

MY VIEW

# A Cape Cod awakening, summer '88

By CELESTE MURPHY-GREENE

From 1986 to 1989 I had the pleasure of working as a Falmouth lifeguard. Traveling from my family's home in northern California each summer to Falmouth was always a memorable experience. My father, Fred Murphy, having grown up in Abington, spent many summers on Cape Cod. He wanted his children to experience the summers on the Cape as he had as a young man and arranged for my brother and me to drive across country to our jobs in Falmouth.

Working with the Falmouth lifeguards was an incredibly positive experience, to say the least. My first summer guarding I was 18 years old and had recently graduated from Piedmont High School in the San Francisco Bay area. I enjoyed not only the natural beauty of

Falmouth, but also the warm and friendly people I met lifeguarding.

During the summer of 1988, when I was teaching swimming lessons to young children, biomedical waste began washing up on the Falmouth beaches. A boat carrying medical waste from New York made its way up the East Coast to Cape Cod dumping the waste into the Atlantic Ocean. Seeing used syringes and other medical waste wash up on the pristine Falmouth beaches was an alarming experience.

Fortunately, this event occurred when Congress was out of session and many members of Congress vacationing on the Cape witnessed this biomedical pollution firsthand.

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On Nov. 1 of that year the Medical Waste Tracking Act of 1988 was signed into law, stipulating specific measures to be taken to safely handle, separate and dispose of biomedical waste, including the placement of red storage containers we now see in hospitals and medical offices. This November marks the 25th anniversary of that legislation.

This was my environmental awakening. I was a 20-year-old college junior at the time, and seeing used syringes wash ashore on the beaches I loved had a long-lasting impression. I was motivated to return to UCLA and help improve our environment.

I started a campus-wide recycling program called Sororities and Fraternities for the

Environment. Later, I earned a master's and a doctorate in public administration with a concentration in environmental policy. Now, as an adjunct professor of public administration at the University of Virginia, I specialize in environmental policy. I have published several academic journal articles and book chapters on the topic of environmental justice and continue to conduct research and publish in this area.

I will always be grateful to my father, who passed away last year, for sending my brother and me to lifeguard in Falmouth. I am also thankful for my experience lifeguarding in Falmouth, not only for the lifelong friendships made, but for opening my eyes to environmental issues and truly having a positive impact on my life.

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