fierce storms. The cement used to build the thick foundation was so strong that it took my father an entire day to chisel a small hole for the installation of a new furnace during the 1950's.

In order to maintain the property, my father Adrien J. Boisvert had to be a Jack of all trades. He had to paint the tower, house and surrounding fence. He was able to do all of the electrical and most of the plumbing work himself. Dad was also a bricklayer, stonemason and an excellent carpenter.

During the forties and fifties, the cobblestone streets and old trolley tracks in New York were being replaced. The old materials along with old building materials were dumped along the shoreline around the city. Dad would retrieve some of this material to build structures around the station. One can still see the low brick and cobblestone wall near the ocean that he built in the 1950's.

My mother Alice M Boisvert worked just as hard as Dad. It was her responsibility to keep the house spotlessly clean - a tough job with 7 children under foot. At any time Coast Guard inspectors would show up at the door to give a white glove test to the house and tower. Mom also answered the

phone and maintained the station when Dad was out of town or sick.

One of the duties my parents had was to watch out for fog so that they could turn on the fogbell. They were often awakened at night with the sound of distant ships horns. I remember Dad putting a ladder up on the bell tower during a power outage in order to manually sound the bell with a hammer. He and my brother Adrien Jr. (Andy) would take turns doing this until the fog was gone. Eventually the bell was removed due to shorefront erosion and the fact that modern ships have new ways to establish their location.

Some of my fondest memories was going to the beach in the summer. Since the Army Corp of Engineers places large boulders in front of the station to prevent erosion, we had to walk four blocks to the nearest beach. Every ship that entered New York harbor had to pass right in front of us. We would watch for the really big ships like the Queen Mary. Within fifteen minutes, the wakes of these ships would reach shore in the form of big waves. We would try to body surf as many as possible. It was great fun.

This past March, I went on an Elderhostel learning vacation. One of the study topics was lighthouses. The man that gave this talk, Ralph E. Eselman, is on the board of the National Lighthouse Museum located on Staten Island. Ralph told me that the fresnel lense from Coney Island Light is on display at the Museum. I hope to see it one day. Since I have never seen the lighthouse from the ocean,

I plan on taking a cruise that will pass in front of the station.

Living at Coney Island Light has given my brothers and sisters and I a unique opportunity to know the joys of coastal living.