

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

CHERI and DICK STABNICK

October 29, 2023

Interviewed by Steve Young in Charlestown

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Q: This is Steve Young of the Quonochontaug Historical Society. It's October 29, 2023. We're in the home of Dick and Cheri Stabnick. You spell your name, Cheri, C-H-E-R-I?

C: Yes.

Q: Okay. And Stabnick is S-T-A-B-N-I-C-K?

C: Correct.

D: Correct.

Q: Because this will get transcribed, and that's the way it gets posted in the oral histories on our website. On that point, I want to make sure you know we're filming this, and we're recording this, if that's okay with you.

D: That's fine.

Q: And what we do with these is we put the oral histories in the Oral History section of our website, because we're trying to preserve for future generations the knowledge and the stories that people have while they're available.

C: That's a great idea.

D: Yes.

Q: It's an important part of the Historical Society. So, that's okay with you?

D: That's fine.

C: Sure.

Q: So, Dick, what year were you born?

D: October 16, 1944.

Q: And where were you born?

D: Memphis, Tennessee.

Q: And just generally, how did your father make a living, or father or mother make a living?

D: My father was an obstetrician and gynecologist. My mother was a nurse. When my brother and sister and I were born, we lived in Memphis. Dad had his first heart attack in 1955, and gave up his practice, came to Connecticut at Hartford Hospital with the idea or thought that if he took a two-year residency in anesthesiology, the schedule would be a little more definitive surgeries, and it didn't work. So, Dad had his second heart attack and passed away in 1959. And my mother, Cheri, was a widow and lived until about fifteen years now?

C: 2023.

Q: This year?

C: She passed away.

Q: This year she died?

C: No. She went 2003.

Q: And do you have a brother and a sister?

D: My brother passed away about ten years ago. I have a sister who's still alive, married to a retired cardiologist. And they live in West Hartford, and also have a home up near Narragansett.

C: Point Judith.

Q: But they don't have the Quonochontaug connection that you do?

D: No.

C: No.

D: We're the only ones. Cheri and I and our two daughters.

Q: Did you go to high school in Memphis?

D: No. West Hartford. Conard High School.

Q: And then you went to Wesleyan?

D: I went to Wesleyan. Yes. 3:15

Q: What was your major at Wesleyan?

D: History. And of course, back then, all that you could get was a BA. There was nothing else. So, I had a BA in history. For a couple of years, up until my junior year, I played basketball and baseball. I had an organic chemistry professor, and the class was always at 8:00 in the morning, and he would stop by our fraternity and blow the horn to make sure—but by my junior year, he looked at me and he said, “You don’t want to be a doctor.” He said, “You hate labs. You spend more time at sports.” So, I remember mentioning it to my mother, and being a medical background, her initial response was, “What else is there?”

Q: It sounds like a lot of medicine in your family.

D: Yes. So, I spoke to several people and decided to go to law school at University of Connecticut.

Q: So, the basketball and the baseball playing was at Wesleyan?

D: Yes.

Q: As a little anecdote, you live across the street from the Getmans.

D: Yes.

Q: And the Getmans were your neighbors for a long, long time at the Scheffield house?

D: Yes.

Q: We know Chris passed away this year, but he and you had a common baseball connection.

D: Yes. A common baseball, and several committees here. But Chris was an excellent athlete. He played baseball. We played baseball against each other. Wesleyan always played Yale every year.

Q: And he was Mr. Yale?

D: Yes. Amazing his career.

Q: What year did you graduate from Wesleyan?

D: 1966.

Q: Did you go right to law school?

D: I went right to law school. I had trepidations about law school. It was a different environment then. Had it not been for this lovely lady, I probably would have quit.

Q: Did you get out of University of Connecticut Law School?

D: I graduated in 1970, and took the bar in 1970 and fortunately passed, and went right into practice.

Q: I'm going to get to that. But tell me about meeting Cheri.

C: We don't have the same opinion.

D: One of my dearest friends at Wesleyan a year behind me, Pat Dwyer, married Cheri's best friend, or one of her best friends from college. Pat and Barb fixed us up on a blind date.

Q: What year would that have been roughly?

C: 1968.

Q: Was that your first date?

D: Yes.

C: March.

D: March.

Q: And then what year were you married?

C: 1968.

D: I wasn't going to let a good thing get away.

Q: So, you were in the middle of law school?

D: Yes.

Q: Where is the University of Connecticut campus that you studied?

D: It's still in Worcester, but it was West Hartford. And when I went there, it was one building, three stories high. Very primitive. Almost like you would have thought it was a junior high or a high school. And now they've grown to the old Hartford Seminary.

C: It's beautiful.

D: And it looks just like a college campus. It's gorgeous.

Q: Was your class size 100 or 50 or 150?

D: One hundred and fifteen. And of that, when you look back, five women. At that stage back then, the idea was to get people to quit. I know you have a legal background, but it was very critical in everything you did. "You're foolish." And so, as I said, I got to the stage where I got frustrated, but she talked me into staying.

Q: And the Socratic method isn't very fun for the first-year law students.

D: Yes. Exactly.

Q: Then you took the bar?

D: Yes. In Connecticut.

Q: So, you've been a lawyer for more than 50 years?

D: Fifty-three.

C: And still practicing, much to my dismay.

Q: Did you live in married student housing when you married Cheri?

D: She was my financial support. Cheri was a schoolteacher. We lived on the third floor of a three-family house, and lived there up until Jennifer, our oldest daughter, was born.

Q: Once you graduated, where did you decide you wanted to practice law?

D: I knew I wanted to practice in West Hartford. Cheri taught in Farmington and had strong roots there. I had roots in West Hartford. So, we bought a house, and we've been in the same house in West Hartford ever since 1970.

Q: How do you divide your time these days over the last few years between West Hartford and Quonochontaug?

D: Not as much as I should. Weekdays we're in West Hartford. Cheri's very active in clubs in West Hartford also. We come down on weekends. I'd say out of a typical 52 weeks, we're down probably weekends 35 or 50 of the weekends.

Q: Because West Hartford is an hour away?

D: An hour and ten minutes. Eighty-two miles.

C: An hour and 40 minutes.

D: Eighty-two miles.

Q: How did you hear about Quonochontaug? I know from doing many of these that a lot of people came as friends of renters, or friends of owners, and then they rent, and then they buy. What was your story?

D: This lovely lady can tell you better than I. Being 79 years of age, I have difficulty remembering. She knows absolutely because of the first time we saw it. And she'll tell you the story.

C: The first time we saw it.

Q: The first time you saw Quonochontaug?

C: Do you want me to tell you now?

Q: Sure.

C: Okay. It was 1980, and we had rented in Cape Cod for a number of years, and then Nantucket one summer. We got rained out a lot. "Okay, we're not going anywhere this summer." My husband was a young lawyer, and he was doing work for Butler Nursery, and Joanne Thompson worked there. She lived in West Hartford, and she worked there. She just said to him one day, "I'm selling a house in Rhode Island. Would you like to come and take a look?" There was a gasoline shortage. I don't know if you remember back in 1980. We were in line forever to get gas. I had an aunt visiting me from Michigan, and she had never seen the Atlantic Ocean, so I said, "Okay. We'll go down and take a look at this house." And she showed us this house. It's the best cottage on West Beach Road. Do you know where that is? You probably do.

Q: No. You tell me.

C: Pat and Jack Frost?

Q: Yes.

- C: The driveway goes right between them and the Depatie's old house. So, it's set back a little bit. She was asking \$90,000 for it, and I said, "It's way too much money. We could never afford that." In retrospect, we should have bought it. So, she drove us around Quonnie a little bit, and she took us to the Central Beach parking lot. We walked down on the boardwalk, and I said, "This is for me." I just fell in love with it. I thought, "Oh, this is great. We're only like an hour and a half from home." And we were driving around a little bit. We went by the Tanners who had just built their house, and they were working on it. They happened to live on our street in West Hartford. I always knew that they went somewhere to Rhode Island, but I didn't know where it was. So, we ended up renting the next year right across from the Tanners. They entertained us a lot, and introduced us to—
- Q: What street was that?
- C: It was on Niantic, the Noonan's house, which is torn down now across from the Rice's house.
- D: Marshall Rice was across the street.
- C: So, they introduced us to a lot of people in Quonnie, and we've been here ever since.
- Q: Did you ever rent, or did you just go straight into building?
- C: We rented for five years.
- D: We rented for three years I think.
- C: Five. We rented the Noonan's house for four years, and then the Depatie's house for one year.
- Q: The Depatie's house on Niantic?
- C: Where Jeff Freger lives in, our moderator. He lives in that house now. It's on Kenyon.
- Q: So, now we're up to about 1985 or so?
- D: Yes.
- Q: Tell us about your children.
- D: We have two daughters, Jennifer and Courtney. Fifty-three and fifty. Jennifer was born in 1968.
- C: 1970.
- D: 1970. I'm sorry. December 11, 1970. Courtney is August 4, 1973, right?

C: Yes. You've got it.

D: And when we bought, one of the reasons we decided to buy was there is another couple who live in Quonnie, the Divneys. And the kids were similar, or close in age to the Divney's children. When we rented for those years, these kids formed a bond, and there were sand castles—everything. So, that's what attracted us. And the only thing that I was always concerned about was, because at that stage, Jennifer was getting to be a teen, and I have a little disk that I've kept to this day that I talked to her and said, "If we buy, we're going to go down there. I don't want to hear there's something at school." And they both said yes, they would. And now, I love them dearly, but we can't get rid of them. They're down here all the time. They're strong, strong advocates of Quonnie.

Q: When you said you came in 1980, first you came as renters, and then this house was 1985?

C: That's when we saw Quonnie for the first time. And then we rented for five years. We moved in here 1986.

Q: So, the girls are teenagers when you bought the house and moved here?

C: Yes.

Q: It's hard when they have sporting events, dance class and boyfriends and stuff to get them away from?

D: They have many friends at home, and they both live in West Hartford now. But their ties are really stronger with young people—young kids their age when they grew up down here.

C: Young to us.

Q: Tell me about joining a law firm, or starting a law firm, and your law career.

D: I knew I wanted to practice law. I didn't think I wanted anything commercial. Everybody thinks they want to be a trial lawyer. There were three gentlemen who lived in West Hartford that had a general practice, and when I interviewed around, there was a large firm that I interviewed with that happened to have a number of partners from Wesleyan. I didn't like the idea that it was Wesleyan or Trinity. But these young fellows gave me the opportunity to get a taste of everything in the practice. Fortunately, after doing that for about five years, I knew I wanted to do defense work, workers' compensation. And two fellows that I was in partnership with for 50 years approached me and asked if I'd join that firm, and we started that firm that had actually been started by the one partner's father, who was one of the first men to every do workers' compensation in the state of Connecticut.

Q: In Hartford, or West Hartford?

D: Hartford. We had an office in downtown Hartford, and then Glastonbury for 50 years. Two years ago, it became evident that we were too old. We just couldn't—we covered the whole state. It was just too much. Even with the young people, we couldn't cover it, so we made the decision that we were going to close the firm. And that's what we did.

Q: One of your daughters is an attorney?

D: Yes. Courtney worked for us for a number of years. When the decision was made, she went and joined another firm, which happens to be the firm I'm of counsel with now. And of that firm, of the twenty-some-odd employers, something like sixteen started with us. So, Courtney joined that firm, and I was planning to retire. Fortunately she had so many files that they asked if I would be willing to come on a per-diem basis to help with the transition. That was about a year and a half ago.

Q: So, you get paid by the hour or by the day now?

D: By the revenue. What I bill and paid, I get a percentage of. I'm a counsel, and Courtney's a partner in that firm.

Q: That's a treat working for a daughter, or working with a daughter.

D: I love it, because they're marvelous people. I'll tell you a side story. About four or five months ago, there was a partnership meeting they were having, and I was walking out. It was a Friday afternoon. I went by the library. It's glass, and they saw me. "Come on in." So, I opened the door, and they said, "Come on, we're having a partnership meeting," and I said, "No. I've done that." I said, "I'm going to see my wife." But this is terrific for me.

Q: How did you find this piece of property?

D: Cheri's better at this than I. But we looked at three or four houses, and they kept getting scoffed up. People were buying them. Steve McAndrew was the agent, Thorp Agency. And he said, "There's a piece of property on the other side on West Beach Road, part of Central Beach. Three lots. One-acre lots. And it's for sale." We came and saw it. The gentleman that owned the property, Mr. Finlayson up the street—I think that's correct—his wife was ill. He wanted to go to Florida.

Q: Did you say Finlays?

C: Finlayson.

D: I think it was F-I-N-L-A-Y-S-O-N. And he was a true gentleman. Old school. The property was on the market subject to approval for perk tests for three building lots. It was one-acre zoning then.

- Q: Perk tests are P-E-R-C?
- D: P-E-R-K I think. And two of the lots passed, but the third did not.
- Q: Was this for septic reasons?
- D: Yes. And the problem was it was done in March when it was wet.
- C: It had to always be March when you pass a perk test.
- D: So, we negotiated the price. He was going to submit it again. And we gave him a deposit. He never cashed the check. He wouldn't sign a paper. He said, "I'll shake your hand," and that's it.
- C: It took two years for this third lot to pass the perk test. Now, with our above-ground denitrification systems, you can build on anything. But back then you couldn't. But he was so nice. It was just a handshake.
- Q: You told me a nice story when I saw you earlier in the month about negotiating the price over that two years. Tell us about the price.
- D: The price originally was \$95,000 for the three lots. When the perk test didn't pass for a year or two, he called me one day and he said, "I want to leave. I just want to leave. Give me \$65,000 right now, and we'll leave." Cheri and I said, "We can't do that." So, we closed knowing that—we knew it was going to pass some time, but just a question of when, and we knew the purpose behind what we thought was advantageous was one lot would be for us, and the other two lots for each daughter.
- C: That's what he thought.
- D: With the idea that we'd have a captive market.
- Q: When you said, "Can't do it," what did you mean by that?
- D: I can't buy it for that. We'll just—
- Q: For 65?
- C: Yes.
- D: Yes. "We'll just close for the original price and waive any condition on the percolation test."
- C: I think he had wanted to sell it as one lot. But we wanted it to be if we wanted it as one lot, then we couldn't sell part of it. So, we had to have it divided before. It took two

years for all that to happen. And the price of things were going up then. He could have gotten a lot more.

Q: And he and his sick wife went to Florida?

D: Yes. The zoning back then was one-acre zoning. The three lots touch at a point on the side of the house over here, and we had an attorney represent us, Ben Nokorottal, who was very, very smart at the time, and he said, "Dick, you cannot—you must have all three lots in different names." Otherwise when the zoning, which I think it's three acres now—if you have two lots same name, they'll merge into one. So, we did one, and we always joke that Cheri got the house. I took the lot with the cemetery, and the girls had the lot, which actually may be the best down below.

C: It's nice and quiet down there.

D: That's the quiet lot.

C: Secluded.

Q: What shape was the lot in when you bought it?

C: We have a picture here. It's a big one. It's framed. Where did we put that?

D: But let me show you pictures. Here's the picture of the lot. Can you see it? If you look, we're standing right there right at the corner of West Beach Road and Central Street, isn't it Cheri?

C: No.

Q: Where West Beach Road bends around?

C: It's right about here. It's kind of distorted, because it was three different pictures that were put together.

Q: So, it was all rough trees and growth?

C: Yes. Not even a lot of trees. It was just a lot of tall, dead grass.

D: It was a lot that from the street went down at a decline.

Q: So, did you do something about that?

D: Yes.

Q: What did you do?

- C: When we built the house, we put a basement in, because that was a lot less expensive than putting a lot of fill in. So, we have a basement, and we just put fill in the front of the house for the driveway, because it did dip down a little bit. It was gradual. It was a little higher there, and it kept on getting lower and lower.
- D: Our friend, Mike Divney, made a suggestion.
- C: He was an engineer.
- D: We hired a bucket truck to come. Cheri got in the bucket and went up so she could see where the house should be with the best view.
- C: Our architect said—it was just going to be a small attic, and he said, “You might have a good view.” So, when I got up to where the level of the attic would be, you could see all of Quonnie Pond, Weekapaug and so far, so we made the attic a little bit taller so you can walk down the middle. It ended up being a good place for the soccer team to have a sleepover. But we do have a good view. We thought we would go up there all the time, but we don’t.
- Q: So, you brought in truckloads of dirt?
- D: The front of the house was the way it is now, but the side dropped appreciably all the way out to the road. The gentleman who built the house, and there are two stories I would tell you, Henry Brightman, a real gentleman, he and his sons were the builders. We had an architect come. Henry would look at the plans, and he’d say, “What are all these things?” He did everything. But he did two things, the first of which was when the house was being framed, he called me one day and said, “Come down.” I came down. I stood out there, looked out the side, and he said, “Do you see that?” I said, “Yes.” And he went around the other house, and I said, “What’s wrong?” He said, “It’s two inches off.” They built this side inside the studs. The other one they did outside.
- C: Do you mean for the foundation?
- D: No. For the framing. So, I said, “What do we do?”
- C: The framers did it.
- D: He said, “We take it all down.” So, he took it all down—not the whole house, but the side.
- Q: To move it in two inches?
- D: Yes. And after the house was built, the back portion of the house only went about fifteen feet beyond the porch.
- C: Do you mean the grass?

- D: The grass. We kept everything. But they had to bring in truckloads of dirt for the side and for the back. It was over 100 big trucks of dirt. Poor Henry, unbeknownst to him, they were bringing in top soil.
- Q: Is that a bad thing to do?
- D: The guy that ran the bulldozers stopped and he said, "This is crazy." He said, "This is too expensive." We ended up working out a deal to reimburse Henry, because he had misunderstood. Henry was ill then, and passed away. So, it was his son.
- C: This was the last house that he built. I had met him when we were renting the Noonan's cottage. He had come over to make a repair. I thought, "What a nice man." So, he ended up building our house. I was keeping my fingers crossed that he'd be the one to get it, and he did.
- Q: Wasn't there a commercial building on Route 1 that was Brightman's store?
- C: It was. Do you remember where the farm was? It was a little place. And his house was right behind it.
- D: His little grocery store?
- C: It's still there. I think it's yellow now, but it used to be a federal blue color then.
- Q: I'm going to make this overhead an exhibit to your transcript. You were talking about where to put the house on the lot. Would you describe where your line is, and what way you wanted to enter, and that kind of thing?
- D: The lot, in the back of the property is a stone wall. That stone wall runs all the way over to Old West Beach Road. So, the three acres encompasses that whole area with the exception of two pieces of property. Originally, because of the way the house and the lot was with the slope, if you look at the survey, which we've shown you, there was to be a ten-foot driveway to come all the way along that stone wall, and there was to be a garage under the house. And then we decided not to for two reasons: One, because it would have been so hard to maintain; but, more importantly, that's wetlands back there, and our concern was water would flow off that if it was amesite stone, and somehow pollute that property. So, we decided not to. Unfortunately, now the lot is configured that way, so what we have to do is change the property lines around giving the third lot that property. But we have to reconfigure the other lines to make sure that we conform that there are three one-acre lots.
- Q: So, that stone wall that you're talking about, that's probably 200 years old?
- D: Absolutely. You can still see it.

C: We redid it, though. In 2003 we rebuilt the stone wall. We built it all the way down.

Q: I presume that the Sheffields lived across the street, and this was their farm area?

C: Yes.

Q: And they were farming it.

C: This stone wall goes all the way down to the beach. So, it sort of separates Central Beach from West Beach. That's the dividing line. This is on West Beach.

Q: So, in 2003 you upgraded the walls and rebuilt them?

D: Yes.

Q: And now they're so pristine, straight and nice.

D: Was it 2003 that we did the wall here too, Cheri?

C: No. I don't remember when we did that. I don't remember what year that was. I was on the board of governors at the time for special events then. Lonnie Row owned this house across the street.

D: He had the lot.

C: That's his house. And this was an empty lot, and he wanted to build it for his daughter. He wanted to build a house on it for his daughter. So, this is East Beach, and this is Central Beach. He had this lot right here.

D: Yes. He had the lot right next to the cemetery.

C: So, he wanted to get water to come up there. Our house was the last house on the waterline. So, they would have had to go all the way up here past these stone pillars, and go all the way down there to get to this lot and to this house. So, I remember saying, "We've got this empty lot here. If you just want to go partway and go through to the back of the lots to bring the water in, it would be okay with us." And so, when they did that, all these rocks came up. We decided let's make a wall with all the rocks. It went all the way up to here. And then we really liked them all the way along West Beach Road. It looked good. And then we thought let's see what the cemetery—we heard that there was a cemetery. We didn't know. Our kids were twelve and fifteen when we built the house, and move Poltergeist was very popular then. Remember it was built on a graveyard? And everybody said, "Don't go anywhere near that." It was too scary. But we finally did clear it. And then that's when we got excited about the cemetery, because then we built a stone wall to protect it.

- Q: What year do you think that was roughly that you uncovered the cemetery and started working on it?
- C: I know that the Row's daughter passed away 25 years ago, so it must have been just before then, because he wanted to build her a house. So, it had to have been—
- D: 2000 or thereabouts? I think it may have even been before that.
- C: I think it was still in the '90s.
- Q: 1998 or something?
- D: Yes. Exactly.
- C: Probably.
- Q: Describe the condition that the cemetery was in when you found it?
- C: I was a tall thicket. Raspberry bushes and prickery bushes. You couldn't see anything.
- Q: All briars and overgrown?
- C: Yes.
- Q: How did you clear it?
- C: We hired Mark from Broadview. He came out and cleared it. We have like a little waiting room before the cemetery, because that's where the property line was where the actual cemetery is. We did that. It was a fun project, because I had a friend at home who had a wrought iron business, and he collected antiques and stuff. I had found an old iron fence for the cemetery, and then he had a latch in his iron shop. He found this old latch to put on the gate. There it is.
- D: That's it.
- Q: We'll make that the next exhibit B.
- C: Okay. And the latch is on the other side. Yes.
- Q: And you found the granite, or was the granite already there?
- D: No. We bought the granite for that, plus the other document, the entrance to the cemetery.
- C: Do you think it was Mike that did all the stone work?

D: Little Mike. Yes.

C: I don't remember his last name. But he did all the stone work.

Q: So, we'll make the iron gate the exhibit B, and the picket gate exhibit C?

D: Yes. That's the gate.

Q: Were they put in at approximately the same time?

D: Yes.

C: I don't think that was.

D: If that was taken recently, that's the second gate, because the first rotted. But we did the whole thing at the same time, and then Cheri had a friend do the sign that's on there. We knew the history. That's the history.

Q: So, we'll make that exhibit D, that story of how many people were buried there.

C: And this whole thing at the iron shop too. What's interesting about the cemetery is that we had just started this garden club at Quonnie, and everybody gave me plants. Almost all the plants in that cemetery are originally from somebody else's house in Quonnie. We've added a few things here and there. But almost all the plants in there.

Q: We'll make little notes in here so we'll keep it straight.

C: It's really a Quonnie garden.

Q: Over the years have you done additions? I think Dick was telling me about this seat.

C: That was a Christmas gift for him one year from me.

D: We went through a period of years where what we would do at Christmas was give each other a gift that was something with the cemetery. The bench that Cheri did. I think the kids gave us the fountain, didn't they?

C: No. We just put that in this summer.

D: I know. But the kids gave that.

Q: Was it an earlier version?

D: Yes.

C: It never had a base to it. It was just the top.

- Q: I'm going to mark the picture that's got the stone seat that was a Christmas gift E so that we can keep these straight.
- C: And there's a sign right near the little picket fence gate. There's a sign to the left of it that says, "Circa 1775." That was a Christmas gift for him too." Oh, boy, I got a rock for Christmas.
- Q: Earlier, before we started, you showed me a little history that Bob Frost gave you where he had some information about the Pendletons that were buried there, and the Sheffields that were buried there. Can we make a copy of that and make it F?
- D: Yes. I'll make it as soon as we are done here. I'll make a copy of that. We have a copier.
- C: I did that this morning.
- Q: That one?
- C: Yes.
- Q: Okay. We'll make that F. Do you take full responsibility for keeping it up? I visit it a lot. It's always so nice. It's well cared for. It's clean.
- D: I think we do most of it. But quite frankly, as we've gotten older, Cheri has a young woman who comes periodically. But we've done most of it.
- Q: She does some clipping?
- C: She's a weeder. She's been working in Quonnie lots of places. So, that's good.
- Q: Is that Erin?
- C: Erin. Yes. And this is her first year in the cemetery. I've had other people before. I used to not want to drive my car, so I'd ride my bicycle with a bucket of water on the handlebars, and a shovel in the back. It was fun. It was a really fun project to do it.
- Q: You'll have to come see Bob Pretone's cemetery on the Dingle. It's very interesting. It's been there for hundreds of years, but they've uncovered it more recently than you uncovered this one. It's got a historical designation as Cemetery 51 in the state. Did this one ever get formally designated?
- C: Yes.
- D: Yes.

- C: And it looked like an old street sign. It's laying down right now.
- D: It is registered.
- C: It was right in the front, and we thought that didn't look good.
- Q: Do you know the number?
- C: No.
- D: We can find it.
- Q: We'll leave it blank, and you can fill in that it's number 41, or whatever number it is.
- C: It was a long time ago. We'll have to look back and see.
- Q: You were telling me about the adjacent property, which I think is this property from the wall over?
- D: Yes. It's like a triangular piece. And that's wetlands, but it was owned by a gentleman Holmes. He found an engineer to say if you took the furthest point north, right where Old West Beach turns, there's enough property there to build a house.
- Q: That's buildable?
- D: Buildable, and they could do this new septic system. Ron was a lovely gentleman. He passed away. We talked about it, and discussed buying it, but the price was prohibitive what he wanted. So, we didn't. He got the permit. And then what happened, fortunately for us, I don't know if you know Chris Phillips.
- Q: Yes.
- D: Chris talked the conservancy into buying it for—I don't know all the particulars. We contributed towards it, but the big thing was Mr. Holmes got a tax credit. The conservancy got it at a much lower price. And the only thing I ever asked, and I don't know whether we ever got it, was a right of first refusal that if something ever happened to the conservancy, that they wouldn't try to sell it without letting us know. But quite frankly, we did that for protection of the property. We need more land like we need more children.
- Q: It's pretty overgrown.
- D: Yes.
- Q: It seems like if he had built the house where he was planning, it would have changed your pastoral view quite a bit.

- D: Yes. It would have changed that. But if you would have seen it—
- C: It would have been right here.
- D: Right there. It would have been right next to the driveway. And it would have been—I don't know what the side yard requirements are now, ten feet, twenty feet, but it would have really been wedged in there, and it would have been on stilts.
- C: Thirteen feet.
- D: The other thing that we always thought, and a lot of people don't know—you may know—there is a culvert that goes over West Beach Road, and it's collapsed. So, any time it rains, if you look in our backyard where that wall is, if we have two or three days of rain, the water is almost through the wall into our backyard.
- C: It's squishy when you walk on the grass. It's really squishy.
- Q: Is it possible for you to take this picture A and tell us what's north, what's west, what's east, what's south?
- D: I think this is Surfside, isn't it, Cheri?
- C: Yes.
- D: Surfside would be south. So, go Surfside. That's north I think, because the ocean is down here.
- Q: So, this is probably south, this side?
- D: Yes.
- C: South is more over here.
- Q: Over here?
- C: I don't know.
- Q: And this is north?
- D: Yes. The property is definitely west of our lot.
- Q: West. And east is by—
- D: West Beach Road.

Q: By the Getmans, which is east of you?

D: Yes.

Q: That helps a lot. We'll mark this as A, and put it into the transcript.

C: I don't think going up West Beach Road is due east. I think east is—

D: On the map I've shown you, it has it right there, so that helps.

Q: Okay. Why don't I mark this as A1. I'll mark this as A2, and this is A1, and then they'll be together in the transcript.

C: Who did that on the map?

D: Finlayson I guess. We got that when we bought the property. Well, anyway, that's what—

Q: Close enough.

D: Okay.

Q: Tell me the land conservancy is where? It goes from your stone wall—

D: All the way to Old West Beach.

C: All the way to here.

Q: Not past Old West Beach Road?

D: Yes.

C: That's another conservancy.

Q: Just Old West Beach Road is the border, and your wall is a border? So, it's this triangle that contributed?

D: Yes. It's Old West Beach.

C: This is a different conservancy—that one. Near the Brown's house. The Brown's house is attached to that. I think this is the Weekapaug Conservancy, and the other one might be Charles.

Q: So, Bob took a picture, and I'll mark it A3, where they say it's the Holmes' property.

D: Yes.

- Q: Mr. Holmes as going to build, and then instead, sold it to the conservancy?
- D: Yes. That's the piece—
- C: The son inherited it. The son lived in California, and I think he was kind of tired of dealing with all this.
- D: But that's the piece of property is triangular that is predominantly wetlands.
- C: And a home to a gazillion mosquitos.
- Q: Do you have landscapers? Or are you the landscapers? Because your property is always so pristine and looks so good.
- C: I like designing it, but we have somebody that cuts the grass for sure.
- Q: Because you have a lot of grass to cut.
- C: A lot of grass. When he was doing it, he was just down on the weekends, and giving me instructions during the week to water this and water that. But it got to be too much for us to take care of, so we have someone that cuts the grass. And I have somebody that helps me weed now and again too.
- Q: You mentioned to me that over the years, you've been on different committees.
- D: Yes.
- Q: What committee did you serve on?
- D: The Property Committee. The Long-Range Planning Committee.
- C: Real estate.
- D: The Real Estate Committee with Mike Divney and stuff. And then Cheri's been on a number. But Cheri's forte is events and the Garden Club.
- C: We started the Garden Club.
- D: Who are the founders of the Garden Club?
- C: Bobbie Adams. Do you remember her?
- Q: Yes.
- C: And Bev Boucher and myself. So, I'm the only one left here.

- Q: What year would that have been roughly? Like 30 years ago?
- C: 1996. Maybe it was '93, because we've had our 30th birthday. I think is about 30 years ago.
- Q: And you said that one of the issues that was the most contentious that kind of turned you off on being on committees was the phragmites and the pond preservation?
- D: And the pond. Yes. We had a committee. Chris Gadmen as on it. I was on it. Steve Pete, Steve Long. There was a considerable amount of money spent, and I can't think of the name of it. They were going to spray it, and what they were going to do was spray just a small portion to see what happened. Everybody in the community—not everybody—a small contingent were afraid that it would pollute the well. So, there opposed. And we had very, very heated meetings on it. Eventually what happened was the proposal was dropped.
- Q: Because there was no consensus?
- D: No consensus. East Beach opposed it.
- C: That's for West Pond.
- D: And they were showing pictures of dead people putting it in people's mailboxes. It was really, really ugly. So, it kind of—not offense—died a natural death. And nothing has happened since.
- Q: So, this is the pond that's by the big beach parking lot?
- D: Yes.
- Q: And there used to be swans there?
- C: Yes.
- Q: I don't know the swans are still there.
- C: A lot of guys that are our age that grew up here, they learned how to fish there.
- D: Sail.
- C: And they learned how to—they would row a boat. It was a big pond.
- Q: It seemed like it was more accessible. And you could walk down to it easily.
- C: Yes.

- Q: And now it's a rock climb.
- D: Yes. Not only could you walk down, but, as you know, the beach, you're not allowed to have food or beverages on the beach. So, Cheri would go down with the kids, and they'd have a picnic right next to the pond.
- C: Everybody did.
- D: And it was marvelous. Just so beautiful. In the fall especially. And then it just started getting smaller and smaller. Steve Long's house, when he bought the property—a
- Q: On Niantic?
- D: Yes. And the pond was like twenty feet from his back house. But when we were there ten years ago, you could go 100 feet back.
- C: And the Wildman's house. When you see it now, it's all phragmites.
- Q: And when you said they spent a lot of money, was that on experts?
- D: Yes. We had tons of experts. Chris Getman from Yale. And Chris Getman always had a favorite phrase, and he had talked to fellows from Yale, "Everybody said you can't use chemicals." And Chris' favorite line was, "Show me a country that doesn't use chemicals, and I'll show you a third-world country." But the funny thing was we talked at one time, and this one gentleman was going to come and say, "You know what? I'll come and drink this chemical."
- C: I know. I remember that.
- D: But those were the days, when you were here I'm sure, you would have annual meetings. Well, the annual meeting when this ended went almost two-and-a-half hours long. But people just—
- Q: Dug in on the pond issue?
- D: Yes. Finally we just said, "That's it. It has to be dropped."
- C: So many communities did it, and they had no repercussions. It was all okay. But you never know. I'm glad they didn't.
- D: The committee went around, and we had private donations that would pay for everything. I just got so frustrated, because it became personal. That's the part I disliked. There was a gentleman here who—and I can't even remember his name—but he was well intended, but I'm sure he objected when you turn the clocks back in November. Anything—

- Q: He didn't want any change?
- D: Yes. That's right. And that's what we found. Even today you find some of that. The light posts that are on the roads, on the Long-Range we were going to change the lights, and everybody objected saying, "No. We don't want brighter lights. We want the old classic ones."
- C: They didn't even want stop signs. There weren't any in Central Beach.
- Q: Were you ever boaters, or were you mainly beach people?
- D: Beach people. But the days of our going to the beach all day and stuff—in fact, we walk down and go to what is called Nun's Beach down there. But, no, the days of our—we never owned—I have great respect and fear of the water. I would never want a boat.
- C: We have a canoe.
- D: Yes. We have a canoe that's only been used three times, and kayaks that have probably been used five.
- Q: It sounds like it was an important part of your daughters', plural, life being here in Quonnie, and having friends here.
- D: Oh, gosh, yes.
- C: All of us. Yes.
- Q: Did they marry people from Quonnie?
- C: No.
- D: No.
- C: No, they didn't.
- Q: Because there are quite a few examples of people—
- C: I know. Yes.
- D: Neither daughters married. And they're inseparable as friends. And our older daughter, Jennifer, has a child in vitro, and we joke and say, "Courtney's Harper's father." They're like bread and butter. They're always together. That's the story that I told you. Our concern about the beach is there's no questions in my mind that these kids will stay here as long as they're able.

Q: So, we've probably gone over the one-hour mark, and I want to give you an opportunity if I've left anything out, or there was a part of Quonochontaug you wanted to talk about that we didn't cover, or part of your property that we didn't cover.

D: Cheri might. The only thing I would say is Cheri found this jewel, and it is that. It's a jewel.

C: Joanne Thompson showed it to us.

D: But we're very fortunate to be here. It's a lovely community. Great people, such as yourself. And I feel very, very comfortable knowing that if the kids—I told them I'll haunt them if they come back and sell this. But this is quite a place.

C: I think what's really neat about going to Big Beach is when you had young children, everybody—we're all sitting around together. Everybody sort of helped keep an eye on each other's children. If somebody was doing something, anybody had permission to tell them to stop doing that. It was like a little village. It was really nice. And my children are still very friendly with all of our adult friends and their kids too.

Q: It takes a village.

C: It does.

Q: We have a nice village going.

C: It is.

D: Exactly. And I'm convinced the times we've had natural problems—the hurricane and I can't remember—if anything happens, the storm isn't even open and we have four or five people that will call, "We went by and saw your house." So, everybody takes care of everybody else. And there have been some—I'm sure you know—there have been some tremendous people that have been here. Baptistas. He was a gentleman. John Tanner. There have been great, great families.

C: We've lost a lot of good people this year.

D: Chris Phillips and Chris Gedman.

Q: Bob Petrone reminded me that I forgot to ask you about naming your house. It's got a neat name.

C: Serendipity. There was a little restaurant in Boston that we always went to, and we just thought it was a cute name. But it had nothing to do with this house. We felt that it was serendipitous that this piece of land was part of Central Beach, because I wanted to be in Central Beach. I just loved it when we rented there. And so, to find out that—who knew

that this land over here was part of Central Beach? That's why it's serendipitous. It was serendipitous that it's in Central Beach.

Q: Very good. Well, thank you.

D: Thank you.

Q: I appreciate it, Cheri. Thank you so much. You were both terrific.

C: Thanks.

Q: Thanks, Bob.

