A TRIP TO TEMPE BEACH
By Steve Hancock – May, 2010

When I was a 10-year old kid summers were special; no school for three months, too young for teenage angst, and oblivious to the challenges and disappointments of adulthood. One of the very best things about summer in those carefree days was going to Tempe Beach, a public swimming pool much visited by the sweltering children of Tempe, Arizona. Few homes back in 1956 had backyard pools so Tempe Beach was the only place you could escape the blistering desert temperatures by jumping into a big blue pool of clear, cool water. This is a reminiscence of a walk from my home on 14th Street, up Mill Avenue to 1st Street, to go swimming at Tempe Beach.

Back in the 1950s Tempe was a small college town just starting to expand its boundaries. Tempe's town limits – the area that was developed – started around Broadway Road to the south and ended near the Salt River to the north. The western limit was Farmers Avenue and the eastern limit was Rural Road. If you were a kid and you wanted to go somewhere in Tempe you walked or you biked. It was about 1½-miles to get from my house to Tempe Beach. I usually made the trip with my brother Bill or some neighborhood pal. My mother, like most parents in the 1950s, wasn't too concerned about Bill and me being out on their own back then, even for hours at a time. A kid's life was more benign and the line-up of modern day boogey-men, the pedophiles and psycho-creeps, were either deep underground or much less active. One reason kids were safer back then was because there was usually someone in every house you passed (most moms stayed at home) and they knew who you were and took note if any strangers were lurking about. The downside to this community surveillance was that any malfeasance on your part was soon reported to your parents – a situation that would plague my adolescent years.

Mill Avenue was the main street in Tempe in the 50s and it was on the

Mill's sidewalks that we traveled to Tempe Beach – mostly sticking to the west side of the street. The first place of note we would pass was the Woman's Club on the northwest corner of Mill and 13th Street. My mother, a working mom, was never a member of the Woman's Club so I have no idea of what the ladies of Tempe did in that place. I do recall playing with fallen pods from the bottle trees that lined the street in front of the club. On the other side of Mill Avenue (the east side) were athletic fields for Arizona State College and a few rows of rounded Quonset huts that may have housed married students or been used for storage by the college. Today Grady Gammage Auditorium and adjacent parking lots occupy that space.

Traveling further up Mill Avenue we would pass modest homes with lush lawns courtesy of flood irrigation from underground pipes tapping into canals carrying water from reservoirs on the Salt River – no desert landscaping back in the 1950s. There were oleander hedges 12 feet high, mulberry trees with two-foot wide trunks, and green everywhere – it could have been a town in

Iowa or Connecticut. The irrigation water would flow into your property from a circular, metal valve that was opened by a city employee who would turn off the flow of water when sunken lawns were filled to capacity. My brother and sisters and I would often splash around in the "irrigation" on hot days, making sure not to step on any of the "crawdads" that washed in from the canals. These were large, red crayfish armed with large claws and a belligerent attitude.

Most of the kids I knew did not wear shoes when walking in the summertime. Sandals and flip-flops didn't become staple footwear until years later. On shaded sidewalks being barefoot wasn't a problem, but when you had to step out onto an unshaded asphalt roadway, the surface heat could be blistering. Reaching a patch of grass after crossing a hot street was one of life's small pleasures. My brother-in-law Terry recalls alternately tossing down his t-shirt and towel to avoid placing his bare feet on the asphalt surface of the roadway.

At the corner of 10th Street and Mill Avenue you would reach two oases, the Dairy Queen on the west side of Mill and a Standard gas station on the east side. Back then Dairy Queens served only soft ice

cream with a variety of toppings; no burgers, fries, or anything else that couldn't be oozed into an ice-cream cone. Walking through the glass doors of the Dairy Queen you entered a clean, bright space with benches along the big front windows and a counter – it was always cool and there was a pervasive, though subtle smell of vanilla and chocolate as you waited to be served. The gas station across the street was an oasis because it had a "Coke machine" – an insulated tin box, about table height, with an insulated lid. Inside were metal racks submerged in ice water that guided bottles of Coke and a variety of Nehi and Barq's sodas into waiting hands. There were few things that could quench a thirst on a hot, summer day like a bottle of "pop" fished from a bath of ice cold water.

As we progressed further up Mill Avenue, just north of the Dairy Queen, we passed my family's doctor office (Dr. Flynn?) and then more homes. On the east side of Mill Avenue, between 10th and 8th Streets, was the old high school, surrounded by a chain-link fence after having been severely burnt in a 1955 fire. On the southeast corner of 10th Street was the aptly named Tenth Street School that my sister Lorene recalls attending. My brother Bill says there was an elementary school on the southeast corner of Mill and 8th Street where he attended first grade. The following year the 8th Street School was closed and we both went to the new Ritter School where I attended first grade.

Back on the west side of Mill, at 9th Street, we walked past the Travelodge Motel and then a Union 76 gas station. A little further north was a gastronomic landmark, Pete's Fish and Chips. I could write a whole book on Pete's Fish and Chips since it remained a flourishing eatery well into my college years in the 1970s and was often visited by this connoisseur of deep fried foods – the menu would make a nutritionist weep. Remember the Monster Burger?

Today 8th Street is called University Drive and its intersection with Mill Avenue was the real beginning of downtown Tempe. As you stepped off the curb of 8th Street you would leave

directly behind the Britt Smith car lot and arrive on the north side of the street at Rundle's market. I often tagged along when my mother shopped there and, although I don't have specific recollections of what we would

buy, I‟m pretty sure that Rainbow Bread, Crisco, Jell-O, Bar-S wieners and Arnold‟s Pickles were on the grocery list. Arnold's had a pickling plant in Phoenix and driving down Washington Street you would smell the briny operation long before you actually passed it. Arnold's pickles remain my benchmark of what a sweet pickle should taste like - to this day not Heinz, or Vlasic, or Mt. Olive can come close to the exquisite tang and crunch of an Arnold's pickle. Unfortunately, they went out of business years ago. Another item that has passed into favorite food oblivion and periodically purchased at Rundle's – as my sister Lorene reminded me – was the Boston Cream Pie. This was a packaged snack that consisted of a round, light cake folded over a thick, banana cream filling to form a half-moon. It was similar in taste and texture to a Twinkie but denser and much more satisfying.

Across from Rundle's, on the northeast corner of 8th and Mill, was the Berge Ford car dealership. North of there a way was the House of Toys. For most kids, the House of Toys was a temptation that could draw you from the usual west side route over to the east side of Mill. There was a glass counter top case filled with miniature metal Tonka cars and trucks that was splattered with drool from this 10-year old boy. They also had shelves well stocked with model airplanes, ships, and cars, the kind that had to be glued together. I have clear memories of sitting at home cutting out balsa wood parts with a razor and the strong, chemical smell of "airplane" glue and metallic paint filling the room. I must have had a dozen little square bottles of paint with sticky lids that had to be wrenched off with a pair of pliers. I wonder what ever happened to all the model planes I assembled.

Back over on the west side of Mill, as we walked north from Rundle's, there were a few small buildings nudged up against one another but I don't remember the occupant's other than, as you neared 7th Street, Ehrhardt's Home and Auto. Using high school yearbooks from the early 1960s, some friends found that Marge Smith Florists and Peggy's Shop were there between 8th and 7th streets but I have no recollection of them, probably because they held nothing to attract the attention of a young boy. Ehrhardt's easily came to mind because that is where I got my first 3-speed bike, a Western Flyer. This was a big step up from the

old Schwinn I rode with the friction type brakes that were applied by reversing the pedals. One negative about the 3-speed with hand brakes was the inability to do a decent "brodie." This is a maneuver where you build up speed on a bike, slam on the brakes by reversing the pedals, and turn the bike sharply while putting the non-braking foot down as a pivot point. This produces a tight, sideways skid that, when properly done on a dirt surface, results – hopefully – in any nearby friends being spattered with dust and pebbles. With the acquisition of the 3-speed and its wimpy hand brakes my brodie days were over. It was not unusual, by the way, for my friends and me to ride our bikes from Tempe to Mesa to go to a movie – a round trip of about 12-miles. Mesa had a slightly larger, classier movie theater than Tempe but the real draw was the adventure of the long ride on Apache Boulevard with mostly farmland between the two towns.

At the southwest corner of 7th Street and Mill was Nevitt's Richfield gas station. Mr. Nevitt had a repair service as well as a small boat sales business. For some reason I can well remember Mr. Nevitt, a purposeful man who must have acknowledged my existence in some way, something a 10-year old boy would appreciate. My father died before I was even one year old so I sometimes took the measure of adult males as exemplars of the kind of father I periodically yearned for.

On the northwest corner of Mill and 7th Street was Joe Selleh's Sporting Goods. Actually, I'm not sure if Selleh's was there in the mid-1950s but I know it was there by the time I started high school in 1960 because I got my one and only pair of football shoes at Selleh's. These shoes had a short, barely scuffed life since my football aspirations were soon dampened by my realization that I really didn't like playing team games – I've never been a good team person, even into my professional working life where being a "Team Player" is much valued. A little further north of Selleh's was the Sprouse-Ritz store, sometimes referred to generically as a five-and-dime store. Sprouse-Ritz always smelled of the cloth goods sold there; jeans, shirts, underwear, dresses, towels, washcloths – it was a sort of musty but not unpleasant smell, similar to the smell of a used-books store. I recall there were rows of waist-high bins filled with everything from sewing needles to eye-glasses to candy

bars. Now they have 99-cent or dollar stores – what could you possibly buy today for a nickel or a dime?
North of Sprouse-Ritz, still on the west side of Mill, was the Dutch Oven Bakery. This was the third in a troika of places where, according to my brother, we could choose to feed ourselves on our summer trips to Tempe Beach. He remembers being given 25 cents apiece by our mother to purchase our lunch since we were often gone the entire day. The other options were the aforementioned Pete's Fish and Chips and the Dairy Queen. The big draw at the Dutch Oven was the Pecan Crispy, a flat, saucer-like cookie about eight inches in diameter that was made from thin layers of dough baked with cinnamon and crushed pecans on top. You could walk five or six blocks before crunching the entire thing down, leaving a moraine of flaky crumbs on the front of your t-shirt.
Speaking of t-shirts, they didn't have shirts printed with pictures or logos back then. The most common t-shirts worn by children had colorful horizontal stripes and not even a hint of a logo except on the little tabs inside the collar. This was a time before the great dementia that caused masses of consumers to seek out and pay for clothing items with the manufacturers' name plastered all over them. John Dixon, a childhood friend, remembers the Yankee Doodle Cafe being next to the bakery but I have no recollection of the place.
As you crossed 6th Street heading north you were entering the heart of downtown Tempe. This is where the bank, movie-theater, and drug store were located – between 6th and 5th Streets. At the northwest corner of 6th and Mill was the First National Bank, a place that held absolutely no interest for a 10-year old kid. Money was of little concern to me at that age, a fact underscored by a strong memory of my mother often saying to me, upon a request for some extravagance, "Do you think money grows on trees?" I didn‟t think money grew on trees but I rarely gave much thought about the labors that did supply our family coffers. It was probably a tribute to my mother that she never belabored the fact she worked long and hard to support her family of five
children, especially when we asked for money to buy some nonessential thing – like a pair of football shoes.
One of the great places in any town is the local hardware store,

especially for the male of the species. A good hardware store is one where you despair of getting some obscure nut or bolt you desperately need but, invariably, you find it in some little drawer, in a little cabinet, in an aisle near the back of the store. Tempe Hardware was such a store, located just north of the First National Bank a ways. The store had been around for five decades in the 1950s and was located on the first floor of a three story building that still stands today though much emasculated; the hardware store has been replaced by trendy little shops catering to tourists and seekers of moonbeams. My sister Lorene told me she recalls being sent to Tempe Hardware with a plumbing fixture my mother had removed in some repair job at our house (my mom did most repairs having no husband around and little money to spare for a plumber). The fixture needed a new washer but my mom had not been able to disassemble it so sent Lorene and my other sister Deanna to get a new washer, expecting the experts at Tempe Hardware to take the thing apart. The guys at the hardware store twisted, banged, wrenched, and cursed but were unable to get it apart. My sisters returned home with the fixture still intact and non-functioning. My mother, probably suffering the long-term exasperation of being a single, working mom with little sympathy from a male dominated world went ballistic. Lorene said my mother grabbed the fixture, went at it with a hammer, monkey-wrench, and a vengeance and was able to dismantle the wayward device by sheer will. My mom then sent my sisters back to Tempe Hardware where astounded employees found the right washer, reassembled the fixture, and watched as my sisters begin their second trek of the day back home.

Just up the street a ways from Tempe hardware you came to the Miller's Indian Store. This place always attracted my attention because of the copious window displays (the entry way was an alcove with windows on all sides). Foremost among the things displayed was a taxidermy concoction whereby a monkey's head and shoulders had been married to the body of a large fish. The taxidermy skills that put this thing together were first rate and enhanced by an overall patina of dust and grime that gave it an appearance of authenticity and antiquity. It was a small-boy magnet that would draw you inside to see what other wonders lay within the store. There were many Indian jewelry items on display but also an

assortment of artifacts and oddities all crammed together in a small space. I recall the proprietor was always attentive and welcoming but slightly bemused as the rubes looked over the merchandise.
Across Mill Avenue was a landmark that still exists as a movie theater – the Valley Art Theater. Back in the 50's it was called the College Theater and was a mainstay in the lives of Tempe's children. Keep in mind that not all households had a television set in the mid 1950's and television picture quality (all in black and white) could not come close to what you saw on the big screen. Movies were always well attended during matinee hours by throngs of excited kids. I can remember seeing many western films there – Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and Hop-Along Cassidy were the big-time shoot-„em-up stars but I also remember a guy called Sunset Carson
that actually did a live show at the College Theater. I recollect that he did some sharp-shooter routine and maybe some whip cracking – could it be he whacked a cigarette out of a girl's mouth? I remember thinking, though only 10 years of age, that his career must be waning if he was appearing in a berg like Tempe, Arizona. The College Theater also had many horror flicks on their matinee billings, many starring the very creepy Vincent Price who seemed to have a penchant for capes, castles, and curvaceous women. One horror film that generated many nightmares for me was the "Creature from the Black Lagoon," a film I saw on TV a few years ago and turned off because the monster that haunted by childhood looked so silly in adulthood. I also saw many creatures-from-outer-space movies that always had repetitive woo-wooing background music whenever the need for suspense was heightened, usually with a damsel and hero stuck out in the desert somewhere. Often we would spend more time laughing than screaming at these "B" horror movies.
In many ways movie theaters haven‟t changed much over the past 50 years; they have a floor that slopes down toward the screen so the folks in back can see over the folks in front, you have to sit through previews of future films before seeing the movie you came to see, and you get up once in a while to get something to eat or drink at the snack bar. The difference is that back in the 50's you always saw one or two cartoons

between films, you usually saw two films not just one, and the items at the snack bar weren't prohibitively expensive. I usually got a Big Hunk candy bar or a brand of black, white and pink candy beans with a licorice center – I don't recall the name. I doubt I spent over 50 cents for a ticket to get in the theater plus the candy I munched on. Since few if any parents accompanied their kids to the matinee movies things could get pretty rowdy. I have a friend, now a respected college administrator, who gleefully tells of shooting modified paper clips, propelled by a rubber band, into the College Theater movie screen and rolling shaken bottles of soda pop down the aisle to effervesce against the stage front. It was a full-on experience to see a matinee movie with 50 or so unfettered children at the College Theater.

The other big draw in downtown Tempe was Laird and Dines Drug Store on the southeast corner of 5th Street and Mill Avenue. This statement is based more on things I've read in my brief research for this reminiscence than my personal experience. Many of the oral histories I read online at the Tempe Historical Museum, most written about Tempe life in the 1920's, 30's, and 40's, refer to Laird and Dines as the place where people met socially and where you could get a ice cream soda at their soda fountain. I have no memory of ever having a treat of any kind there and just a vague idea that I must have been in the building. If I did go there with my mother or with friends it left no lasting impression. Maybe its heyday as a prominent meeting place with a thriving soda fountain was in the past and it was starting its slide into downtown Tempe's hippy-haven days in the 70's. Or maybe it was just on the wrong side of Mill Avenue as I neared Tempe Beach, only a few blocks away.

North of Laird and Dines, across 5th Street, was the Arizona Public Service (APS) office and then the Vienna Bakery and College City Cyclery. When I mentioned the Vienna Bakery to my sister Lorene she recalled going on a Tenth Street School field trip there and becoming so upset after

the aroma-rich tour ended because no cookie, piece of cake, or even a crumb was handed out as a token of their visit. John Dixon said there was a place called Jim Shelly's Coffee Cup Cafe on that side of the block

(east side) and a high school yearbook from the early 60s has Lorrain's Beauty Shop listed as a sponsor and residing at 405 Mill Avenue. Perhaps Lorrain's was in the Andre Building that still stands today, one of the few buildings remaining from the 1950s era. I do not remember much of the east side of the 400 block of Mill Avenue but the west side does have a few places I recall passing on my walk to the Beach. The Boston Store was where we went to get clothing that could not be made by my mother or my Aunt Pearl who was an accomplished seamstress – things like belts, ties and suits. I don't have any strong impressions of the Boston Store other than a feeling that it was a step up from the five and dime store clothing. The other establishment that did leave a strong impression, even though I never entered it as a youth, was Parry's Bar – at least I think was called Parry's in the 50s (I know it was named Parry's in my 1970s college years). It was not a place that easily revealed itself to the passerby since it was a long, narrow space that was poorly lit. All you could see were shadowy figures seated at the bar and rarely did any noises, including voices escape from the place. Over the years that I lived in Tempe, up until the mid 1970s, there was a man we all called Julio who lurked around downtown Tempe, usually in close proximity to Parry's. He was a short Hispanic male – we would have called him a Mexican back then – who had two distinguishing features; one was a round, flat-brimmed hat and the other noticeably large lips and jaw that gave him a somewhat comic appearance. Julio was a man who always seemed to be benignly drunk and somewhat garrulous as we children would pass by. As young kids we were mildly frightened by him, as teens derisive towards him, and as young adults admiring of his long downtown tenure and nostalgic towards him. I suppose he passed away unheralded for his contribution as a staunch town character.

As you came nearer to Tempe Beach there were two very prominent landmarks that loomed on the horizon. First and foremost was Tempe Butte, a rocky hill that anchors downtown Tempe to the Salt River. This was another destination for active kids in summer. It was just high enough to afford a great view and steep enough to test your muscles and nerve. Today you can walk up a steep paved path, almost to the top but back then you had to scramble up the south slope after crossing a small,

earthen canal lined with cottonwood and willow trees. Nearby were a few adobe homes, remnants of the old Barrio Al Centro and Barrio Mickey Mouse. Both of these Hispanic enclaves were crudely swept aside by Arizona State College‟s expansion in the mid-1950s.

I was probably a clueless racist back then. I had a friend, Ronnie Rodriguez, who was a classmate at Tempe Training School where we attended 2nd through 6th grade together. I can remember being welcomed at his home in a small barrio just east of where the new light rail line intersects Rural Road and playing war games in the nearby fields. However, I also remember using the term "Mexican" with derogatory intent in my younger years though never to Ronnie. There was a prevalent feeling of being superior on the part of Anglos, something I probably

absorbed in the schoolyard, my church, and by just the separateness of the two communities. For some reason, I never put my brown skinned pal Ronnie and my poorly conceived concept of Mexican inferiority together. Maybe Ronnie passed my myopic muster because he didn't have an attitude like the Moras, two brothers at school who were "Pachucos." A Pachuco was a Hispanic tough guy with slicked back hair, low slung pants, a wide leather belt, and rolled-up sleeves – not the sort to tolerate any superiority fantasies.

I don't recall any racism imparted by my mother; in fact I recall being severely chastised once for naively using the "N" word in an argument with my brother. By the time I was high school age in the 1960s the word "Mexican" had lost much of its racist sting. However, I recall one Hispanic classmate often stressing she was Spanish not Mexican, a comment that reflected lingering discomfort with her own racial identity.

I do regret my participation in the racism of my childhood and I especially regret the heavy-handed removal of the people and homes in the small Hispanic neighborhoods that lay at the foot of Tempe Butte.

The other prominent landmark as you neared Tempe Beach was the Hayden Flour Mill on the east side of Mill Avenue, right up against the Butte. This was the place that gave Mill Avenue its name and attests to the fact that Tempe was once surrounded by bountiful fields of wheat and cotton. The mill still operated at the time I was a boy and was made

prominent by the towering silos that held the grain to be ground into wheat flour. The abandoned mill and towering silos still stand today, majestic but decaying, surrounded by sleek new condos and an artificial lake. I guess the people of Tempe want to honor the past but have not yet found a way to turn the old edifices into something useful.

Before you got to the flour mill or the butte, you would first come to the Casa Loma Hotel on the northwest corner of Mill Avenue and 4th Street. It was an impressive three story building, with stucco walls and tiled roof, and verandas on two upper floors. My friend John Dixon remembers a restaurant being located either inside or adjacent to the hotel. Once you passed the Casa Loma my memory begins to falter. I know there were a couple of auto sales lots on the east side of Mill Avenue. The Tempe Motor Company was just south of the railroad tracks that have been converted to carry sleek light-rail trains from Mesa to Phoenix. North of the tracks was the more prominent Dana Brothers car lot that sold Dodge, Chrysler, and the now defunct Plymouth brand. I don't recall much of what existed on the west side of Mill, in the area between 3rd and 2nd Streets, other than a belief that there may have been auto repair places – my brother Bill is pretty sure there was a place called Bunch's Radiator and Muffler Repair in that general vicinity. While we passed all these places on our trek to Tempe Beach there must not have been much there that a 10-year old boy found interesting.

Walking north the next place of note was Monti's La Casa Vieja, a steakhouse restaurant that still resides on the southwest corner of 1st Street and Mill Avenue. Monti‟s was an old adobe boarding home built in 1871 and expanded over the years before a Mr. Monti bought it in 1954 and converted it into a restaurant. I never stopped there on my trips to the Tempe Beach because

it was too upscale for a kid on a quarter a day budget. It wasn't until years later that I stepped through the doors when I began dating one of Mr. Monti's daughters. Regretfully, that liaison never resulted in an affordable meal other than occasional bread sticks wrapped in a napkin when I picked her up after work. As a kid in the 1950s, Monti's was most notable for its proximity the Tempe Beach – the pool was right across the street.

The thing you first noticed as you approached the pool was the bath house, an engaging building made entirely of river rocks from the nearby Salt River with arched entries to the men's and women's shower rooms. On the men's side you immediately encountered a mist of sweat, soap suds, and chlorine fumes – lots of chlorine fumes. The mid-1950s marked the beginning of the end for the polio virus but it was still enough of a threat that all public pools had huge amounts of chlorine in the water to combat the virus that was spread by even miniscule amounts of a carrier's fecal matter. Peeing in the pool probably also added to the need for substantial chlorination. After a summer of marinating in highly chlorinated pool water, and walking home in the desert sun, my blonde hair was bleached bone white and my eyes were perpetually pink. I looked like the offspring of a human parent and the Easter Bunny.

The pool and bath house were part of the larger Tempe Beach Park that included ball fields and a picnic area that sprawled down to the bank of the river. The picnic area was between the pool and the bank of the Salt River. There were towering cottonwood trees providing shade and a sloping lawn carpeted by the ubiquitous crab grass that thrived in desert heat and covered most the lawns in town. You could race elephants on crab grass and there would be little evidence of their passing – it was as durable as asphalt. I remember my mother giving me the hellish job of removing crab grass intrusions into her rose beds, an endeavor requiring a sharpened spade to dig up clumps of earth entangled with the deeply penetrating crab grass roots. You had to get every segment of root or it would grow back in days, only thicker and longer. With rose bushes, you also had to daintily pluck crab grass strands from amongst the thorny branches, an aspect of the job that invariably ended in lacerated hands and honed cursing skills. I love modern day desert landscaping if only because crab grass is never a recommended ground cover.

While I attended a few picnics at the park, probably church affairs, it was the pool that that was my main destination. I'm not sure when I learned to swim but I do remember I did so at Tempe Beach, taught by Park staff. I loved to swim. It didn‟t matter if it was on the surface doing the crawl or back stroke or underwater diving down to the drain in the deep end. As a 10-year old boy I spent almost all of my time at the pool

in the water, rarely lifting my body fully onto terra firma. When I did leave the water I usually perched on a walkway that separated the main, Olympic size pool from the wading pool. From this vantage I could watch people diving off the boards at the opposite deep end – something I wouldn't master for a few years yet. I could also see people queuing up at the snack bar and even smell the hot dogs and hamburgers giving up their fragrant fat to boiling water and hot griddles. There was a grassy area in front of the snack bar where you could lay down a towel and bask in partial shade while consuming some fried item but I don't recall ever doing so until my adolescent years when leggy teen-age girls lured me into the social world of the snack bar area. It could also be that my brother and I never consumed any food at the pool because of the widely held belief that if you entered the water after eating you would cramp up and sink like a stone.

The Tempe Beach I knew as a kid no longer exists. The area is now a sleek new park that leads down to Tempe Town Lake, an artificial body of water where you can rent a boat or bring your kayak for some time on the water. No swimming is allowed. The entrance to the new park pays homage to what once was with pillars of river rock supporting a great arching "Tempe Beach Park" sign. It’s a nice place and probably much loved by the children of Tempe – but not by me. I guess it is the nature of old men to think of the past as a better place than what now holds sway which is, of course, not true. Today there are fewer diseases like polio. There are big, flat screen TVs with HD and laptops like the one that wrote this memoir. There is Thai food and sushi. There is Viagra. But to a 10-year old kid in the summer of 1955, a trip up Mill Avenue to Tempe Beach was just about as good as it gets.