

People of Avon

Bob and Sally Garvin

by Ruth Maher

Like most fairy-tale romances, their story began once upon a time, long, long ago, but not so very far away.

Bob and Sally grew up in West Hartford and were casual friends in high school.

Bob attended Mt. Hermon and the University of Hartford before joining the U. S. Coast Guard. The more he learned about life as a mariner, the greater became his love of the sea. With amazing dexterity he could quickly tie any knot that had ever been devised. He vowed that he would some day pilot his own boat.

Sally Coombs graduated from Hall High School and Skidmore College. Beautiful and vivacious, with a wide range of interests and talents, she was a girl who could not easily be forgotten.

In 1948 Bob and Sally were married. Both of their fathers were home builders by trade, and Bob joined them in building his first home in Secret Lake, Canton.



Despite the fact that her father helped build that house, Sally's parents found it hard to believe their daughter and son-in-law would be moving "all the way over the mountain to such a remote and godforsaken place as Secret Lake."

At that time Route 44 over the mountain was often a pretty forbidding drive, especially in winter. On the Avon side, at the edge of the steep west-bound lane from the top of the mountain down to the left curve, the deep concrete-lined runoff ditch was wide open. No fence or other barrier protected a hapless driver from suddenly finding himself with his right wheels deep in the ditch and his undercarriage scraping the pavement. Negotiating that stretch of Route 44 under slippery conditions was enough to remind any driver to say a prayer and resolve that the very next day he would put on studded snow tires and have his brakes checked. He might even be tempted to change his route and travel from West Hartford to Avon by way of Farmington.

But Sally and Bob loved their house and the wonderful world of nature that surrounded it. During their years in Canton they welcomed the arrival of four lovely daughters, Janis, Kim, Leslie and Misty. The girls still cherish happy memories of that house and their friends in Canton.

After World War II Sally's father, with John Kenney, had reopened the Hitchcock furniture business. Bob traveled for Hitchcock from southern New Jersey to Maine, delivering the exquisite Hitchcock pieces, often assembling them in customers' homes. Whenever possible, he traveled the back roads, making many friends, discovering hole-in-the-wall nooks and diners that offered comfortable overnight accommodations and delicious home-cooked meals. He was often invited to spend the night at the home of a client. It was not unusual for him to revisit these new friends, delivering their repeat orders of Hitchcock furniture.

Fine woodworking was one of Bob's hobbies, and he enjoyed creating beautiful specimens of early American pine furniture. He was meticulous in his work, and Lambert Hitchcock himself would have been proud of Bob's finished pieces. His interest in the preservation of old structures led him to membership in the Avon Historical Society, a group to which Sally was also dedicated.

Bob firmly believed in the importance of preserving open space. He was a nature lover who, despite his busy schedule, found time to tame the resident chipmunks to eat from his hand. Under his guidance, Janis also learned to hand-feed the chipmunks. As president and director of the Avon Land Trust, Bob played an important role in promoting our organization's growth and goals. Family and friends remember him as unassuming and dedicated to service. Bob loved music and was a member of the Hartford Choral Club. He enjoyed participating in programs of Canton Benefits, Simsbury Light Opera Company and Avon Music Makers.

In 1964 the Garvin family moved to Oakridge Drive, Avon, to the beautiful house Bob had helped design and build. For the rest of their lives, that was a lively center



of activity for Bob and Sally and many friends and family members. Bob never lost his love for the sea and boating. The family spent four months of each year at their second home at Hawk's Nest Beach in Old Lyme. When the opportunity arose, they bought a 40-ft. PT Boat from government surplus. Because of its size, they named it "Whaleboat," and it added a new dimension of beauty and excitement to their lives.

Three of the girls were cheerleaders, and Sally was a regular spectator at high school football games to cheer for the cheerleaders as well as the team. She was an expert seamstress who created beautiful prom gowns for her girls. She also made elaborate costumes for Simsbury Light Opera Company and Avon Music Makers.

Among civic groups who publicly acknowledged Sally's skill and generosity were Avon Board of Education, Avon Garden Club, FAVARH, Avon Historical Society, American Field Service Student Exchange Program, Avon Republican Party and Avon Free Public Library, where she and Olive Russell volunteered in the History Room. In 1999 they were given the Community Barn Raiser Award by "Yankee Magazine" for having donated more than ten hours of weekly service in sharing their knowledge of recorded history of the town and its citizens.

At a time when I wanted to do some research regarding local history, I called the Avon library and was told to call Sally Garvin, whom I had never met. She insisted that I

need not wait for the regularly scheduled hours for opening the History Room. She would meet me there that very afternoon. She did, and within a few minutes she provided an overwhelming amount of information about my subject and the availability of many other reference sources. She possessed a great reservoir of knowledge and was very gracious and generous with her time. Sally and her friend, Olive Russell, made the History Room a wonderful place where it was easy to get lost in the town's past, among people whose lives wove color and character into the story of Avon.

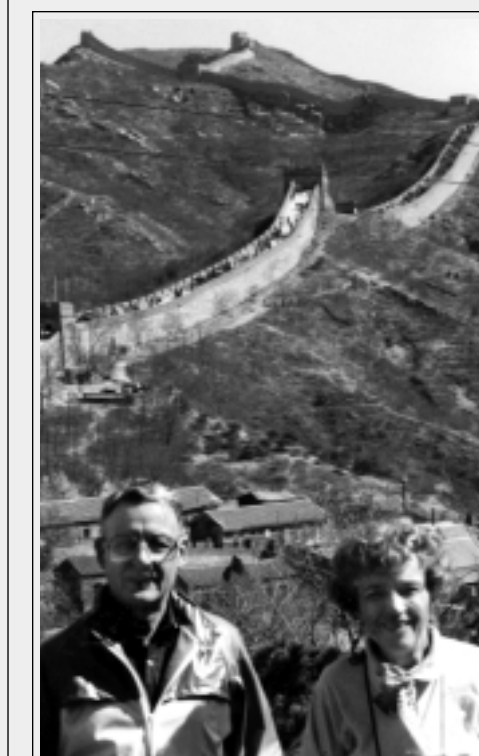
Bob and Sally found the world full of fascinating people and places. They made friends in Alaska, Australia, China, Ecuador, Guadalupe and the other exciting places they visited. Janis recalls that their memories of the Panama Canal were among their favorites.

The Garvin girls have vivid memories of their parents' love for people and nature. They share their parents' philosophy that top quality is worth working and waiting for, and hard work is the most effective path to achieving worthwhile goals.

Bob developed chronic leukemia in 1995 and died in May, 2000. Sally died of cancer in February, 2001.

photos from left to right: Bob and Sally with their very special "girls"; Bob aboard "Whaleboat"; at the Great Wall of China

In recognition of their invaluable contributions to the Avon Land Trust and other town service organizations, a memorial bench will be placed in their honor at the hiking trail being planned for Hazen Park on Nod Road. It will be a quiet spot where visitors can enjoy the beauty of the mountainside and the valley while they reflect on the importance of preserving such unspoiled vistas for generations yet to come.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Avon Land Trust is happy to welcome our many new members. It's wonderful to know that so many friends and neighbors share our desire to protect and preserve the natural beauty of Avon. Your interest and support are deeply appreciated.

ANNUAL MEETING

The Avon Land Trust

Avon Senior Center

West Avon Road

November 15 at 7:30 PM.