

### **Chatham: My Town by a River**

*For as long as I can remember, I have only eaten one hot dog a year. I'm not a huge hot dog fan, but there is a place and a time where hot dogs have never tasted more delicious; behind the United Methodist Church on Main Street in Chatham, New Jersey, immediately following the Fourth of July Parade. Maybe it's the sweat worked up marching in the parade that makes them taste so good. Maybe it's the birch beer in plastic cups used to wash it down. Or maybe it's just the immense sense of community on this day, on so many days, that make growing up in Chatham such a unique experience.*

*When giving my address, I have to spell the name of my street several times so that people understand it's not Parrot, like the bird, but Parrott, like the family, who's mill once stood near where my family's house now does. My swim club, Minisink, is named for the Native American tribe that once inhabited these lands. Even our annual summer festival bears our town's Native American name; Fishawack. I've had the good fortune of growing up next to the Passaic River as it flows through Chatham, and I've spent countless hours in the wooded park near its shores. I've seen fisherman in waders, kayakers, and brave dogs emerge from the waters. I've skipped rocks across the rippled waves and sat alone on the log bridge, dangling my feet, lost in thought, and needing a break from the world around me. I've watched the river rise and fall with superstorms and hurricanes. Once the tide so high the water almost touched the bridge that links Chatham to the highway and eventually to the outside world.*

*In the fall, I'll leave Chatham for college. I'll leave behind the many things that have made growing up in Chatham such a gift. I have been clapped out of Milton Avenue School and clapped in to Lafayette. I have ridden my bike up of Fairmount Avenue until my legs felt numb bolstered only by the knowledge that on the ride home I'd be coasting. I've worn a witch's head made out of paper mache for the Head Show and a gown designed by a fellow high school student on the Catwalk. I've often wondered how many thousands of times I have walked down Main Street. To Chatham Middle School, to the Library, for a slice of pizza or even in a parade with a warm hot dog and a cold birch beer waiting for me at the finish line.*

*All these memories together have formed who I am. I am from Chatham; I'm a Chatham Cougar. In the fall, I will likely attend college in Delaware, a place uniquely linked to the Passaic River. At one time, during industrial development, there was a route between New Jersey and Delaware linked through the river's canals. So perhaps in a small way, I'll still be connected to the waters that have flowed by my house for eighteen years. Even as I venture off to what lies ahead, the river is there beside me always.*