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"It's your New York!"

The Rondout Reader



WELCOME TO
HIGH FALLS

Settled
1669

A Smalltown Story

by Kevin Ahearn



THERE'S ALWAYS THE AQUEDUCT

I set out to become a hero when I was nine, the moment I saw the Aqueduct.

The old stone bridge had "double arches" and looked like the ancient Romans built it. More than a hundred feet long, 15 feet wide and maybe 25 feet high, the Aqueduct was going to make me a Man!

My beautiful grandmother, a worldly Vaudeville performer generations ahead of her time, refused to associate with the local 'riff raff' and never did it. Mom couldn't; she had a 'perforated eardrum,' which had to be worse than cancer. The doctor said she

could die if she went underwater. My father didn't need to; World War Two had made him a hero.

I'd be the first in my family to...I imagined the everlasting, unbuyable moments 'tween off the Aqueduct and far below, the waters of the Rondout Creek; I was gonna fly like Superman!

Like millions of other American children in 1955, I was a 'Baby Boomer,' the son of a hero who had saved the world. As we grew up, our 'greatest generation' parents didn't want their kids stuck in the hot city for the summer. Mom made connections with old friends of her mother, and got us a place to stay. A couple of days after school let out, the five of us and Mom and Dad got into the family car, a dark green 1951 Pontiac with a flathead V-8 and a busted grill, and headed north out of New York City.

The 90-mile ride rolled on and on and on until Mom pointed to a stone tower atop a distant mountain to spot forest fires.

"We're in the country!" she said.

A little later we pulled into *Paul's Crystal Spring Lodge*, a big wooden house on Mohonk Road with ten numbered bedrooms, built back in the day to board *canal workers*, whoever they were.

The next morning Dad took the bus back to the city and we went into High Falls, a tiny town with fewer people than *53rd Place*, our little street in Woodside, Queens. But down the hill along *Bruceville Road*...

That same July thousands of miles away, Disneyland, 'the happiest place on earth,' with its four fabled 'lands' was about to open. Little did 'Uncle Walt' know; compared to this stretch of the Rondout Creek in High Falls, New York, his 'Magic Kingdom' was strictly Mickey Mouse.

From downstream up: first there was 'The Rapids', 40 yards across, shallow but fast, we'd ride the rushing water down a chute, first in tire tubes and then on our backs, paddling underwater to keep our feet up. Best in July. When the Rondout dropped in late August, strictly for babies.

Just a little upstream, the 'Crick narrowed. Called 'the flat rocks' ten months a year, during the summer, best for sunbathers and waders, it was 'Jew Beach' (Hey, this was the Catskills!). I never got into fishing, but catch a carp and you could sell it - in certain circles, 'Rondout trout' was a summer delicacy.

Then came the 'Sandy Beach' where Mom, a knock-out in a one-piece almost as black as her hair, would spread out the blanket every morning. Most was flat rock, but there was a short stretch of sand where kids could walk into the shallow water to wade and play. Out a little bit under the water lay 'First Rock' and then 'Second Rock' where novice swimmers could stand easy.

The water was crystal clear. I could throw a can and then go underwater and read the label as it sank. On weekends, 'Sandy Beach' could get pretty crowded. It would be years before the first African-American family would come and I'm ashamed when I remember how much they stuck out.

Then the 'High Rocks' which were flat and wide and low; it was the 'Crick' that was high which made for safe diving. In later years, this would be the late night party place.

The Rondout curved into 'Smith's Beach' which was larger and sandier than 'Sandy Beach,' but rocky and hardly anybody entered the water there.

'The Ledges' loomed over the 'Crick' like a staircase. Step by step, swimmers would work their way up to jump off the top one. The water was deep and the current could be strong. No beginners here.

If the Garden of Eden had a 'swimmin' hole', we were in it. Later I'd sail on the Hudson and the Mississippi and spend nearly a month on the Amazon, but the Rondout was my Birth Water - a good part of me was born in it. 'Adam', I know how you felt!

"There's always the Aqueduct," Mom would say; she, too, saw it first as a child.

From another age, the Aqueduct jutted out from the far side in a double span...'Somewhere over the rainbow', Oz had its Yellow Brick Road; the Gray Stone Bridge was ours, right here over the Rondout.

The Aqueduct was finished in 1826, half a century after the *Declaration of Independence* and the same year the 'Granite Railway', the first chartered railway in America, began operations. Unlike other architectural wonders made of imported materials, the stone bridge was homegrown; the granite blocks were cut in the local quarry. Cement from nearby Rosendale held it together.

On September 2, the 43rd anniversary of the evacuation of New York by the British, workers and sightseers, in carts and on horseback and on foot, lined both sides of the Rondout for the laying of the keystone. Inserted in the masonry: a copper box

containing current coins and engraved plates with the names of D&H officials and the Kingston chapter of the Royal Arch Masons.

In full regalia of their ancient order, the High Priest, King, and Scribe and Captain of the Host of the *Mount Horeb Chapter 75*, gathered at the apex of the arch as the band, set up on the left side of the Rondout.

As if baptizing a newborn or perhaps christening an oceanliner, the High Priest poured corn, wine, and oil on the sacred keystone as the band struck up a solemn tune.

Drummers, strummers and hornblowers led the procession to a triangular table laden with food and drink. The celebration went on to Simeon DePuy's Stone House Tavern, in business since 1797, where the revelers were served by black slaves. (The *Emancipation Proclamation* was nearly two score years away.) Best toast at the bar: that the new stone bridge "never want an adequate supply of water to transport the wealth of the interior to the Hudson."

Never a train or a horse-drawn cart or coach or car or truck would ever cross the Aqueduct. An iron lattice supporting wooden walls, not unlike the hull of a ship, was then constructed atop the structure and filled with water to float 20-ton coal boats *over* the Rondout, 50-plus per day, from dawn to nightfall, six days a week.

A bridge for *boats!* Pulled by mules straight out of Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland*, through the Delaware & Hudson Canal to the Hudson and then downriver - The 'Big Apple' got its early glow via the Aqueduct.

A quarter mile upstream roared the falls, fifty feet across and twenty feet high, which gave the town its name.

Only two kinds of people lived in High Falls: those who had jumped off the Aqueduct and those who were going to 'one of these days'.

My day was coming, but first I had to learn how to swim. My first week on the Rondout I was out in the deep water off 'Second Rock' in my froggy tube when its legs came apart and I went under. Drowning is like climbing a ladder without rungs. When I fought my way to the surface, I saw someone swimming for me. It was Mom.

Many years later, I would be her caregiver in the last stage of her life. When things got difficult, I'd see her as the brave lady I twice owed my life to.

Winnie Williams, the 'Grand Dame' High Falls, had jumped off the Aqueduct before most of our mothers were born. She also performed under it--puppets, singing and dancing, and charged the city kids five cents a show.

Together she and Mom used to 'police' the Sandy Beach, sweeping up shards of glass from broken beer bottles. Later they'd team up to clinch the deal that transformed an abandoned local church into the Delaware & Hudson Canal Museum, a must-see for townies and tourists alike.

And don't forget the seasonal Sunday flea market (Old Lock #18) which helped pay the museum's mortgage.

If New York State had a 'Roman Forum', it was High Falls. Stone reminders of the Canal Age are spread out in and around town like the petrified bones of a gigantic dinosaur.

It was the D&H Canal that gave rise to the Aqueduct. Conceived in 1823 to ship anthracite coal from Rondout-on-the-Hudson to Honesdale, PA and then to New York City, the state's first super-highway would be four feet deep, 32 feet wide, contain 108 locks, 137 bridges, 26 basins, dams, and reservoirs. Unlike the Erie Canal, the D & H was backed by private money, making it one of the first million-dollar enterprises in American History, bankrolling through the tiny hamlet by the falls.

Overloaded with rules and regulations, by-laws and traditions, crime and corruption, child labor and 'payday ladies', cock and dogfighting, and a lore awash with ghosts and witches, through drought and flood, epidemics and strikes, accidents and disasters, canal work was long, hard, dirty and dangerous, a low-paying seasonal job without security and benefits. From this hearty stock came the 'High Fallonians' who would jump off the Aqueduct.

"Dig we must for a better New York" began with canal builders. By the 1840's, dozens of water-ways laced across the state. Ill-conceived from the start, most would flounder and fail. While The Erie was the bigger and longer, and more famous canal, the D&H proved to be a sound investment ready for upsizing.

In 1850, a second water-way was dug through High Falls bypassing the original canal and the Aqueduct. Cut off on both sides, the former engineering marvel was left to begin and end nowhere.

In a couple of weeks I was swimming, underwater, too. But the Aqueduct was still way upstream. Soon enough I swam with the current from the 'High Rocks' to the 'Sandy Beach' and then back against it.

Come early August I was ready for a 'scouting mission'.

Setting out from the 'High Rocks' in a big, black inner tube, for the first time I paddled up towards the Aqueduct. But it wasn't the only bridge that had crossed the Rondout here.

Between 1847 and 1851, John Augustus Roebling, who would later build the Brooklyn Bridge, designed and constructed four unique structures. Like the original stone bridge, it was as much a bathtub, each filled with water to float boats full of coal from lock to lock.

The larger, "second generation" 50-ton canal boats were equipped with tiny kitchens and beds, allowing whole families to live onboard. Pulled by a team of mules, as they crossed over the new Roebling structure, they could look down at the 'old' Aqueduct, stripped of his latticework, as naked as the day the Royal Arch Masons had laid in the keystone.

In 1850 the canal company, which owned most of the land, formed the village into streets and lots. When drunken railroad laborers, driven from their jobs on a Hudson construction site, attacked D & H Canal workers, the combatants were called 'High Falls Rioters.'

The Roebling Aqueduct burned down in 1917 and its ironworks were sold as scrap. Only the stone abutments, towering over the original stone bridge, remained. Jumping off 'The Pier', as it was called, was no mean feat; 'The Ledges' had to be cleared on the way down.

Bill Blakely, a redheaded local kid (Mom called him a 'nut'.), rode off on his bicycle. With a victorious scream, boy and bike separated in mid-air. Both survived to ride back up to town.

Under the Aqueduct looking up at the stonework, if Camelot or Olympus had a skywalk...

"Colossal!" said the sea captain in *King Kong*, which I'd see a hundred times on television. "It could almost be Egyptian."

Not only were kids jumping and diving off, but there was a rope from above and they were swinging on it.

The Aqueduct had no guardrails. There was a one-inch hollow pipe embedded in the surface stones. First somebody stole a length of barbed wire that was quickly replaced with a safer rope.

A little later, the 'Sandy Beach' would have a rope of its own. To take the best ride, you climbed a small tree, pushed off and *zoom!* Playing *Superman*, I wore a big red towel and off I went, peaking high and letting go. Weighing a ton dripping wet, my 'cape' wrapped around my neck and again I almost drowned.

"Little boys and little girls jump off the Aqueduct," went the homespun homily. "Young men and young women hit the 'Crick."

"I was terrified that first time," one jumper told me.

One boy went off holding a big beach umbrella which tore apart before he hit the water.

"I blessed myself before I went over, a lot of the kids did," a young girl told me. "The second span where the water is deep, but away from the whirlpools. Look before you go 'cause you don't wanna hit anybody down below. And after you hit, spread your arms and legs. You'll come up faster."

She might have been a full year older, but of a different class - an 'experienced woman' mentoring an innocent virgin.

Not soon enough and never well enough, I'd be finding out about girls. How wonderful it would be if I kissed my first one on the Aqueduct. Later we'd be married on the stone bridge, and after the ceremony, sneak back in the middle of the night with one of those double sleeping bags. Many, many years later, my family would gather as one of my grandchildren sprinkled my ashes from the Aqueduct into the 'Crick'.

I was going to heaven!

And on a new moon night; the Aqueduct's twin arches, shadows blotting out the stars, became like wings as if it could fly away to anywhere in the world.

Aqueduct, take me with you!

Day after beautiful day, the sun hot and the skies clear, the water got lower and lower, the current slowing to a lazy crawl. Great news for new swimmers; the whirlpools under the Aqueduct became mere eddies.

My plan took shape. I'd tell Mom I'd be going to the 'High Rocks' for a while, then keep going. No towel or sneakers, I'd take the path up behind 'Smith's Beach' and there I'd be. I wondered how long it would take me to build up the nerve to jump.

And when I went off, would I close my eyes and hold my nose?

Mom would get 'hiss-tickle'! Sit me out of the 'Crick' for a few days and take away my comic books, but later on, for years and years, I could hear her bragging to the girls. "My oldest jumped off when he was nine...and hasn't been the same since."

And she'd be right. 'Cause when I got back to the city and saw the other boys, bigger and stronger and older...

"I jumped off the Aqueduct," I'd tell them. "I'm a Man!"

Hardly slept a wink before the big day. Nothing could possibly go wrong.

"You win some, you lose some, and some get rained out," they say in baseball.

I got rained out. Again and again and again. As the rain came down, the 'Crick' went up, higher and higher. After a couple of days, we drove down to the gravel parking area near the 'Sandy Beach'. It was completely underwater and so were the 'High Rocks.' 'Jew Beach' had disappeared and 'The Rapids' had waves, *breakers* bigger than Rockaway.

Upstream, enveloped in an eerie mist, the falls roared like Niagara. Once slow, clear and beautiful, the life-giving and forgiving Rondout had become fast, dirty and deadly, its sudden power ripping out trees, summer docks, parts of houses and people's lives.

"The 'Crick is whippin'!" said my baby brother.

Four people were killed. A dozen bridges were destroyed and still more heavily damaged. Homes, farms, and businesses flooded, the county would be declared 'a national disaster area' and millions would be spent on flood control, an overdue investment that would later pay dividends.

"It's like the end of the world," said Mom.

The Aqueduct was gone! Was it just underwater or had it been swept away by the flood?

We went back to the city only to return over the Labor Day Weekend. The water had receded and there stood the Aqueduct. The last titan of a lost technology, the old stone bridge had whipped the 'Crick'.

A huge tree trunk lay on the 'High Rocks' and would serve as a fireplace for years to come. As for swimming...

In New York history, 1955 is most remembered as the year the Brooklyn Dodgers won their only World Series. 'Dem Bums' would soon be gone to California.

"Wait till next year!" vowed frustrated Yankee fans.

Me, too.

I graduated from elementary school in 1956, a baby step up. In the country, I'd be taking a giant step *off*.

First day back I ran up to the Aqueduct, but couldn't go on it to jump off; a steel gate trimmed with barbed wire blocked the way. Nose pressed against the gate, I could see that the flood had wiped the surface stones free of grass.

I couldn't go any further, but tomorrow would be another day. Wouldn't it?

"Central Hudson says the Aqueduct's a hazard," said Mom. "They're going to knock it down,"

"It was a different world back then," I'd be told more than half a century later. "Central Hudson was like God."

Following the flood, engineers from the Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation closely inspected the old stone bridge and concluded it might suddenly collapse 'with possible tragic results to swimmers and fishermen.'

Bad enough, but the Aqueduct posed a far greater danger. A link to the past, it represented a bridge to a future the big power company was totally unprepared to deal with.

'The Children of the Aqueduct' numbered maybe a dozen locals, and a growing number of city kids up on summer vacation. The Tappan Zee Bridge, spanning the Hudson had opened in late '55 and the New York State Thruway, the longest toll road in the country, would soon be finished, cutting the drive from the city to an hour and a half. The Aqueduct was the greatest thrill ride (Free! Very little waiting!) north of Coney Island. Allowed to become a teenage Mecca, it would be a disaster in the making, and Central Hudson would be liable.

The High Falls Civic Association, a concerned group of citizens who placed the interests of their town above all else, was trying to save children's lives and property values. They wrote Central Hudson letter after letter, calling the Aqueduct a 'beautiful nuisance', petitioning the power company to take it down.

The Civic Association was afraid. As more city folk came north, the Aqueduct could become a notorious landmark, an adult-free paradise only children could dream about, turning their town into a cheap tourist trap, overrun with *hundreds* of

out-of-control teenagers. Safety and sanitation costs? When insurance rates skyrocketed, who would pay? God forbid anybody drowned; the resulting litigation could break High Falls.

Morning after morning throughout July, I'd be craning my neck to get the first look when we drove down to the Rondout, to see if the Aqueduct was still standing. Mom watched me like a hawk, refusing to let me out of her sight.

Looking back, if only I had...

"Mom, I want to jump off the Aqueduct. I *need* to do it," I should have said. "I know how to swim, know where the water's deep. Other kids are still doing it, why not me?"

"Don't you ever listen to anyone?" she would have shot back. "*Engineers* said that a 'touch' in the right place could bring the whole thing down. With your luck, it'll be you...Do you want to be known as the boy who destroyed the Aqueduct?"

Motherly logic would have been absolute.

Mom would go on to earn two Masters' degrees, teach and retire early as a reading coordinator for 33 NYC schools. With her wonderful second husband, she'd travel throughout North America via RV and then take a trip around the world, but High Falls would always be home.

Only John Davenport (of the 1697 Davenports), the owner of the High Falls Hardware Store, took a stand. When he heard of Central Hudson's plans, Davenport took his movie camera down to the Rondout and made films of children jumping off the Aqueduct.

Mom didn't know, but seeking community support to save the old stone bridge, Davenport assembled local parents at the High Falls Firehouse for a free show.

"I had no...*idea!*" gasped one mother for many.

"One of these days, one of our kids is going to get killed at that damn fossil," said an irate father. "Not one of mine!"

Alone against Central Hudson and the Civic Association, there was nothing more Davenport could do.

(Where *were* the 'High Falls Rioters'?)

During the 1870's, millions of tons of anthracite coal floated through High Falls, but dating back to Eve's Apple, the canal was a biblical technology facing Armageddon.

[Proverbs 26:27](#) "He who digs a pit shall fall into it,..."

The light at the end of the tunnel - The Train was coming. Early locomotives were slow, crude, unreliable, expensive and dangerous, but they kept getting better, while the canal was long past its high water mark. And when it got cold, when the coal was needed most, trains kept chugging along while the canal would freeze over.

In 1899, the D & H Canal Company, its "franchises, rights and privileges" was sold for \$10,000. A few years later, the *Ulster Queen* was the last boat to make a scheduled run.

With the D&H done, as well as the local cement industry, for the first half of the Twentieth Century, High Falls had only two things going for it: peace and quiet. Then came the 'Baby-Boomers.'

In early August, 1956, all the world focused, not on the engineering marvel spanning the Rondout facing imminent destruction, but on a man-made [sea-level](#) waterway in [Africa](#), a big ditch connecting the [Mediterranean](#) and the [Red Sea](#). Armed with Soviet weapons, the Egyptian dictator outraged America and especially Britain when he seized the Suez Canal, calling for a 'United Arab world', whatever that would be.

A method used by the ancient Romans for removing an icon suddenly in disfavor: Central Hudson's engineers secured heavy chains and cables to the span, strapped them to the back of a bulldozer, and with a step on the gas, would pull down the 'beautiful nuisance.'

"Don't be alarmed, ladies and gentlemen," the guy in front of *King Kong* assured us. "Those chains are made of chrome steel."

Snap!

Same with Central Hudson's.

On that fateful day, no vast multitude gathered on both sides of the Rondout. There was no band and no refreshments. The High Priest, King, and Scribe and Captain of the Host were long dead and buried with the rest of the *Mount Horeb Chapter 75*. No procession to celebrate at Simeon DePuy's Stone House Tavern, empty and decaying, perhaps a near-future target of the wrecking ball.

Only a young woman and her three-year old watched from 'Smith's Beach'.

"My mother always told me to be where things are happening," said Jessie Feth, my neighbor fifty years later. "To see history."

"Have this down in a couple of hours," boasted the crane operator, kin to the future president of the D&H Canal Society.

Not so fast. The pride of the Royal Arch Masons wasn't about to give up its stones. Again and again the big, heavy ball slammed into the stone bridge without effect. Not until the 'keystones' were attacked, the wedge-shaped pieces at the summits of each arch. It was as if each span were the jawbone of a living thing getting its teeth kicked out.

The battering went on for three days. Finally the central base was dynamited.

Except for a couple of ugly brick stumps on both shores, not a clue remains that the Aqueduct ever existed. Not every fallen stone wound up in the Rondout; a few were brought up and became gravemarkers in the High Falls cemetery. One of the 'keystones' is on display in Grady Park.

Mom would let none of us see and she was right. To watch, helpless as a little boy, as the way to the Man I wanted to be was beaten, busted and broken down to the last stone. It was as if Krypton had exploded and nobody, not even a single baby, ever escaped.

My very first quest and I had failed. Not because I was too timid, I'd rationalize, or too afraid or too scared to everlovin' death, but because, dammit to hell!, I was *too late*.

Winnie Williams wept for a week.

The first time I returned to the Rondout without the Aqueduct, the beauty of the trees, the rocks, and the water still shone, but it was like looking at Mt. Rushmore with the four faces removed.

"It's the end of an era," said Mom.

Within a few years, the Jet Age would launch a mass exodus from the Catskills to Florida. 'Jew Beach' would be left behind in name only. From 'The Rapids' to 'The Ledges,' 'The Garden of Eden' would flourish through the sixties and seventies, but sludge from local factories (later closed) would pollute the Rondout and over-fertilizing by farmers (still a problem) would damage its ecosystem. Once clean and clear, the 'Crick' became yet another dirty New York stream more and more parents refused to let their children swim in.

After a couple of drownings in the early eighties, the land was sold and posted.

Some twenty years ago, I went down to the "Sandy Beach" and was struck by how small everything looked, like returning to elementary school. As I stood on a flat rock from where I had jumped into the 'Crick' a thousand times, a thousand memories flooded by.

"If you go in the water, you'll be arrested," said the NY State Police officer.

Banished by The Law; again I understood how 'Adam' must have felt.

"We really didn't care enough about history," admitted one old-timer. "To many of us, the Aqueduct represented a past we wanted to leave in the last century. Farmers and craftsmen made our town what it is, not canal workers."

"But if it happened today," said another firmly. "Every man and woman, child and babe in High Falls would be standing together on that old bridge. Central Hudson, the National Guard, and the Supreme Court combined wouldn't get us off."

Earlier that year, my brothers and sisters and I gathered at the rocky shore just downstream from the falls. As I sprinkled our mother's ashes in the 'Crick', I couldn't help feeling that Mom would have wanted to go off the Aqueduct just once.

Imagine if...

Opened in 1947 where the present-day post office is, 'The Aqueduct Sweet Shop' would still be in business.

Spring is wedding season. With all due respect to churches, temples, and mosques, 'High Fallonians' get married on the Aqueduct. And so do many others. The rental fees more than pay for security and cleanup. Summer brings the vacationers and the tourists for "The Aqueduct Experience -- The New York Rite of Passage" - Season passes, T-shirts, caps, postcards, calendars. The town might even get its supermarket back.

Come autumn, with Ulster County ablaze in fall foliage...The annual "Aqueduct Marathon" and "Leaf-peeping" from the old stone bridge. The expanded D&H Canal Museum would be running tours year-round.

Only two kinds of people live in High Falls: those who have made love on the Aqueduct and those who were going to 'one of these nights'.

The twin spans, beautifully sloped like the top of a heart, whetted over the water...On a warm summer's evening, bathed in moonlight and cooled by a 'Crick' breeze. Just once and feel its stones forever!

An era without an end: 'The Children of the Aqueduct' would have been our own.

Life went on after the Aqueduct came down. During the 50's and into the 60's, the Fireman's Carnival was the event of the summer. In the 1970's, Bernie Spar's 'Fly-Ins' were held at the nearby High Falls 'International Airport' . Both are long gone and probably never coming back.

There were two fires and a string of openings. In the center of town, at the crossroads which, God willing, will never have a traffic light, Eli Zwick's supermarket looked bigger than the Pentagon to a little boy. When it burned to the ground, Mr. Zwick became the High Falls postmaster. For more than half a century, the supermarket site has been a vacant lot. Recently the plot was purchased by a city antique dealer, but groundbreaking is still a long way off.

In 1960, Richie, the 'Tom Swift of Kripplebush', chugged into town on the "Motorbike of The Future" a twenty-inch Schwinn bicycle fitted with a lawnmower "dish" engine he claimed could break the local speed limit. While Richie was enjoying a famed 'Pizzarette' at Novi's corner restaurant, the owner's son, ('A punk with nothing else better to do', said Mom.) started throwing lit matches at it. Suddenly the bike was ablaze and High Falls was hopping.

The young arsonist soon developed a rare affinity for fire, went to Europe and became a renowned chef. In 1964, he returned and bought the old stone tavern, located at Lock #16, where so long ago, the opening of the Aqueduct had been celebrated. (The whole town thought he was out of his mind, except of course, Mom.)

Within a few years and countless hours of hard work, the *1797 Depuy Canal House* boasted the finest cuisine between Manhattan and Montreal. Do make reservations for a fabulous dining experience and just before dessert, propose a toast to TIME magazine's 'Father of New American Cooking' and the 'Motorbike of the Future', the only "dish" John Novi ever burned.

And don't dare miss the annual tree-lighting ceremony in December!

On the other side of Route 213, the former Parsonage for the Reformed Dutch Church of Clove (now The High Falls Community Church) became a succession of forgettable bars until Richard Murphy bought the dilapidated building and miraculously transformed it into the renowned *Egg's Nest*, featuring superb food and drink and even

better conversation. A consummate host and niche historian, Richard knows more about the 'secret Rondout *submarine*' than anyone else on earth.

Up the road a bit stands the heart and soul of High Falls, the legendary Rock Cliff House, built more than a century ago to house, feed and inebriate D & H Canal workers and run by the best bartender a little town ever knew. Dottie Parkin had the style and the strength of Amanda Blake on TV's *Gunsmoke* and I couldn't help but call her 'Miss Kitty.'

Dottie wasn't offended; those who slighted her no longer drank at her house. (Wait at least a week before begging her to accept your apology. *Wildflowers!*) We lost Dottie a few years back and her daughter Suzy, who had jumped off the Aqueduct when she was ten, took over but was soon forced to sell. Work began immediately to restore the Rock Cliff House, but then hard times hit and the place has sat empty and idle.

A new era will dawn the night I can drink a beer at the 'Cliff'.

The only place in the world where you can have a soon-to-be world famous 'Rondout Burger' is the High Falls Cafe smack dab in the middle of town. Good food, fine spirits and the best 'live music in Ulster County'.

Hard times and high rent had the High Falls Cafe to move a mile and a half way, up Berme Road from my place, to the Stonedock Golf Course.

Fore!

And then there's the yearly High Falls Fair Day and the Whiffle Ball Championships, the renown Pet Show, plus Crazy Hat Bingo.

Be advised, however, that High Falls lacks a supermarket, a pharmacy, a laundromat, a movie theater, a gas station and a traffic light, and hopefully, it always will.

I'm living in our family home, once a locktender's cabin at #21, a mile upstream from the falls. From my studio window, I can see deer and woodchuck, fox and ducks in the woodland. Rondout Creek, cleaner than it's been in decades, keeps flowing by, and the day I'll be going with it, I do hope it's whippin'.

Even if you have a degree in psychology, don't think for a minute that the destruction of that old stone bridge more than fifty years ago somehow inhibited my personal growth or interfered in any way with my maturity. Right out of high school, I'd be off on adventures around the country and around the world.

There's always The Aqueduct!

Please continue reading @

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I was a
TOP SECRET *Superhero!*



Discovering *America*

by Kevin Ahearn