

## “Marshfield” By Ralph Fletcher

THERE'S A TOWN called Marshfield in the state of Vermont. You can also find a Marshfield in Maine, one in Missouri, and one in Wisconsin. I grew up in Marshfield, Massachusetts. The curly part of Massachusetts that sticks out into the ocean is Cape Cod. Marshfield sits on the ocean, just above that curl.

I lived on Acorn Street in a regular house bordered by forest on two sides. Dad

owned seven acres of woods in back. Across a dirt driveway we had Ale's Woods, a forest of pine trees. The pines dropped millions of needles, which gave the forest floor a nice, springy feel. Those trees were great for climbing. If I crawled out too far on a limb and fell, the soft needles cushioned my fall, so I never got hurt.

The woods held magical things. We found snake skins, real Indian arrowheads, box turtles, beehives, snake spit on tall grass. We dug up the buried trash from people who lived there many years before. We saw gravestones so old we could no longer read the names carved in them. We found all kinds of mushrooms. Some were edible, and others were poisonous toadstools. Mom said to think of them as strangers—some are good, some are bad, and since you couldn't tell the difference it was best to leave them alone. One morning in the woods I stepped into a fairy ring of mushrooms, a big circle ten feet across.

There was a tiny stream in our backyard small enough so you could step from one bank to the other. This stream flowed under the dirt driveway and formed a swamp at the edge of Ale's Woods. I loved the dank smell of that swamp and all the things that lived there: mossy logs and goggle-eyed frogs, bloodsuckers and eels and foul-smelling skunk cabbage. Half the swamp was underwater, and the other half contained thick, dense mud. It was impossible to walk through that muck without getting stuck. More than once I tried and left behind one of my sneakers, a lost sole sunk forever at the bottom of the swamp. I got in trouble for that. But today I'm glad to know that something of mine was left behind in Marsh-field.

Here is my story.

