

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

SAMUEL BACK

Wednesday, November 11, 2009

Interviewed by Anne Doyle

This is an unedited transcript of an oral history that is available in the QHS Archive Center. The policy for the use of this copywritten material can be obtained by contacting the Quonochontaug Historical Society (archivist@quonniehistory.org).

DOYLE: I am sitting with Sam Back, of 14 Highland Road, East Beach, and he is going to talk about his Quonnie memories. So Sam if you would just state your full name and date and place of birth –

BACK: OK. My full name is Samuel Hutchins Back, and I was born on September 30, 1940 in Cleveland, Ohio. Although, shortly after my birth, when I was two and a half years old, my family moved to Danielson, Connecticut, where my father had grown up, and at that time joined his father in a law practice there.

Practically from the first day that my dad arrived in Danielson, he wanted to find a place at the shore, for vacation, and one that was open ocean, not the Long Island Sound. So he drew a line from Danielson, Connecticut, which is in the northeast corner of the state, directly south and hit the Rhode Island shoreline right about here, in Quonochontaug. So add to that that my mother and dad had good friends in Danielson, and he was stationed at the Charlestown Airbase.

DOYLE: Oh!

BACK: And they in fact were residing in Quonochontaug on a year-round basis, at that point. Well, John Korab, John and Marjorie Korab were their names. Well, they lived here. So the combination of my dad wanting to find a place on the shore, and the Korabs actually living here, are really the two things that got my family here. Originally, we rented the Sarcey cottages, generally for a two-week period in August. And that started during the second world war, because I can remember blimps flying out over Block Island, looking for German submarines. And that really is my first memory of something specific here at Quonochontaug.

The Quonnie bug then kind of moved through Danielson. Jack and Helen

Sye came down and rented. After Jack's death, Helen married a man by the name of Roberts, and she's probably better known to the Quonochontaug community as Helen Roberts.

DOYLE: I don't know her.

BACK: Yes, well, she's deceased now. But she owned a house over on –what's the street along the water?

DOYLE: Surfside?

BACK: Surfside. Where it bends up. And she was almost at West Beach Road; she was in one of those houses along there. And the house passed from her to her daughter Winnie, and they lived in it for a while. And her married name was – Harold – I'll think of it in a minute.

DOYLE: Was this a house – was this—?

BACK: It was a small cottage.

DOYLE: Is it still there?

BACK: Oh yes, yeah.

DOYLE: Where the Glassons [live]?

BACK: I don't know.

DOYLE: I see. OK. It's not important.

BACK: Harold Curtis; Winnie and Harold Curtis.

DOYLE: Oh yes!

BACK: Winnie and Harold Curtis. She was Helen Roberts' daughter. And then, just to make the circle a little smaller, Harold Curtis was Bea Wilbur's son actually by marriage. Bea Wilbur was the second wife of Ed Curtis, so that he was a stepson. But again --another Danielson connection—Bea Wilbur. So Helen Sye, Bea Wilbur, and also Frannie and Pitch Pitcher. And all three of us – the Backs, the Syes, and the Pitchers –I remember started over in the Sarcey cottages. And as you know, the Pitchers had a long residence here, from the '40's right through Jerry and Emily selling their house here. Probably five years ago now. But the better part of--

DOYLE: But the Pitchers came after you did –

BACK: Yes, yes.

DOYLE: Because of you—

BACK: Yes, as did the Syes. And as did the Lodges, Jack and Betty Lodge, who owned *Topsy* [cottage] for a number of years, had two children about my age, David and Susan.

DOYLE: Was that a connection that your folks had, in terms of your father's law practice?

BACK: Well, no; friendship, just friendship.

DOYLE: Oh.

BACK: Jack Lodge was probably my dad's best friend, in Danielson, so they followed us here as well. So Korab, Back, Sye, Pitcher, Woburn, Lodge—six families eventually came here to Quonochontaug. And I guess, of those, Jane and I are the only ones left at this point, as we think about it, Jerry Pitcher having moved to South Kingstown. But [he's] still in the area and considers this part of the world as home.

I went away to boarding school in the ninth grade, so for me, Quonochontaug was really home. You know I was away at school all of the school year, and then spent summers here. So it has been the constant in my life.

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: And those years when I was a boy growing up were certainly wonderful. And I would say from – let me think – my parents rented through 1952, and then in 1952 they bought the cottage where we were for forty-five years, here on Highland Road.

DOYLE: And what number was that?

BACK: It was 41. 41, next to the old Tunxis Inn. I remember well the Williams family, who owned the Tunxis Inn; and of course, it was the only place within walking distance where you could buy ice cream. So, they had a freezer on the front porch, and kids would often go there.

DOYLE: Now, they used it as a little-- like a B & B or an Inn, didn't they? Or did they actually –people came there for meals?

BACK: I would use the term “boarding house.”

DOYLE: Boarding house.

BACK: Older people would come for the summer; have a room, and I assume – I don't remember--but somehow meals were prepared and served. I don't know if the Williams did it, or people living there did it. But they had a number of –well “older people in a boarding house” would be the best way to describe it. The Williams lived there year 'round. And at that

point, I think we were the only people on the street who were here year 'round.

DOYLE: Is there anything in your mind that stands out about them as people? Were they friendly, were they --

BACK: Yes, very kind, good to kids. Wonderful next-door neighbors. And the one story I remember them telling was: During the war, they had a couple of people in the dark of night come and knock on their door, asking for directions. And so the Williams gave them some directions; they believed these people were on foot but they weren't sure, but gave them directions to wherever it was they were trying to get to, and sent them on their way.

And then about two hours later, the Coast Guard came knocking on the door to ask if anybody had been there. And of course, they answered in the affirmative, told the Coast Guard what they had told these people, and the Coast Guard went on their way. They never heard any more about it, but their assumption was that this was a trial run: that two people were put ashore (because there was submarine activity out off the coast during the war—German submarine activity and they thought it was a trial run to see how long it would take the Coast Guard to catch these people. But they didn't know specifically that's what it was.

DOYLE: A trial run set up by our --

BACK: Yeah, set up by us.

DOYLE: Oh, all right.

BACK: Just put two people on the shore down here, told them what time to get moving, and to see how far they could get before they got caught.

DOYLE: I've never heard that story!

BACK: Well, that was the story the Williams told us.

DOYLE: Was this during the summertime?

BACK: Uh --no; it was during the winter. Dark -- early darkness and so forth, but interesting story. They did not feel it was people off of a submarine, but rather, as I said, a practice run. That's the primary thing, I think; from that time.

Once we bought the house, or I should say, my mother and dad bought the cottage, I would be here for the whole summer. Up to that time we rented -- we started in Sarcey cottages and then rented a couple of houses over on Burdick Street for two or three summers. And those I remember when we moved from weekly rental to monthly rental. So, we took -- my mother and dad took the established path of getting to Quonnie, renting, loving it, and then eventually buying.

So, my summers here from '52 certainly through high school were wonderful. Small things I remember: I remember working on the first ball field, which was over in Central Beach at the corner of West Beach Road and Central Avenue, clearing brush, moving whatever rocks we could, and so forth.

DOYLE: So they had all of you and your friends working on this?

BACK: Yeah, yeah. A lot of people – child labor, yes, absolutely.

DOYLE: [Laughter]

BACK: If we were going to use it, then we certainly should help put it in shape and did.

DOYLE: Then who owned—was that maybe—at that point—it must have been sold to a private family.

BACK: I--I have no idea. And then, eventually, when I was a little older and well into my teens, of course, the ball field moved to where it is. And of course, ball games haven't changed very much; you play to win, not just to have a good time. And in those days we could remember--generally could tell when the teams took the field which group – the young men or the old goats—had had a party the night before--

DOYLE: [Laughter]

BACK: --because usually one team was a little better than the other, but through the course of the season, probably split the games about 50-50. Well mixed.

DOYLE: Yeah. So they had the kids and the old goats even back --

BACK: Oh yeah! Yeah.

DOYLE: --at the original field --

BACK: Well, I don't know about the original field. But I remember it from the current field.

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: The current field named for Howard Thorpe.

DOYLE: Thorpe now; yeah.

BACK: Yeah; OK. So I remember that. And the other thing about those years was – there was just a big crowd of youngsters here.

DOYLE: MmHm; [Agreeing]

BACK: Different age groups; generally, an age group would cover three or four years, and of course at that time, every year made a big difference. Or so it seemed. You are __how old?

DOYLE: Right now, I'm – I have to think! [Laughing] I'm 66.

BACK: 66. I'm 69, and you know I was in a crowd with your brother, but you were in the next younger crowd, pretty much, you and your sister.

DOYLE: Yes.

BACK: So, it was interesting how that went. But lots of people – lots of families here for the summer back in those days.

DOYLE: I think that's what made the difference and made the connections a little bit deeper because you all were here for the entire summer.

BACK: Yeah.

DOYLE: That's unusual, today.

BACK: And as I said, for me, this was really home. I went to Danielson at Christmas and probably at spring vacation, if I wasn't doing anything else.

DOYLE: And mention the school that you were at.

BACK: I went to Andover Philips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts and then went on to Yale. And graduated from college in '62. My first job out of college, that summer, was working at Kenyon's Laundry. And Kenyon's Laundry existed on the Westerly-Bradford Road. That's all I can tell you.

DOYLE: This was out of college now?

BACK: Yes, yes. This was a summer job.

DOYLE: A summer job. OK.

BACK: Before I went to work. And in fact, Martha Shea, now Martha Capaldi, worked there that summer also. That's where we got to know each other.

DOYLE: So that was kind of a hot spot there too! I had never heard of the place before!

BACK: Well, if you come out of Westerly on Route 91, right where the road takes a 90-degree bend to the left, there's a driveway going up the hill, and the laundry was just up that driveway.

DOYLE: Did you know the family?

BACK: No; nope. Although they lived over on East Beach somewhere; I couldn't tell you their names or anything else, except that they owned and ran the laundry.

DOYLE: Now this was every day you were working there -- Monday through Friday?

BACK: Yes.

DOYLE: And how did you get there?

BACK: Well, I probably started out at the Hiscox Lumber Company, because the Hiscox family had a summer house here at the time and the lumber company in Westerly. But they had no work for me. So, then I made my way eventually to the laundry.

DOYLE: Did you have a car then?

BACK: I did; I did. I had the family car.

DOYLE: Oh; I see.

BACK: Or at least shared it with my mother. I don't remember exactly how that worked. But I got to work every day. And I did a fair amount of work in the laundry, washing clothes; I didn't do any pressing. And also, the laundry had a truck that went around the greater Charlestown area and even over into Pawcatuck. And I drove the laundry truck that summer a fair amount, so that the regular driver could have some vacation time.

DOYLE: Now that was when all the services came to people that were here summers, is that right?

BACK: Yes.

DOYLE: So, they did pick up people's laundry down here.

BACK: That's true; glad you mentioned that. Back in those days, the milkmen came here, the fresh fruit and vegetable people, the bakers—Arnold and Cushman—those are the ones I remember at the moment, but they all had trucks that came through the community.

DOYLE: Yeah; yeah. Do you remember Sammy, the vegetable man?

BACK: Sure, sure. The fruit and vegetable man, I do.

DOYLE: Yeah, little guy.

BACK: Little guy out of Bradford would get his stuff every day and come on over. And I remember we preferred Arnold baked goods to Cushman baked goods, for whatever reason. And – I'm trying to think – Consumers Dairy

DOYLE: Consumers Dairy !

BACK: So those things were all here at the time.

DOYLE: Back talking about the World War II era, did you remember anything else going on at the beach? Did you see the soldiers, do you remember seeing the soldiers --?

BACK: No; no. Of course, and I haven't mentioned this, planes were flying out of Charlestown night and day, 24 hours a day. My understanding was that basically, Charlestown took the overflow from Quonset, when a ship would come in. And what they did here, since it was just a small strip, they practiced [aircraft] carrier landing. They would touch down, gun it, go right back up again, come back around, touch down, gun it and go right back up and circle around. So that was pretty much going day and night, but I don't remember it bothering me, particularly. And of course, it went on—Charlestown was open well after the War--for a while. But I don't remember how long.

DOYLE: And it was still going on, the practice was going on then. 'Cause I remember the sounds at night, going to sleep with that sound of the planes.

BACK: From the sky, circling over. Every now and then they'd lose one.

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: Go in the drink but –

DOYLE: Do you remember any being lost when you were here?

BACK: No, not specifically. But I do know that happened on occasion.

DOYLE: Now your parents – you said they bought the cottage here –

BACK: Bought the cottage in '52--

DOYLE: So they didn't build it.

BACK: No. That cottage was built bef---I can't tell you when –

DOYLE: I wonder if it was –

BACK: But I think it was before the '38 Hurricane.

DOYLE: But it was still there, or do you think it was moved there?

BACK: No; I think it was built there. That might be a good Segway into the '54 hurricane, which was on August 31 in 1954. I was here, and very briefly, in the two years before the hurricane, four or five cottages had been built below the Van Ost house—or below the Duksta house, as the case may be, now the Howe house. One, two, three, four – four I can remember

specifically. And what happened in the hurricane was they were all washed away. The first one, which is right down where the boardwalk is at the foot of Highland Road, just to left of it there was a cottage there; and that went across the pond. That was the first to go, and it went across the pond. One was demolished entirely, and three floated up the road and stopped just short of Stony Nook. It was incredible that one of them didn't just go right on and crash into Stony Nook.

DOYLE: Stony Nook was the name of your –

BACK: No. It's the name of the cottage that's on the corner where Midland comes into Highland. Right across the street from Van Ost, now owned by John and Phyllis Weisman.

DOYLE: Oh; OK.

BACK: But there were three houses sitting right in that intersection. Which was rather remarkable that more damage wasn't done.

DOYLE: Did you actually – I mean, you were in the cottage—

BACK: I was in the cottage, and what we all did was come up to the farmhouse. I think the Seibert family was there at that time, but I wouldn't swear to it. And the farmhouse is the high ground along this road. So – cottages going across the pond, cottages coming up the road—and the other thing I remember is, there were telephone wires, there was a string of telephone wires along the beach at that time. And I remember the waves breaking over the telephone wires.

DOYLE: And you saw this before you came up to the farmhouse? Or were you able to go upstairs in the farmhouse and look out?

BACK: Well, yeah; yeah. But being a teenager, with some other teenagers gathered there, we were out fighting the storm! hanging on to the pillars in front of the house and watching the waves break and the water go by. None of these houses were here at this time, so we had a very good view. Two interesting things on that: the low point, the water came right across Garden Pond and went up--right up through this low area here and cut— oh, not Sea Breeze – what's the next street that runs down to East Beach Road?

DOYLE: Overlook?

BACK: Overlook! It cut Overlook, down toward the bottom of Overlook because that's the low area, and that's where the water went. And it actually cut the road there, in a low spot.

DOYLE: Now there must have been-- that cottage that got swept away from the shore area -- did it land on the --?

BACK: No, it went over here –[gestures] won't do any good! It went essentially to the northeast, right across Garden Pond and landed in the rushes over there. And –uh—then the other thing that happened was that – what's the name of the pond by Central Beach?

DOYLE: West Pond. Fresh Pond or West Pond.

BACK: Ok; West Pond. The water came up across West Pond and cut Sea Breeze [Avenue] right down by the tennis courts. Now that road was much lower then.

DOYLE: Yeah. Yeah.

BACK: It has been built up and improved; but at that time, it cut Sea Breeze. So, we were isolated here, for a short period of time.

DOYLE: But for a couple of days?

BACK: A couple of days, yeah, until those roads got filled in. The other primary story I remember about that hurricane was – a freezer floated across Quonnie Pond and wound up on the shore near the Thorpe house. And it was full of food! And we always imagined that it probably came from the Weekapaug Inn. We don't know that for sure, but given its size and the amount of food that was in it . . . So, it's against the law to open anything like that and take the contents. So, what do you do? Do you leave it there and let 'em rot or do you take it and use it? Needless to say, we grabbed a lot of food and a bunch of families.

DOYLE: Yeah, yeah.

BACK: When I say "we" --a bunch of families emptied the freezer and a number of meals on –

DOYLE: Meats? And --?

BACK: Meat and frozen vegetables, and so forth and so on.

DOYLE: Did you and your friends do most of the work in terms of getting the stuff out of it?

BACK: I don't remember that. But yeah, we emptied the freezer and had a few meals on the – we assume on the Weekapaug Inn. And then, shortly thereafter, I went off to school. Actually, that was just before my ninth-grade year. So I went off to school and was not involved in much of the clean-up. One other thing that I ought to mention that I remember was that John Duksta, Sue Howe's dad, where Sue and Art Howe now live, had an annual clambake. And shortly before the hurricane, he'd gotten a great deal on paper goods, which he would use for his clambake. And they were in his basement. And of course his basement is right down on the pond. And the water filled his basement but did not get up into the

house. But it took all those paper products and distributed them all over the neighborhood!

DOYLE: [Laughing] Oh my goodness!

BACK: And so, I remember picking pieces of paper napkin out of briar bushes and so forth for a number of days while we were here after the hurricane. They lost two cars, which were in their garage at the time, but it was the paper products that I remember the most.

DOYLE: Now was your dad here too?

BACK: He was not here. My father was in New York at that point. Just my mother and me and our animals. And Dad was very disappointed; he wished he had been here to see the storm.

DOYLE: Now did they try to evacuate you at all?

BACK: No; no.

DOYLE: They didn't?

BACK: No, not at that time.

DOYLE: I thought that they did try and evacuate people that were near the water –

BACK: They might have, and I honestly don't remember if this storm came as much of a surprise or not. But no; there was no order to evacuate.

DOYLE: 'Cause we weren't, but of course, we were at higher level.

BACK: You were higher up. Were you here?

DOYLE: Yes, yes.

BACK: Okay.

DOYLE: Now was West Beach also –West Beach Road—was that also cut off by water or –

BACK: I don't know, but I'm sure the storm came right over down there, right over the road.

DOYLE: And staying over at the farmhouse during the hurricane, did you all just kind of –

BACK: Well, the storm was in the morning, and by the afternoon, it was gone; the sun was out and it was a beautiful day.

DOYLE: Okay. So, you went back to your-

BACK: Went back to the house, and the only thing I regretted was that we hadn't brought the animals with us. But they were fine.

DOYLE: Yeah. Did you have kerosene lamps going? Do you remember that?

BACK: Oh sure. And candles.

DOYLE: Now what about – did you have a telephone?

BACK: Yeah.

DOYLE: So maybe you could get ahold of your dad or –

BACK: Yeah, although again, I don't remember, and I don't remember how long the power was out, or any of those things. I do know that we would cook on a charcoal broiler or somebody who had a gas stove. We only had electricity at the time. I think, but I don't remember if the Cavanaugh's owned the house next door at that time or not, but I remember they had water in the basement; they have a full basement under that house.

DOYLE: Now which house was that?

BACK: Well, the Tunxis.

DOYLE: Oh, the Tunxis-- yes.

BACK: But our house, which was maybe two feet, two and a half feet above the ground, did not get any water in it. But the garage, which was ground-level, did.

DOYLE: Uh-huh. You were lucky.

BACK: Yeah. But cleaning up after something like that is –

DOYLE: Yeah; but do you remember what the beach looked like afterwards?

BACK: The beach was lovely! I remember taking a walk up the beach, and it was lovely.

DOYLE: Were there many houses down, on the shore toward what is now the East Beach parking lot, and on down?

BACK: No.

DOYLE: There weren't any –

BACK: No; just along Highland. But as I say, they all went. Van Ost's was the house closest to the water, that stayed.,

DOYLE: That wasn't damaged?

BACK: I don't remember.

DOYLE: That just seems like it would be so vulnerable --

BACK: Yeah; yeah. Certainly, there was a good deal of water around it; there were houses floating by.

DOYLE: Now did you travel over to see some of your friends on Central Beach and West Beach, or --?

BACK: Memory is a little dim at this point!

DOYLE: Vague, yeah!

BACK: Oh sure; we all gathered ---

DOYLE: I'm wondering --What about surfing in those waves?

BACK: No, no.

DOYLE: You didn't try that! After the storm, I don't mean during the storm --

BACK: No; no. We stayed away from the water. For days.

DOYLE: Now on a normal day, were you out there doing some surfing with those rafts, the rubber rafts?

BACK: Yeah, rubber rafts. Body surfing and rubber rafts.

DOYLE: Now, did you go spearfishing?

BACK: I did not; I'm not a fisherman. Did some clamming and crabbing back in those days, before—

DOYLE: Okay, where?

BACK: Well, mostly in the Charlestown pond, rather than the Quonnie pond, but what's that -- Ninigret?

DOYLE: That's Ninigret now, but it was Charlestown Pond .

BACK: Ninigret now -- mostly in the Ninigret Pond. I guess 'cause we knew it better from having rented over there in that part of the world.

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: Not a lot, but some. And I can remember being able to pull mussels off the rocks, here in front of Central Beach. But they've been gone for many, many years.

DOYLE: Yes, and I wonder why --

BACK: They just got all taken—overfished.

DOYLE: I was wondering about that.

BACK: So, I think efforts to re-stock some of these ponds are wonderful. Hopefully, they'll be successful.

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: Moving on, uh, well from the Hurricane, and then I graduated from high school in '58, and most of my college summers were spent away, on jobs of different sorts. Except the summer – after I graduated from college was when I worked at the laundry, because I had a job starting in September.

DOYLE: And what was that job?

BACK: Initially, out of college, I taught school. And I taught down at the Lawrenceville School, which was a boys' prep school in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. From that point on, summers for the most part I would get back for a week or a few weekends but was not here for any great length of time during summers.

DOYLE: But your parents were still here.

BACK: My parents were here. Mother would come down for the summer; Dad would get here as much as he could and always took some time off in August. And that was '62 I graduated, married Jane in '68 and we'd get here at least once a summer pretty regularly.

DOYLE: Well, you had some lifelong friends here, and probably whenever you did come down, you'd connect with them?

BACK: Could connect with them, yes. And see them. And it's interesting now—and you're as familiar with this as I am – how many of our generation who were here in those summers are now here year-round. You know, a fair number of people – but we don't need to identify them here. But I've always been amazed by that. So, it's a place that a lot of people loved and have come back to upon retirement or even before.

DOYLE: It's like with your experience, this was really home to you because of your own life situation,

BACK: This was really home; yeah, yeah.

DOYLE: And for a lot of people that was true. For me – whenever anybody used to ask me, where are you from, I used to say Rhode Island! I don't know why, but that's the way it was.

BACK: That's the way you feel! Very true. And the same is true for our two youngsters—not youngsters anymore – none of our children are. We at one point lived in Westerly for ten years—

DOYLE: Oh yes, tell me about that.

BACK: It was from '79-'89, and it was really during our children's grade-school years. So Westerly became home along with Quonnie, for them.

DOYLE: So they were—when you were in Westerly, you would also be able to come down here summers.

BACK: Yeah; well, we'd come and visit. Again, my mother and dad were there.

DOYLE: That's what I mean; you'd come and visit.

BACK: And we could come down for the day – easy trip. So we would do that. So where I'm going is – when Jane and I decided to build this house [on Highland Road], which we did in the year 97-'98 as our permanent home, it also was the place that our children came back to, between Westerly and here. And they, of course—through the years, we really kind of took over the cottage on a full-time basis, I would say in '85, after my mother died. My dad didn't use the cottage anymore after that, and we really took it over and looked out for it.

So our kids had great summers here as well. In fact, in Tom's high-school years—Amanda was in college, and this would be in the early '90's – Tom's high-school years, he lived here alone. [Laughing:] Jane likes to say, "I can't believe we let him do that!" But he was fine; he had a job and worked I think high-school summers at Sandy's and then college summers at the Misquamicut Club. So, he always had a good job and had a few friends wandering in and out. But the house was always immaculate when we came back to visit—visit our son-In our summer cottage. So for both of them, very much a part of their life, and really home, home growing up for them as well. Amanda in particular has a group of friends here that will be lifelong. Moreso than Tom. So, in that sense, the beat goes on.

For Jane and me, deciding to come here when we retired, and build a house, was really a no-brainer.

DOYLE: That wasn't a long process in deciding that?

BACK: No; no. Because – where else? In one sense, where else? We wanted to be in the Northeast, where our kids were – although Tom's now in Chicago –and we had identified a few other places that we might be interested in, but we love it here, and not a day has gone by that we've regretted our decision. And particularly because we were able to buy this lot.

DOYLE: Could you describe where you are and where we're looking out?

BACK: Well, We're on Highland Road, at 14, which is on the east side of Highland Road, if you think of Highland Road running north to south to the beach. And our property gives out on Garden Pond, so we have life,

particularly the bird life in the pond to enjoy every day. And then we look out over the pond to the ocean. And there is one house we can see from where we are, and another will never be any built on any of this because all that property is unbuildable. So, it's lovely.

DOYLE: You couldn't ask for anything nicer.

BACK: It's lovely. The only thing we need are drapes which are a little darker, in our bedroom, because the morning sun pours in there. Poor us! Shucks!

DOYLE: Well, you get up early in the morning anyway—

BACK: Get up early anyway -- that's right.

DOYLE: What's your routine like now --? You start early, I know.

BACK: Well I start early, and I head to the Y and get exercise. I do that three days a week. And I'm up at 5:15 to get in and get in some mileage on the treadmill and the bicycle. And then I go to what we call a stretch and go class at 7:00 in the morning; and that is basically a combination of some stretching that has some Yoga in it, although we don't dare call it Yoga, and some calisthenics.

DOYLE: Now were you a part of the Y before, when you lived in Westerly?

BACK: Yes; yes. And I in fact joined that class in 1980. We moved to Westerly in '79 and I joined that class in 1980. So, it's been going on for what now – 30 years!

DOYLE: Are you still with people that you –

BACK: Nobody from back then is still in the class. I'm the only one. So, I'm the senior member. Not the oldest – but the senior! And it draws --there are probably about 20 people who go over time, but it draws about twelve or fifteen regulars. Which is great

DOYLE: Yeah, that's good.

BACK: About half and half, men and women.

DOYLE: Oh, I didn't know; I thought it was all men.

BACK: No.no. Men and Women.

DOYLE: Did you do much sailing on the ponds?

BACK: I did not, I did not. We had a small motor boat that we used to put in, and poke around in and go clamming and crabbing. But now, as you know, our primary mode of transportation is kayaks –on the pond and on some of the inland rivers around here, which are in many ways more fun to kayak than just the big pond.

DOYLE: MmmHmm. Do you have any reaction to the development of Quonnie?
Or – I mean we’re all part of it

BACK: Yeah, Yeah.

DOYLE: But does that – just—

BACK: No; my only negative reaction is that some of the houses are too big.
These are very small lots, and people are building houses to fill every
possible inch that they can. And it loses some of its kind of “cottage
charm” which it had in the years that you and I were growing up.

DOYLE: Yes. I miss the vegetation – the natural vegetation. I don’t know; you
probably didn’t go out blackberrying or blueberrying—

BACK: We went blueberrying –

DOYLE: Oh you did?

BACK: Yeah.

DOYLE: I mean, there were lots of wild fruits, you know; and of course that’s all
gone.

BACK: That’s all gone, yeah. And when we first came here, if you think of
Overlook –middle Overlook, up to where it intersects Midland, and
Midland goes over to Sea Breeze, and then Sea Breeze goes west, there
was nothing there when we first came here.

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: So Upper Highland north and Midland beyond Overlook and then Upland
and – I’ve forgotten the name of the next one –

DOYLE: Buddington

BACK: Buddington—none of that was there, so that ‘s all new in the last forty
years.

DOYLE: Yeah. Did they have problems in getting permits to build? I mean, that’s
all lowland up there. You go up Midland and it’s – very mushy in there.

BACK: Yeah. There are. And some of that’s been filled in. I would say there’s
no building now on the marsh side of Buddington. But other than that, it’s
all built.

DOYLE: And what about your involvement with the East Beach Association? Can
you explain what the East Beach Association is?

BACK: Well, it's property owners here, in a loose confederation, trying to look out for the preservation of the area, and taking care of whatever issues might arise.

DOYLE: How have you been involved in that organization?

BACK: There are about three hundred families, and its boundaries are very clearly defined, and you know one of the big things the Association does is try to preserve the beach. And we work hard at that. And also, as you know, kind of the only way to keep the crowds down at the beach is to control access to it, which, like Central Beach, we do by making parking available only for members of the Association.

DOYLE: In the **summer**.

BACK: In the summer. But it's been interesting to watch the East Beach crowd move further and further to the east, towards Blue Shutters. As the population gets bigger. And fortunately, East Beach owns the property that gives access to that beach, almost to Blue Shutters. It runs up there quite a long way.

DOYLE: Oh! I didn't know that. You mean they own all the strip, right along the coast?

BACK: Yeah. Right up most of the way to Blue Shutters.

DOYLE: Do you know what the history of that is? I mean, how did that all happen? Because there obviously were houses there before the '38 Hurricane.

BACK: Yeah. That I don't know.

DOYLE: And I often wondered why they allowed – that, is, there are some houses that are past Blue Shutters that have been built on the coast.

BACK: Yes.

DOYLE: But why they allowed that versus –maybe it's just that...after the '38 Hurricane, maybe East Beach acquired this land or something – and then didn't --I don't know. I'm not sure.

BACK: Jane and I were walking up there the other day, and she said, "Are these houses along Atlantic Avenue part of the East Beach Association?" And I don't think they are. I don't know that for a fact, but I don't think they are. I think the Association ends right at Blue Shutters.

DOYLE: At Blue Shutters. Well, part of your East Beach Association is also Sunset Drive and that area—

BACK: Yes, yeah.

DOYLE: And parts of –what—East Beach Road, too – right?

BACK: The Association runs all the way out East Beach Road-- For properties that front on East Beach Road. But only -those.

DOYLE: MmHmm.

BACK: And then --well that's the easiest way to describe it.

DOYLE: I was looking at your directory, for other reasons, recently, and I think there are some people on it that live on Briarwood.

BACK: That's something that's grandfathered, from a property in the East Beach Association--

DOYLE: Oh.

BACK: --from --uh--Doctor -- I can't remember his name--something that's grandfathered. But Briarwood is not part of the Association.

DOYLE: I didn't think so. But I was wondering about that.

BACK: Art Ganz could give you the details.

DOYLE: Actually, he's the next one I'm plan to talk to.

BACK: But all properties on East Beach Road. And then of course what's the road that goes over to Sunrise Acres? That's where -- anything along there is not part of East Beach.

DOYLE: And that's a separate --

BACK: That's a separate little community of its own.

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: As long as we're talking, we also have a water system in East Beach, that covers about a hundred homes.

DOYLE: Is there a limit on that?

BACK: Yes, very much. Very much a limit. And we serve only the houses along those roads. But that is -- if there are 300, we serve now about a hundred and ten and might go to a hundred and forty or fifty if every lot was built on.

DOYLE: OK. And that is -- but how far do the pipes go?

BACK: The pipes go to the foot of --why can I never remember the name -- they run to the foot of Overlook, and then they run through Upper Highland, Midland, Upland--

DOYLE: But not down East Beach Road.

BACK: No; they did not go down East Beach Road.

DOYLE: I didn't think so.

BACK: And then all of Overlook and Sea Breeze from the tennis court east. And then down Highland and down Midland.

DOYLE: And you were on the water--?

BACK: I'm on the water board.

DOYLE: You still are.

BACK: Yeah.

DOYLE: I think that's kind of nice pieces of living in a community like this because everybody does their own job and –

BACK: Yes, yeah

DOYLE: And it makes – it works!

BACK: Yeah; and like everything else, it's a few people that do it. A lot of people want to come down and not have anything to do with anything. And that's fine.

DOYLE: MmmHmm. Yeah.

BACK: But we've made some – as has Central Beach – we've made some vast improvements in the delivery of water in recent years and feel good about it.

DOYLE: Yeah. Good. Um – Just going back a little bit, do you remember as a teen, what you did – what would you do at night with all your friends?

BACK: Generally, we gathered at somebody's house. And we had several musicians: I think of Tracy Schwarz, I think of Sam uh-----oh, terrible! Sam and Jack – generally they rented Stony Nook—parents were good friends of the Byrnes—but those two and I think Mac Moulton played. And we would often sit around and jam; play cards, uh play different board games, but generally just get together at somebody's house.

DOYLE: Were you a part of going to the dances at the hall, at the Sea Breeze Inn?

BACK: Sea Breeze Inn? Probably; that memory is a little vague.

DOYLE: OK.

BACK: There used to be square dances at the Grange.

DOYLE: Oh, you go back –oh, the Grange. That's a little before --

BACK: I would go to those. I was younger than the crowd that really did that, but they'd pull me in every now and then and let me dance with them. And then my parents would come and get me at intermission – 10:00 or something like that. I'd have to go home. But oh yeah, forgot to mention—

DOYLE: Did you feel the sense of freedom, though, down here? Or was there a –

BACK: Oh absolutely, absolutely. I was free to come and go. If I went to the beach, I let my parents know. And generally, and I don't remember up to what age, you weren't to go in the water unless there was somebody there to keep an eye on you. But then when you got old enough to handle yourself in the water, that wouldn't matter. But the crowd would gather on the beach every day-- portable radios, to listen to music or the ball game.

DOYLE: Cards were even at the beach, too. Card games going at the beach.

BACK: Cards at the beach, absolutely. Bridge: a lot of bridge on the beach.

DOYLE: Bridge? Oooh.

BACK: Yeah. But just – wonderful time. Gathered during the day, gathered in the evenings.

DOYLE: MmmHmm.

BACK: Every now and then the guys – and I say every now and then –maybe twice a summer – would ford the breachway, which you could do in those days, before it was dredged and re-routed--

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: --ford the breachway with two or three cases of beer on their shoulders and go over to the other side of the breachway and then drink our beer and hope that the girls would come and try to find us.

DOYLE: [Laughing]

BACK: Generally, they were smart enough to stay away. But yeah, I remember being able to walk across the breachway. [More laughter]

DOYLE: Yeah. And could you walk back—I mean you have to walk across it during low tide.

BACK: Yeah, you'd keep an eye on the tide, to make sure you could get back.

DOYLE: Do you remember what it was like over on the other side of the breachway?

BACK: Empty!

DOYLE: And what about the dunes? Do you remember the dunes?

BACK: Yeah, the dunes were there. It was wonderful. But it was empty all the way up to the Weekapaug Yacht Club.

DOYLE: MmmHmm.

BACK: But the breachway is much more navigable now than it was then. But you can't ford it anymore.

DOYLE: No, you can't; you cannot. Absolutely not.

BACK: Not on foot.

DOYLE: Absolutely not.

BACK: There used to be a bowling alley there in West Beach; you probably remember that. And it would draw our attention every once in a while, to go down and go bowling.

DOYLE: Yeah. Do you remember what the alleys were like?

BACK: Pretty awful.

DOYLE: [laughing] Because of all the water – the '38 Hurricane and—

BACK: Yeah – high water would get in there –

DOYLE: Setting up your own pins –

BACK: Yeah, yeah.

DOYLE: When did they take that down?

BACK: I have no idea.

DOYLE: I don't either.

And, did you have much contact with anybody that was living here year-round – well, the Williams you had mentioned were living here year-round. But I was thinking like the Hutchins at the farm, and there were certain people that were here year-round –

BACK: Yeah. The answer's no. Not really.

DOYLE: There was a separation, I felt.

BACK: Yeah. We remember the store; it was Brightman's

DOYLE: Brightman's

BACK: Yeah, it was Brightman's originally and then I'd have trouble remembering any names – Crompton's?

DOYLE: Crompton's. Those two.

BACK: You'd know those. Have them in your literature.

DOYLE: Do you remember Mr. Brightman?

BACK: The old man! Yes.

DOYLE: The old man. I just vaguely remember him. But what do you remember about him?

BACK: I remember him heavy set, a fairly full head of white hair, and a limp. And I don't know what caused the limp. But I remember –

DOYLE: Somebody said he had his leg amputated.

BACK: Well, maybe –

DOYLE: I don't know whether that's true.

BACK: Maybe he had a prosthetic device. I don't know. And then his son, who was a builder [Henry Brightman], [and] Brad Fisher should be mentioned—he has a number of structures around—

DOYLE: Did you know the builder – the Brightman that was the builder?

BACK: No; only to say hello to.

DOYLE: Was it Henry?

BACK: The old man was Henry; I think it may be Ken –. [The elder Brightman's name was Charles; his son was Henry.]

DOYLE: All right; I don't know..Didn't he live up here? In East Beach somewhere?

BACK: Can't answer that.

The other thing that I remember was that Roland DeMoranville was the garbage man. And Roland DeMoranville drove the truck and made his *wife* empty the garbage cans into the truck! I never asked him how or why he did that –or her – is who I should have asked: “Why are you doing this while Roland's sitting in the truck?” I remember that well.

DOYLE: And he lived where Woody is now.

BACK: Yes; where Woody is now.

DOYLE: But wasn't there just this little shack?

BACK: Yes. It was not much of a house.

DOYLE: Oh, yeah. And did he have animals or something? I don't know; I was wondering --I couldn't remember clearly about that --

BACK: No; no. it must have been -- 'cause that's very fertile ground up there. So, it must have been. Which was true here: the farmhouse across the street was a farmhouse.

DOYLE: Yeah.

BACK: And the farmer there--couldn't give you any names--farmed this whole area. When we built this house and put in our planting, it just grew like Topsey--

DOYLE: Oh.

BACK: --Because this property was very fertile.

DOYLE: Huh.

BACK: There was this farmhouse; there was the one over on

DOYLE: Burdick--

BACK: on Burdick [Street]; that fellow's name was Larned--

DOYLE: Well, he bought --

BACK: The one over there.

DOYLE: Yes; after Burdick. Burdick was the one that built that.

BACK: But Larned was the farmer--the "farmer"-- he had a great big vegetable garden.

DOYLE: Uh huh. He was --Larned I think -- or --I don't know--Larned I think his name was; I'm not sure; don't quote me on this but -I think that he owned the Quonochontaug Inn for a while and then bought that from Mr. Burdick at one point. Did you talk to Phylis [Burdick] Reynolds at all during the History Evening? You probably didn't get a chance to.

BACK: No.

DOYLE: Because she's a -- that was her grandfather.

BACK: Oh really.

DOYLE: Yes.

BACK: -- Larned.

DOYLE: No -- Burdick.

BACK: Burdick!

DOYLE: Yes.

BACK: Oh, for heaven's sake.

DOYLE: Yeah -- very interesting person to talk to.

BACK: Uh huh.

DOYLE: Is there anything else that we didn't cover?

BACK: Uh --Not that I can think of right off hand. Uh – the drive-in movie was a place that we would frequent on occasion.

DOYLE: Oh, that's good! Yeah!

BACK: I was just thinking – once we got to being able to drive: the drive-in movie. Never went to Misquamicut much—No draw there.

DOYLE: As a group or –

BACK: Well, or just two or three people.

DOYLE: Yeah. . . .You never went roller skating in the roller rink over there?

BACK: No; no.

DOYLE: Bump-em Cars?

BACK: No. When I was uh –

DOYLE: Watch Hill?

BACK: You know; the occasional trip for ice cream. But that was all.

DOYLE: Our life was very –um—you know we were here at Quonnie, and that was about as far as we got.

BACK: Interestingly – always loved Westerly. 'Cause you'd go in there to shop.

DOYLE: MmmHmm.

BACK: I've forgotten how far in; I remember an S & S Market on Granite Street, but I don't remember much else along Granite Street. But I always thought Westerly was an attractive town. And when the chance came for us to move there, for Jane and me to move there, we did so with great pleasure.

DOYLE: The transition was not a big one, probably.

BACK: No; no. Of course, didn't know anybody there, but I met lots of people and made new friends. But – perfect time, since our kids were school age,

and that's when you do, so that –and have maintained a certain amount of contact with it while living here, although we do not see any of our old friends on a regular basis.

DOYLE: Well, you were part of Christ Church.

BACK: Christ Church, and Jane and Amanda sang in the Chorus [the Chorus of Westerly]. So that gave us a lot of exposure. Church really being the start, and of course the kids in school.

DOYLE: Right, right.

BACK: Uh—

DOYLE: Well, thank you, Sam. This has been --

BACK: Delighted! And if I think of any things we've missed, I'll send you a quick email.

DOYLE: OK. I'll add it to the file.

BACK: But uh –yeah. So I've been coming here for – what -- let's take round numbers: '04 --or '44-- to '09. What's that? Say 65 years. [I'm] 69 years old.

DOYLE: Yeah; it doesn't seem possible – in so many ways!

BACK: And your time here has been similar –

DOYLE: Oh, yeah; I've spent every summer of my life here.

BACK: Yeah. The only – I hate to see the MacLeods selling their cottage.

DOYLE: I know.

BACK: I mean that's a real dagger in the heart.

DOYLE: It is. To me, it's the passing of an era, a Quonnie era. That's the way I look at that.

BACK: Yeah, and it, it –

DOYLE: You knew his grandparents lived over on the pond.

BACK: Yeah; it illustrates what's happening here.

DOYLE: Yes. None of the next generation can afford to have that property, and maintain it.

DOYLE: Right.

BACK: And so what else can you do?

DOYLE: That to me is the biggest sadness. There've been so many generations that have been able to be here and enjoy Quonnie. And now, because of--

BACK: Escalating, values; taxes that go along with it.

DOYLE: Yeah. It's not possible for our children to deal with it.

BACK: Well, I'm hoping that our kids 'll hang on to this house. I they will; they love it, and they'll figure something out..

DOYLE: I hope so too. You have a lovely place here.

BACK: Yes we do.

DOYLE: And I' ve enjoyed getting to know you, as well. And Jane—

BACK: Just one parting shot: Jane loves this place as much as I do. And that's wonderful.

DOYLE: Yeah, yeah.

BACK: And we have a nice group of people who are here year-round, now.

DOYLE: Yeah, I think so.

BACK: That makes a big difference.

DOYLE: MmmHmm. Yeah.

END OF RECORDING