



Where the Lighthouse Once Stood

by Kathleen Mueller

A little red-and-white wooden post was pummeled into the dune across the road from our Cape Cod cottage, marking the spot where Nauset Lighthouse once stood.

Fifteen years ago, or thereabouts, the actual lighthouse was cautiously moved across the road some 300 feet to preserve the iconic symbol so strongly associated with Cape Cod.

The little red-and-white post popped up towards the sky, and stood just about three feet tall, peeking out through the weeds atop the dune. You could see it from our house, and you could see it from down below if standing on the beach.



The red and white Lighthouse marker

It represented, to me, the place from the beach where our house was located, if only one were allowed, and strong enough, to climb over the dune instead of trudging the long half-mile back to the beach through sand, wooden stairway and blacktop.

I giggled to myself, an inside joke I shared with no one: that post is to Nauset Lighthouse what This Is Spinal Tap's replica of Stonehenge was to Stonehenge itself. A miniature caricature of a monolithic icon. The resemblance to that hilarious movie scene still makes me chuckle.

Laura was a modest older woman who had rented our cottage for family vacations for nearly three decades prior to our owning the property. Laura and I became pen pals (keyboard pals) via email after she wrote us a heartfelt snail-mail letter suggesting that we continue renting the house to her and her family of lovely females, and we agreed.

Laura and her family rented the house one week every summer for the first few years we owned the place. During the remaining fifty-one weeks each year, Laura and I would write emails to each other, detailing both of our lives through cyberspace.

We shared a love of the Cape Cod National Seashore, and the month of April. She was afraid of dogs, she told me, and allergic to cats. She had survived breast cancer not once, but twice. She had three daughters and a bunch of granddaughters. I suppose there were some extraneous men in the family; we never much talked about them.

If ever I sent her an email saying, "Hello! I'm at the Cape!" she would always ask about the red-and-white wooden post. "Is it still there?" she asked in the spring of 2007 when some brutal April storms had torn the 50 wooden steps right off the face of the earth, making it impossible to go from our house to the beach for several weeks. "It's still there!" I gleefully reported. They said that the dune was eroding at 3 feet per year.

Each spring season, Laura would ask about the red-and-white wooden post. Sometimes, she'd ask several times throughout the spring and summer, anticipating her upcoming trip. Each time, I would verify that it was still there, holding strong and steady.

Appropriately enough, for a woman who loved Cape Cod so very much, Laura died unexpectedly in her sleep July 4th weekend in 2008. I was notified, weirdly enough, in an email "from Laura" which was sent to me by her daughter using Laura's email account. I sat at my desk at the travel company and cried. It was such a shock. She hadn't been sick, really, she had just complained of a thing or two, here and there. Laura was not what you could consider "old."

The family rented our cottage as planned that year, one last time. A family memorial gathering occurred atop the dune, beside the red-and-white wooden post Laura loved so much.

I still stay in touch with one or two of Laura's daughters. We see one another from time to time if we all happen to be on Cape Cod at the same time. We talk by telephone. They know they're always welcome to drop by and visit the dune and the little red-and-white wooden post.

Last summer, my ever-expanding behind broke the yellow beach chair Laura had left at our house. I regretfully deposited its twisted aluminum wreckage in the Eastham Town dump, ceremoniously placing it amidst all the other broken lawn furniture cast aside at the end of the season.



Nauset Light Beach

As summer came to a close, I was walking back along the lengthy beach towards the place our house would be, if you could reach it by going over the dune. I looked, and I looked, and I looked again. My eyes surveyed the top of the dune in nystagmic disbelief. Were they deceiving me?

No red-and-white wooden post!

I looked elsewhere, and then looked up again. I paced out the distance, in my mind, standing in one spot. Then, I walked to the foot of the dune to get a closer look. I scoured and scoured the horizon of the dune top. No post.

I thought of Laura.

If I could write her a message today, it might read: "Laura, just wanted to let you know... the red-and-white wooden post, where the lighthouse once stood? It's gone."

Photographs courtesy of Kathleen Mueller



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Mueller lives part-time in North Eastham and the rest of the time in the farm country of central Massachusetts, with her significant other, Gil, their dog, Hobie, and three cats: Cali, Tux and Newman. Mueller has shared her life with dozens of dogs and cats since

childhood, and volunteers for several animal-related non-profit organizations.

In 2010, she discovered a box of letters written by her late parents during WWII, and is currently publishing those letters in a three-volume biography of the Mueller family.

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