

Up and Away: Groton Long Point

In its idealized version, summertime offers us the space to relax and recuperate. The gloomy winter and prolonged, wet spring seasons become but figments of our imagination, and our sun-kissed selves can finally indulge in simpler summer pleasures. Soon, you'll crack open a good book in between ocean dips, resurrect golf clubs and pickleball paddles, and recharge under the warmth of the sun.

But usually, toward the end of yet another fleeting June, we remember that such a balance is not so simple to restore. Our responsibilities aren't put on hold just because the sun is shining. *Bummer.*

Growing up, summer always felt like the season that pressed "pause". Even the adults in my life seemed to soften a bit—office clothes traded for gardening gear, dinners eaten outside, weekends planned around the tides instead of timelines. When I was younger, serenity was served on a silver platter the moment school let out for summer vacation. But by the time I was sixteen, I learned that summer doesn't excuse us from anything—not deadlines, not bills, not obligations you never asked for but somehow agreed to anyway. The heat may roll in, but nothing else slows down. If anything, life speeds up: work hours stretch longer, social plans pile on top of each other, and suddenly the season that once promised ease now demands stamina. This June had that particular flavor of exhaustion—the kind that comes from chasing the idea of summer more than actually experiencing it.

I found myself sitting in that realization about six months ago. My days had blurred into a tedious loop: seven mornings in a row spent under fluorescent kitchen lights, hair pulled back, apron tied, clogs sticking slightly to the same tile floors. I'd leave before my family awoke, only to return in the five o'clock traffic with everyone else, baking behind the windshield—but imagining a more glamorous scenario in my mind. I kept telling myself I'd reclaim summer “next week,” but next week never came.

Meanwhile, Instagram taunted me with its parade of Aperol spritzes and tan lines. My friends were logging sunsets like they were clocking hours; *I was logging actual hours*. It wasn't jealousy so much as a nagging sense that the season was slipping through my fingers, disappearing faster than I could chase it. I'd built up this idea of what summer *should* feel like, and I wasn't living any of it. The realization sat heavy—as I'd somehow missed the starting gun while everyone else was already halfway down the shoreline.

It was the end of June, and I had only made it down the shore twice (blasphemous for a Jersey girl). Luckily, my best friend, Caitlin Murray, offered me a much-needed escape.

Cut to the Friday of July 4th weekend. I was working at the New York Red Bulls training facility, serving the team breakfast and lunch—a story of its own. Grateful for the help in his time of need for an employee (which aligned perfectly with my time of need for a job), my boss granted me Saturday and Sunday off.

“Any fun plans for the fourth?” Dan, a midfielder, asked me during breakfast. I raised an eyebrow and covered the pan while the spinach for his omelet sauteed. I liked Dan—I felt a sort of kinship with him, being that he’s only a year older than me and grew up just a few towns over. The difference between us (well, one of many) is that Dan turned down his full ride to UNC to go pro, whereas I was privy to the social opportunities of college. Although Dan never seemed jealous of my position behind the omelet counter, I got the sense that a little part of him was excited to know what being a normal, young, twenty-something is like. I could tell he was being half-polite (I could spit in his eggs at any moment), and half-sarcastic, expecting my typical, overenthusiastic: “Nope, just working!” This time, he was pleased to hear that at least one of us was catching a break. I finished cleaning the kitchen, cracking eggs, and prepping produce for the next day with haste, managing to clock out earlier than usual thanks to the team’s away game. I sent them off with good luck and well-wishes before hitting the road myself.

The stop-and-go traffic coming out of the city had my 2001 Buick Century, named Sal, moving in a rhythm that nearly rocked me to sleep. I know myself; I can fall asleep anywhere—including behind the wheel of a car. I accounted for this, remedying the slow ride with a venti matcha latte and two back-up Red Bulls, courtesy of the fridge at work. I plastered a pleasant smile on my face as old men in matching cars rolled by to find me in the driver’s seat. If you’re self-absorbed like me, traffic can cause a tremendous sense of social anxiety.

Even with the AC blasting and the caffeine buzzing through my veins, the drive had that slow-motion, dreamlike quality only a summer highway can create. The kind where you're inching forward under a sky so bright it feels bleached, surrounded by the familiar cast of holiday-weekend characters: dads tapping their steering wheels, teens in the passenger seat with their feet on the dash, families playing license-plate bingo to stay sane. Every few miles, I'd pass a car with beach pass bumper stickers, and for a moment, it stung—everyone else had already coasted into vacation mode while I still felt stuck between shifts.

But there was comfort in monotony, too. With nowhere to be except "away," the drive became its own undoing of stress. The mile markers ticked by like deep breaths. Even my rambling conversation with myself felt oddly therapeutic. The farther I got from the city, the more it felt like I was shedding layers: noise, obligations, schedules, the heaviness of a June I hadn't fully lived. By the time I hit the Connecticut exit, I could feel something loosening in me—a quiet promise that the weekend ahead would give me back at least a small piece of the summer I'd been missing. One podcast episode (of Dana White on Khloe Kardashian's *Khloe in Wonderland*), a phone call (my mom), an hour-long conversation (myself), and five Spotify playlists later, I made the last left turn of the drive into Connecticut's darling Groton Long Point (GLP).

Quite literally a long point that juts out from the town of Groton, the community is almost completely enveloped by the Fishers Island Sound. What began as land settled by Governor John Winthrop Jr. in 1646 became a formal summering spot and private association chartered in 1921, and remains a community beloved by year-round

residents and returning transients alike. Driving into GLP felt like slipping into a postcard someone had forgotten to update since the 1950s. The houses were a patchwork of shingled cottages and weathered clapboard, each with a porch that looked like it had witnessed generations of sand-covered feet and dripping popsicles. Hydrangeas the size of my head burst in shades of lavender and blue along the fences. The air was thick with salt and something sweet—maybe sunscreen, maybe freshly-cut grass, maybe just the unmistakable scent of a town that revolves around water.



What struck me most was the quiet. Not silence, but a softer kind of noise: bike bells in the distance, the slap of screen doors, kids yelling something unintelligible from a dock. It was the opposite of the soundtrack I'd lived with all month—no clattering pans, no buzzing timers, no click-clack of cleats on tile floors. For the first time in weeks, my shoulders dropped without me telling them to. GLP didn't just look different—it felt different, like a place operating on its own rhythm, one that I desperately needed to match.

Despite almost driving past it, I arrived at my friend's place early enough that afternoon for a dip. This didn't require much effort: we dropped my bags in the clapboard cottage, slipped into our bathing suits, and found ourselves in the sand with a mere crossing of the street. We waded into the sound: Caitlin, with a wine cooler in hand, and I with my film camera. The water was colder than I expected—one of those honest temperatures that brings you back into your body—a forced presence in the best way. It wrapped around my ankles first, then climbed slowly, insistently, until I finally gave in and dunked my head under. For a moment, everything went quiet except for the soft hum of the Sound and my own breath. It felt like someone had wrung out my brain like a sponge. I hadn't realized how much I'd been carrying: kitchen heat, exhaustion, the constant thrum of doing instead of being.



Saltwater has a funny way of pressing reset. When I surfaced, hair clinging to my face, I felt lighter—like the week hadn't beaten me up as much as I'd thought. Caitlin raised her wine cooler at me in a mock toast, of which I snapped a picture. We drifted farther out, suspended between sky and water. I remember thinking, *This is what I needed*. We watched as the thirty-minute ferry from Block Island to Montauk sped by. I'd never seen a ferry move so fast, creating ripples that rushed toward the shoreline. Our gazes followed the movement, and then so did our feet.

Back on the sand, we lay out next to a canoe rack for a while, unintentionally eavesdropping on a retired couple and a young man tracing their mutual connections. The older gentleman's voice had that raspy, sea-worn quality that only comes from decades of New England summers, while the woman spoke with the soft, lilting tone of someone who had spent her whole life laughing easily. Their conversation danced from names to memories to houses—"the little blue one with the windowboxes," "the oldest daughter who just got engaged," "the summer the hurricane took half that dock." None of it meant anything to us, yet it mattered.

There was something comforting in listening to people speak the shorthand of a place they've loved for years. Their familiarity with GLP wasn't performative or braggy; it was tender, like talking about an old friend. And as I lay there, half-asleep with my cheek pressed into the sand, it made me wonder about the spaces that feel like that for me. Places whose details I could rattle off without thinking, where memories cling to street corners or certain smells in the air. Hearing them talk reminded me that belonging isn't always about owning property or having a long history

somewhere—it's about feeling a sense of belonging to a place, even if only for a weekend. So often, we make small talk and connections out of our complaints and struggles. But there I was with my ear to the sand, dozing off to the muffled murmur of locals sharing nothing but their love for this place.



After freshening up and a bit of people-watching from the porch, Caitlin and I made our way into Mystic, the next town over. Though only separated by a six-minute drive, the atmosphere in Mystic is unlike that of GLP. Although probably most well-known for Mystic Pizza (the one from the 1988 film starring Julia Roberts), the rest of the town does not disappoint. The streets bustle with tourists popping in and out of gift shops, boutiques, and ice cream parlors. Mystic has that particular kind of charm that feels curated but not artificial—like the town was naturally adorable and then leaned into it just the right amount. The sidewalks were a mosaic of melted ice cream

globs, and every store had its door propped open, releasing breezy swirls of lavender soap, saltwater taffy, and summer-scented candles. Wind chimes rang outside nautical-themed boutiques, and window displays boasted everything from seashell picture frames to linen dresses that promised you'd look effortlessly coastal (you wouldn't, but still).

Caitlin and I let ourselves drift with the flow of tourists, stopping every two seconds to admire something ridiculous: a mug shaped like a fish, a print of the Mystic Bridge at sunset, a bin of beer koozies that made us chuckle. It was the kind of aimless wandering I hadn't allowed myself in months—moving slowly with no objective beyond simply *taking it in*. The town seemed to hum under the late-afternoon sun, and for the first time all summer, I felt like I was part of the hum rather than running past it.



At the end of our loop of Main Street, we were hot and hungry. If ice cream is what you're in the mood for, *Mystic Drawbridge Ice Cream* is the place to be. We stopped in for smoothies, fawning over the newborn baby and her sweet, young family sitting

next to us. Mom and Dad talked while the baby's big brother and sister kept each other entertained. We spent the last hours of daylight strolling around town some more until we returned to GLP for a home-cooked dinner with the Murray family.

Caitlin shares the label for the youngest child with her twin brother John (who was technically born a couple of minutes after her). Their older brothers, Kevin and Patrick, along with Pat's fiancée, Erin, took a weekend away from their busy adult lives to visit, too. While Caitlin's brothers grilled, we set the table for a dinner that would leave me with a stomach ache—not from eating too much, but from laughing so hard. Being around the Murrays is like being folded into a family you didn't realize you'd been auditioning for your whole life—and receiving tens across the board. Everyone is part of the conversation, and somehow, no one gets drowned out. Kevin grilled like he was defending a title no one else knew he held, while Patrick narrated the process in a mock Food Network voice that sent Caitlin into hysterics. Erin chimed in with the sort of one-liners that sneak up on you and make you laugh ten seconds after the punchline. Dinner itself was a blur of clattering utensils, shared anecdotes, and the kind of laughter that makes you clutch your stomach because your muscles were still tense from the last laugh. Every story seemed to trigger another: childhood mishaps, high school drama, old GLP memories that I only half-understood but loved listening to anyway. What struck me was how effortless it all felt. No one was performing; no one was competing. It was simply a family enjoying each other—and somehow, I was lucky enough to be a part of it.

We “kids” decided to take an evening stroll, intrigued by the dark sound to our left, attracted to the light and laughter coming from every other backyard to our right. We returned home, played a very confusing card game version of Monopoly, and called it a night. I fell asleep smiling.

The next morning, Caitlin and I seemed to follow the crowd to the Groton Long Point Yacht Club—better known by locals as “the casino”. A father led the way for his kids as they biked to breakfast, pointing out the houses where he babysat during his own adolescent summers there. Crossing the street to the Groton Long Point Yacht Club felt like stepping into another dimension of summer. The smell of bacon and toast mingled with salt and citronella, and somewhere nearby, a lawn mower hummed lazily, as if on vacation itself. Locals paused for conversation with a relaxed attitude, as if being in GLP meant the absence of time itself. Perhaps I’d have felt left out if people didn’t extend the same friendliness to us as they do to their long-time neighbors. GLP connected us all, locals and bennies alike. Unlike Spring Lake, where no matter how loyal you are, you’ll never truly be accepted if you don’t own a ten-million-dollar beach house, Groton Long Point knows no hierarchy. In GLP, you’re a part of the community just by being there.

Caitlin and I found a table on the deck, shaded by a striped canvas awning. The chatter around us was casual yet warm—neighbors checking in on each other, kids bickering in the background, laughter spilling out from the kitchen. It struck me that GLP isn’t about keeping people out—it’s about letting everyone in, even visitors like me. I could sit there, coffee in hand, and feel like I belonged simply because I was

present. That sense of inclusion—the absence of hierarchy, the welcome built into daily life—was a revelation. It wasn't about money or status; it was about being part of the rhythm of this small, tight-knit community.

As if the community wasn't already perfect enough, its close proximity to popular tourist towns like Mystic, CT., and Watch Hill, RI, offers residents the freedom to both explore bustling surrounding towns and escape back to serene GLP. We got a lay of the land from the water later that morning when we joined the Murray's long-time friends/GLP locals, the Mackies, on their boat. The sun was curtailed by a sheer blanket of clouds; if I learned anything from my time as a coxswain, it's that it's always ten degrees cooler on the water. So, I decided on a light sweater and linen trousers.



The moment we stepped onto the Mackies' boat, a wave of calm washed over me. The Sound stretched out in every direction, its surface shimmering under a veil of clouds that softened the sun without dimming it entirely. Water slapped gently against the hull, the rhythmic sound a perfect counterpoint to my scattered thoughts from the week. I found myself leaning against the railing, letting the breeze dance through my

hair, and thinking about how small the problems of my day-to-day life felt compared to this vast, moving expanse of blue.

We cruised through the Fisher's Island Sound, eventually making our way to the Watch Hill Yacht Club, established in 1913. Gulls swarmed overhead, their calls echoing faintly across the water. Everything slowed down in a way that only happens on the water: a realization that time could in fact be savored, that the summer I'd been longing for was finally, *fully* here. As we circled back home, Mrs. Mackie suggested that Caitlin and I try *Bravo Bravo* in Mystic for dinner, owned by a friend of theirs. After some downtime, that's exactly what we did.



I believe you can gauge a good company based on how distracted you get by each other when trying to read a menu. We were partially unprepared and still undecided when our waiter approached our high top to take our orders. It worked out well because when we shrugged and asked for the burrata appetizer, he instead suggested we try the Grilled Polenta with shrimp, shallots, and chili butter—which we

devoured in a couple of minutes, expressing our (arguably exaggerated, though completely valid) gratitude to our waiter when he came back around. Time flies when you're having fun, but it helps that the service at *Bravo Bravo* was exceptional, without making guests feel rushed. Soon, Caitlin was digging into her bolognese, and I was into my ricotta gnocchi. Although we ordered the simplest of dishes, they did not disappoint. What made the meal truly memorable wasn't just the food—it was how easy it was to lose ourselves in conversation. Caitlin and I whispered comments that had us snickering so quietly we nearly startled our waiter, who then joined in on our fun. Every bite of the polenta or gnocchi seemed amplified by laughter and the glow of the restaurant's natural lighting, compliments of the window-lined walls. I noticed how attentive the staff were without ever hovering, the kind of service that makes you feel cared for without reminding you that you're a customer.

At one point, Caitlin gestured toward a couple at a nearby table and whispered, "I love how everyone here just *enjoys* eating." And she was right. People weren't checking watches, scrolling phones, or rushing through courses—they were fully present. It made me reflect on how often I ate quickly during the week, distracted, stressed, barely tasting the cold omelets I'd prepare for myself in little pockets of downtime. Here, even simple dishes felt celebratory, and I realized that sometimes, the measure of good company is how fully you forget the world outside; and the measure of good food is how fully you forget about every dish you've ever eaten but the one in front of you. Both Caitlin and Bravo Bravo passed with flying colors.

An hour and a half and some laughs later, we took a digestive stroll back across the Mystic Bridge to watch the sunset at *Oyster Bar* (self-explanatory). Because we'd already eaten, we headed straight up the stairs to a treehouse-eque bar and sitting area, decorated with Edison-bulbed string lights and wicker lanterns. The walk across the Mystic Bridge to the Oyster Bar was almost cinematic. The sun was melting into the horizon, painting the sky with streaks of pink, orange, and purple, while the water beneath mirrored every color in perfect symmetry. Though we didn't try the food, the atmosphere—perhaps a waste on our camera-shy duo—was enough to make us want to go back. *Oyster Bar* closed early for the Fourth of July, which was no problem, because *The Harp and Hound* did not. In fact, we arrived just as the party was getting started. The bar, a few doors down from *Mystic Drawbridge Ice Cream*, was rearranged before our eyes. Tables were pushed aside, a DJ set up his booth, and soon, we were dancing alongside other twenty-somethings from the area. Eventually, our energy was spent, and we were home in bed by 11, anxious to be well-rested for the day ahead.

The Harp and Hound, just a few doors down, was a stark but welcome contrast: energy pulsing, music spilling into the street, string lights glinting against the night sky. We dove into the crowd of twenty-somethings, letting the beat move through us, laughing with strangers whose names we'd never know but whose energy seemed familiar. The combination of dancing, music, and night air had a kind of alchemy—it made the stress of the past weeks feel like it had never existed. By the time we left, exhausted and elated, the world felt both enormous and intimate, a place where even

fleeting connections could leave a lasting impression. Eventually, our energy was spent, and we were home in bed by 11, anxious to be well-rested for the day ahead.

We woke up early to the sound of a sand sweeper coming in through the open French doors of the bedroom. We took it as our cue to start the day. After another brilliant breakfast of eggs, bacon, and toast on the casino deck, we crossed the street to meet with the rest of the Murrays and the Mackies, who were playing pickleball on the community courts.

Morning in GLP felt sacred. The sun hadn't fully claimed the sky yet, and the beach was still quiet except for the gentle sweep of sand across the boardwalk and the distant call of seagulls. After breakfast on the casino deck—eggs, bacon, and toast kissed by the golden morning light—we crossed the street to watch the Murrays and Mackies warm up for pickleball.

The game was casual but competitive between the two athletically gifted families. Laughter rang out with every missed serve and exaggerated celebration. Caitlin and I joined in intermittently, not keeping score, but absorbing the rhythm of movement, camaraderie, and joy. Standing on the sidelines between swings and sips of water, I realized that this was the kind of rest I hadn't recognized I was craving—not lying still, but moving in a place where presence itself was enough. For once, summer didn't feel like an idea I was chasing. It felt tangible, lived, and generously offered by a community I'd only just begun to understand.

Caitlin and I didn't do much that day, as we were eagerly anticipating our early dinner reservation at *Ocean House*, a seaside resort on Watch Hill, for which we realized we had nothing to wear. Back in Mystic, we went searching for dresses at the RI Boutique. Anticipation made the afternoon feel like a holiday. My hands lingered on soft fabrics, imagining the way a green maxi with metallic gold thread would catch the sun on the Ocean House lawn; Caitlin spun around in a strapless white number and laughed at the form it took with each rotation. For a moment, we were both caught up in the thrill of transformation—the simple power of clothing to signal that we had stepped out of our ordinary lives and into something deliberately celebratory: cocktail hour at a fancy resort we otherwise could not afford.

The streets hummed with late-afternoon energy: families wheeling ice cream cones past boutiques, couples stopping to snap photos in front of pastel buildings, cyclists weaving smoothly between tourists. We inhaled it, letting the excitement swell. The prospect of Ocean House wasn't just about dinner—it was about the culmination of a weekend that had slowly peeled away layers of stress, work, and expectation. By the time we loaded our dresses into Caitlin's old Audi and headed back to GLP, I felt the kind of anticipation that only comes from knowing you're about to step fully into a carefully constructed, perfect summer moment. It wasn't long after returning home that we threw our dresses on, did what we could to control our frizzy hair, and squeezed into the Murray's SUV.

Walking into Ocean House felt like stepping into a world where summer was elevated to art. The scent of salt and polished wood mingled with faint floral notes from

the table settings. The dining room was alive without being chaotic—soft laughter, the gentle clink of cutlery, and the low hum of conversation forming a comfortable soundtrack. I remember looking at Caitlin and realizing that every detail, from the sunlight streaming through the tall windows to the neatly folded napkins, made us feel like this dinner had been waiting for us all weekend.



Our table on the deck gave us a perfect view of the sea, the waves reflecting gold and lavender tones of the sun dipping lower. We ordered slowly, savoring each decision, and when the dishes arrived, it felt almost ceremonial. Kodak in purse, I memorialized our meal with a few snaps of Caitlin slurping down oysters and her brothers clinking their glasses. I took a spoonful of clam chowder, the creamy texture and gentle warmth matching the warmth in my heart at that moment.



As the weekend drew to a close, I thought back to that bleary June realization: that summer doesn't pause the world for you. And yet, here I was, evidence that it can pause *you*—if you let it. GLP, Mystic, Watch Hill—these weren't just places I visited; they were invitations to slow down, notice, and belong, even briefly. I carried with me the warmth of the water, the weightless feeling of laughter, the intimate glow of shared meals, and the simple joy of being present.

Driving back to Jersey later that day, traffic no longer felt oppressive. I thought of my office kitchen, of deadlines and fluorescent lights, but they didn't weigh me down—they were just part of a larger world I could step away from, even if only for a weekend. Summer, I realized, isn't only about cracking open a book on the sand or resurrecting old hobbies. It's about carving space for moments that remind you who you are outside your responsibilities. And that, perhaps, is the most authentic pleasure of all.