

A Cape Cod Adventure

by Judith Elliott and Nadeen McShane

WHEN A FRIEND ASKED HER TO FILL IN AS HER ROOMMATE when her friend could not come on the HPS trip to Newport, Judith Elliott thought, “Why not? I’ve been there, but this will have a different focus.” She never thought it would turn into a yearly adventure, a favorite part of every year. It is where she spends the better part of a wonderful week with like-minded people. The trip to Cape Cod and Nantucket was no different.

Nadeen McShane, on the other hand, read about the trip in the wake of her 70th birthday and thought, “I might never get to Cape Cod on my own. I’ll go with Janice Thomas, the HPS Trip Chair.”

The July 2018 trip that Janice planned to Cape Cod and Nantucket was so popular that she added a second trip in August. Below, Judith and Nadeen share their adventures in the first and second trips, respectively.

Captain David Kelley Bed-and-Breakfast

Judith begins, “While I had been to ‘the Cape’ many times, having both studied and visited there, I knew I would experience a different perspective. Greeting fellow HPS travelers before six in the morning, boarding the bus driven by our usual competent and friendly driver, sipping my coffee and eating a muffin our stalwart trip chair Janice provided. I hoped I would nap, but that did not happen. We were soon at the lovely Captain David Kelley House Bed-and-Breakfast in Centerville, MA, on the Cape. Sitting in the beautiful garden with the box lunch of our choice, we began our odyssey.”

Nadeen adds, “Our bus trip was fraught with traffic. It was a minor thrill to cross the new Tappan Zee, but otherwise—unlike Judith—I had trouble NOT napping. Remember

that 70th birthday thing? I nod off frequently.

“I was completely awake on our visit to the B and B. Pristine borders with perfect margins, a tranquil green and white palette, a wide and inviting lawn (cocktails anyone?), a stone stair to the lower patio—these details of serenity contrasted delightfully with the funny saga of Tom and Rick’s early days in the B and B business. The fellows regaled us, on a very hot and sweaty afternoon, with tales of unexpected discoveries on the property, their choices in upgrading the house, and their tough competitive spirit in the field of scone baking.”

C. L. Fornari’s Garden

Judith continues, “We journeyed to the personal garden of C. L. Fornari, a large area overlooking water. We first saw a large trial garden of hydrangea and then a cutting trial garden that I first spied from the vegetable garden, which I was especially enamored. The fence made of branches, the clever shielding from the little beasts who like to eat our vegetables, overlooking the terraced perennial garden was both creatively planned and productive. Walking through an arbor and passing more flower beds to the back of the house, we came to a large patio. From the patio you could see the water with inviting chairs beckoning you to come and sit. A good many of us simultaneously saw a pergola where our annual wine and cheese time was set. We had to be pried away from the lovely setting, good company, and, of course, the wine and cheese to board the bus to Hyannis.

“The hotel that night was not my favorite, but the rest of the trip and the places yet to visit overshadowed that. Dinner was fine at the hotel restaurant. I was too tired to go into Hyannis as many did.”

“Ahhh,” exclaims Nadeen.

“I wondered why Janice changed the hotel. The August group stayed at the Hyannis Harbor Hotel. The rooms were large, clean, and attractive with a little balcony, where I sat in the early morning to read.”

John Sullivan’s Garden

Judith resumes, “After a great breakfast, we boarded the bus and went to our first stop of the day, a whimsical, almost dreamlike garden with a waterfall, Koi pond, statues, and gargoyles peeking out between the plants. The owner’s theatrical flair was evident throughout.”

Nadeen joins in, “Owner John Sullivan played up his Santa-look with a red and white Hawaiian shirt. His property included two cottages, decorated and planted in different styles, which he rented to young, summer hotel workers. John obviously had a happy exuberance, evident in his very individual garden.”

Carol Alper’s Garden

Judith continues, “The second garden was much bigger and much to my liking. It was full of wonderful ideas to emulate in my own garden. There was creative brickwork for the walk around the house, passing the herb garden, bordered with bricks placed in a geometrical pattern and fronted by grafted apple trees espaliered across a low fence. Walking around the house, one comes across a mass of white astilbes, a bench made from a board which was actually a slice of a tree creatively tucked next to a Koi pond, a small patio for one’s morning coffee, and many ferns. The essential garden shed had a trowel and a cultivator hanging both decoratively and handily on the door. Japanese maples were in abundance—the homeowner’s favorite. The thought of lunch pried us away.

“And what a lunch it was! Sitting outside with good company, a lobster roll, and a summer beer just could not be better! Go to JT’s when you are on the Cape and tell them HPS sent you.”

Nadeen agrees, “Yes, the lobster roll (my first ever) was rich and delicious, but Janice suggested we save room for the ice cream at JT’s—and I was glad she did.”

“The Hydrangea Guy”

Judith proceeds, “The final garden of the day was at an exquisite 1930’s Cape Cod house set on a hill and surrounded with hydrangeas. We learned a lot from Mal Condon, “the Hydrangea Guy.” He told us how each perfect *Hydrangea macrophylla* beneath a maple tree was actually in a large pot which was taken up every few years, given a bonsai-like root trim, replaced in the pot and put back under the tree with the pot hidden. While not a task undertaken without machinery and expense, the result is breathtaking. His two vegetable gardens with raised beds and each with its own shed behind the house on this large property were also wonderfully done.”

Nadeen laments, “Once again the heat frustrated us; we wanted to see the garden, but we wanted to cling to the tiny bits of shade too. Forcing my sweating self up the stone steps of Mal’s house, I was able to gather my senses enough to note the lovely silver and pink color scheme of the companion plants in the beds surrounding the house.”

John Shaw’s Garden

Judith resumes, “After our usual hearty breakfast (made better by the good companions), day three found us in lovely Sandwich, MA, at a Victorian house that had been the home of our host’s grandmother. The focus was trees; big, unusual, and varied. (“His ‘thing’,” he said.) The first we saw was a *Stewartia*, then a giant *Ginkgo biloba*. Our host John Shaw also admitted to being “Rhodoholic,” having grown and hybridized many. We then saw his Norwegian wife’s vegetable garden and her berries, her “thing.” A marsh walk was there for the energetic.

Sandwich Heritage Museum and Gardens

“After pulling people from the museum gift shop, we were off to the gardens. Our guide gave us a thorough, interesting tour, followed by box lunches at the outdoor cafe. Afterward, some went to hear “the Hydrangea Guy” give a talk, some to the car museum, and others to the gift shop. I sat and watched the flume, behind a mass of astilbes, as it cascaded down to a pond below us.”

“Those of us on the August tour enjoyed an enthusiastic young horticulturalist who showed us the parking lot gardens at the Heritage Center,” says Nadeen. “These gardens were designed to handle the runoff from the extensive paved space, recycling to reuse all that water which otherwise might have gone down sewer drains. The resulting gardens—full of grasses and natives—displayed color and texture with such panache that we might not have guessed that they had an ecological function.”

The Helfrichs’ Garden

“The third garden of the day,” Judith shares, “was a much smaller scale, do-able garden. It was very well planted, had adequate whimsy such as hedgehogs, and a garden shed I would find difficult to leave. The garden had recently been transformed by the loss of many trees from a storm. (But aren’t gardens always changing?)”

Nadeen chimes in, “At this ‘do-able’ Helfrich garden, Phyllis Helfrich introduced herself as an octogenarian gardener. Her beauty and energy made this description hard to accept. Like the Shaws in the Sandwich garden described previously, the Helfrichs suggest that gardening keeps a person active and healthy.”

Nantucket

“The next morning,” continues Judith, “we departed for the ferry which would take us to Nantucket, leaving the bus behind. Nantucket is beautiful with cobblestone streets, historic buildings, and outstanding window boxes full of ideas to copy at home. A window box landscaper is a real job on Nantucket. While some of our peppier members rented bikes and peddled (all day!) to the garden conservancy gardens, others

rented a car to see the gardens, some hopped on the local public transit, while still others did a bus tour. My group elected to take the bus to the end of the island to the oldest town, very quaint with great beaches at the foot of a bluff and many charming, tiny cottages and equally tiny yards.

“No space for cars between the cottages, just foot travel or bikes. The buildings were largely covered with climbing roses, in some cases over the top. There were climbing hydrangeas and the ubiquitous *Hydrangea macrophylla*, of course.

“Following lunch (and some time watching the people on the cobblestone street and at the town fountain), it was time to leave. We shuttled back to our new hotel. Anything the previous hotel may have lacked, this one more than compensated. Many of us decided to splurge for dinner downtown; the halibut, ambience, and the people did not disappoint.”

Nadeen shares, “On our trip, Janice arranged a tour bus around Nantucket, and the driver turned out to be a vivid storyteller. He lives on the island year-round, patching together a livelihood by holding several jobs. He gave us a working-man’s perspective on an island that is a famed playground for wealthier Americans. His comments added depth to my impressions of Nantucket. Did you realize that Nantucket’s pristine gray and white appearance is dictated by statute? Even the Ford dealer and the Cumberland Food Market wear the same colors. There is no building material on the island that isn’t natural: no vinyl siding, for example. Our driver pointed out that as a boy, he thought of going to the mainland as ‘going to America.’ As a boy, he had dreamed of living off-island, but he realized, he told us, that there was no better place to raise a family than on Nantucket.”

Mom’s

Nadine continues, “A word (or more) about that breakfast at the Nantucket Inn: the restaurant is called ‘Mom’s,’ and boy oh boy, was ‘Mom’ prepared. We had all the eggs, sausage, and toast of our previous breakfast, but in addition light cheese blintzes, pastries, cold cuts, and a waffle station

that prepared Belgian waffles as you waited. Did I make you hungry? It was great.”

The Chapmans' Garden

Judith continues, “After a ferry ride, the final garden was on the Cape garden tour—a small but wonderfully planted garden with varied textures, like chard with perennials, and a planting philosophy that if you don’t earn your keep as a garden plant, you are plucked out of the garden—so plants better behave.”

Nadeen adds, “The Chapmans’ garden was wonderfully planted with dogwood, pear, and beech, with shady paths for azaleas and rhodies, a hidden pond, and a collection of tiny hostas.

“But it was the sunny border, right on the street, that took my breath away: those bees buzzing in the extravagant sedums, perfectly staked 6'-tall dahlias, zinnias, cannas, devil’s trumpet, and elephant ears popping up through the mixed conifers. This garden intoxicates the gardener with its joie de vivre.”

Still Time to Shop for Plants

Judith concludes, “After boarding the bus we made our usual nursery stops for souvenir plants to embellish our gardens at home. It was a rather quiet on the long drive home except for talking of plans for the next trip.”

“And except for the gyrating of a few members to ‘Dancing Queen’ in the aisles of the speeding bus,” quips Nadeen.

“See you in Connecticut in 2019,” they both agree.