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## Chappaqua

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# Chappaqua

*Jonathan Webber*

I ordered a cheap chicken dish; my date from Burley, Idaho, had a bowl of creamed celery soup. We asked for caviar just for fun and the waiter said, “You have to order a meal.” The bill was already thirty-five dollars—we should have expected that in the Eduardian Room of the Plaza Hotel. Just before dinner, we had taken a ride around Central Park on a horse-drawn carriage. The coachman let the Clydesdale’s hooves slosh around in wet December snow for a few extra minutes, and he received more money for a tip than we had paid for a round-trip ticket in and out of Grand Central Station from Chappaqua, New York. When we were younger, we just looked, window-shopped, and admired from a distance; now we had to take it all in before leaving the East.

Even before we could legally drive, we could walk to the train station and take the nonpeak express train into the city for only \$2.35 round-trip. We would ask our mothers for a ride when it was cold. But often we would stay home; to the left of our house was the sleigh riding hill. I broke my leg there showing off at my brother’s birthday party. On the other side of the house was the basketball standard. We would shovel the snow off the driveway and hope that the ball wouldn’t bounce into the stream in the front yard and freeze. It made it harder to make free throws.

We knew winter was over when we could take off our shoes and walk in the freezing water of our stream. In spring and summer we could catch frogs in it. The stream made a great border for all our baseball, football, and lacrosse games, except when the ball got wet or lost in the woods towards the south end zone. The front yard shrank as we got older. When

we broke windows, we got the cul-de-sac to play in. The ball would still end up in the stream, so then my dad would take us to the harmless high school fields to play.

Chappaqua was always like that. The adults wanted it peaceful and serene and constant to contrast with their eleven-hour day in the city. And the parents could afford whatever they wanted. Maybe I should say the companies they worked for could afford it, but thinking about it, the companies worked for our parents. They owned or operated Union Carbide, Sperry Ram, IBM, Head, Olin, Rachile, Tyrolia, HBO, Eastman Kodak, Reader's Digest, and Time-Life Inc. That was just my graduating class.

We said good-bye to our classmates in our New York City style. The graduation party started at 2:00 in the afternoon. We got on Greyhounds and went down to the piers where our ferry took us to Fire Island on the tip of Long Island to Le Dock, an exclusive restaurant we had rented. There were two choices, steak or lobster, but most of us were either too full from the fresh shrimp, clam, and oyster bar or too drunk. Later that night, our ferry took us to the west side of Manhattan Island and up the Hudson river to where another ferry was waiting with the Sugar Hill Gang. They rapped and reggaed until 2:30 a.m., and most of us didn't even notice the George Washington Bridge or the Manhattan skyline. Mr. Giraldi could afford parties like that; his advertising agency had just come up with the slogan, "Tastes great, less filling." By 4:00 in the morning, we were back in our quiet Chappaqua beds, away from the lights and the noise and the traffic.

The city offered an endless fantasy. We didn't work or live there. We only used it when it was convenient. There were crowded New Year's Eve parties at Times Square, and 4th of July fireworks we could see from the sixth hole on the Whippoorwill Golf Course—walking distance from our house. It was on much higher ground than the Mt. Kisco Country Club course or the Seven Bridges course. This made it possible to see the fireworks twenty miles away. There were the Bicentennial celebration and the Centennial of the Statue of Liberty and the 1980 Winter Olympics, when our hockey team beat the Soviets. We were there—everyone was. Sometimes it was better on TV in comfortable, unchanging Chappaqua.

What was hard about leaving New York was not being able to attend all the events waiting for us. We could see the Yankees in the World Series and buy a hot pretzel and a cold hot dog at the stadium and then watch the next game on *ABC Sports*. We could see Chicago, Marshal Tucker, Boston, or James Taylor in concert at Central Park for \$2.50 and listen to the album later in quiet Chappaqua. I had the chance to watch Pele score for the Cosmos and Wilt Chamberlain put in 100 points against the Knicks. We could see the Giants or the Generals, not to mention the Mets, Jets, and Nets. We would stand in line at noon at the big red TCKTS sign at Duffey Square and get Broadway tickets for half price or less for that night's performance. If it was too expensive, we could go off Broadway, or down to Greenwich village, or to the Hard Rock Cafe, or to Rockefeller Center, or Lincoln Square, or the Museum of Natural History and Modern Art.

While packing for Provo, I realized we had seen more than the average

tourist. We could get up thirty-four floors, almost one-third of the way to the top of the Empire State Building, without paying. We weren't tourists waiting in line for the 112-story Twin Towers speed elevators. We wanted the pizza and the cheap egg rolls from the street vendors. We would try on \$9,000 sequin jackets at Gucci's and compare them to other shops on Fifth Avenue: Valentino's, or Bergdorf Goodman, or Fortunof, or Giorgio Armani, or Sax Fifth Avenue. Then we would finally buy a bagel for a quarter. The Staten Island Ferry is still a quarter also; it has been for forty years. We watched the man with an orange afro and a test tube with some dice in it hanging in his ear. These things we could own—and the flowers sold on 28th Street and Sixth Avenue. We owned the clowns and jugglers in Central Park and the mimes in Washington Square Park, surrounded by NYU.

We owned it all from peaceful Chappaqua. The church was small, but important; we didn't know why we should come to BYU if there were 215 girls working as mother's helpers in a three-ward radius. The coast was ten minutes away, and the crowded, dirty beaches were ours. It was five miles to the Connecticut line and its New England shopping malls. It was forty minutes to the first ski slope and less than two hours to Vermont and the best snow in the East. It was two-and-a-half hours to Philadelphia or Albany. It was five hours to Boston or Washington D.C. It was forty-two hours to Provo.