

# QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Oral History

# CAROL WATERMAN SIGG

Including comments by Mrs. George Waterman (Kate)

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Interviewed by Anne Doyle

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Carol Waterman Sigg was here from her home in Switzerland, visiting [her brother's wife] Kate Waterman on Neptune Avenue, Central Beach, Quonochontaug.

**Doyle:** Carol, the first thing I'd like to ask you is just to have you state your full name, so that we have that on the record, and when you were born and where you were born.

**Waterman:** Okay. I was born in Providence in September 1931, and my name is Carol M---Kirk (?) Waterman. And I married a Swiss gentleman by the name of Hans Peter Sigg. And my grandfather had brought his family—my grandfather was William Henry Waterman, and he had brought his family for summer vacations to Quonochontaug and I think Misquamicut—the southern Rhode Island coast, almost every year, because a part of the family, that is, his wife's family, were living in Westerly. I'm not quite sure exactly where, but in that vicinity anyway. And so my father, George Waterman, grew up with a very close connection to this part of the world. And in 1928, my grandfather built the house at the corner; and he built it there because his wife, Emily, didn't like to lie awake at night and hear the ocean right in her backyard. Can you imagine? Because at that time they could have built anywhere. They could have built probably—probably--but fortunately, and for however many reasons, it was fortunate that they didn't; because of course in the 1938 hurricane, those houses that were built down near the water were—they disappeared. And our house only suffered a few broken windows and minor, very minor, damage. Now let's see, where do we go from here?

**Doyle:** Carol, what are some of your very first memories in here at Quonnie?

**Waterman:** Well, let's see. I would say that they had to do with thunderstorms and with the whole family sitting out on the front steps and watching the storms. And also strangely enough, I remember for a treat in the evenings, we would walk up to the Blue Shutters— up to Mrs. Craig's it was called at that time, Mrs. Craig's . . .

**Doyle:** Did you go with family or friends?

**Waterman:** With the family then. We were small children. And we had a dog, Rusty; and Rusty always got, of course, the end of the ice cream cone after it was eaten. And we took fishing trips, too, in the pond. There were fish and there were turtles.

**Doyle:** Which pond was this?

**Waterman:** This little pond here.

**Doyle:** Oh, the fresh pond.

**Waterman:** The fresh pond.

**Doyle:** How did you get onto the pond?

**Waterman:** Well, they had a— I think if I remember correctly—there was a dock going out. It was right near that—you know, the new house that—Kate, what's the name of the people who . . .

**Doyle:** Oh, the Cassons' [**Cousins'**] house.

**Waterman:** The Cassons' [**Cousins'**] house, yes. It was in that area, and I guess the water at that time was really, before the hurricane it was pretty fresh water. And there were nice turtles. We used to catch the turtles, and I think one time I remember sitting around the table in the house there, in the kitchen, and watching—I think it was my grandfather—prepare an eel to cook. And our maid, Ella, who used to come with us to Quonochontaug at that time, she had been the one who had caught the eel.

**Doyle:** I've heard somebody else talk about the eels. Were they caught in a pond?

**Waterman:** They were caught in the pond, yes. And . . .

**Doyle:** Do you remember eating it?

**Waterman:** No. No. I remember —no I wouldn't have touched it; I'm sure of that. I wouldn't have touched it. But it was an event. And of course, I've got

memories—having mostly to do with experiences of nature, as a child—the beach and the rocks and the crabs that we used to go up under the rocks to catch those crabs and put them in a pail, and then I guess we threw them back when we were finished. Because there wasn't much else you could do with them.

**Doyle:** Did you go off alone? Did your parents let you go off in . . .

**Waterman:** Well, of course, I'm speaking now of the time when I was 6, so of course not then; but of course later on we were free, we were free as the breeze. During the war, we had a—we had a wonderful time during the war because they had all these sand—all these fortifications with sand bags, right on the beach. Right along the beach.

**Doyle:** Our Central Beach?

**Waterman:** Yes, uh huh.

**Doyle:** Tell me about that because I want to hear about that.

**Waterman:** Well, they were just like—I don't know what you call them, but they were like trenches. You know, they were just great big holes where the soldiers could get down and shoot over if they had to.

**Doyle:** Okay, like right on the dune, in the dune area then, or right in the beach?

**Waterman:** Right on the—I think it was more—of course back from the beach. It was probably in the, you know, right down at the end of this road there was an empty space to the right.

**Doyle:** Yes, yeah.

**Waterman:** Before houses were built there. And now of course where all those houses across from—I don't know the name of the street—but across from Surfside there were no houses. **Xxx**, because they had been washed out.

**Doyle:** Because of the hurricane, yeah.

**Waterman:** And then up the beach, up by Blue Shutters, of course, was where the soldiers were stationed.

**Doyle:** I didn't know that either.

**Waterman:** You didn't know that?

**Doyle:** Was that where the bunker is, or where the ammunition—that place?

**Waterman:** As a matter of fact, I think they built that; then they made a house out of that sometime. Much later. Much later.

**Doyle:** Yes.

**Waterman:** And of course we baked cookies for the soldiers and we . . .

**Doyle:** Now, how old were you at the time of the war?

**Waterman:** 10 years old, 10 years old.

**Doyle:** And so you would go down on the beach and actually talk with the soldiers?

**Waterman:** Oh yeah, sure. They let us look through their rifles and try their gas masks on. And they were bored. They had nothing to do. And then we had, of course, we had black-outs. We had to blacken our windows in the evening with black material. And the soldiers who patrolled the beach were always looking for a possibility to come into somebody's house because they were bored. So they'd respond to a ray of light, and everyone I think fed them and entertained them.

**Doyle:** But they lived up there, by the . . .

**Waterman:** They lived up there by the Blue Shutters. And they had a whole—I don't know how many of them were there; I can't remember, but it seemed to me at the time that there were quite a few. And then, of course, we had the airplanes from the Charlestown auxiliary air station, which I guess now is a nature preserve.

**Doyle:** It is.

**Waterman:** And they would fly around at night practicing, and they would crash into the water; and you would see flares all over the place where they'd be looking for them. Or they crashed often into the pond, I think the Charlestown Pond. And if I'm not mistaken . . .

**Doyle:** You said they crashed.

**Waterman:** They crashed; they went down.

**Doyle:** Oh. Now I remember that sound. I remember at night the engines. They would to around in a circle and then would turn the engines off, and you would hear this rrr, rrr, rrr and then they would start up again. But that's what I remember. But I didn't know that they actually . . .

**Waterman:** Oh I think some—I don't know how many—but I know that there were crashes in the pond.

**Doyle:** Accidental?

**Waterman:** Accidental, certainly.

**Doyle:** I mean what had they been out practicing? I never heard about this before.

**Waterman:** It was a familiar—and it was a familiar sight to see the flares over there—over the east end of the beach.

**Doyle:** Did that ever frighten you, or do you remember it being . . . ?

**Waterman:** No, I think it was rather exciting.

**Doyle:** So you really didn't get the connection between the war going on and . . .

**Waterman:** Oh yeah, we got—oh sure, we—oh, we knew very well; we knew very well that the war was going on, but you know the war was to us so far away.

**Doyle:** Yeah.

**Waterman:** And this was sort of—nobody, nobody had believed that anyone could ever attack the beach of Quonochontaug.

**Doyle:** Did you ever know about—I heard some story about a spy that was in Red Top. Did you know anything about that?

**Waterman:** Yes. [But] I don't know anything about it. What everyone knows was that someone who lived down there observed a man who every morning would go down, you know, toward West Beach with a machine of some kind in his hand. And they, whoever it was, reported this case to Washington to whatever department it was that you reported those things to. And didn't hear anything more about it until after the war, and then received a letter thanking for the cooperation because this person had been signaling to submarines, apparently.

**Doyle:** So I have heard that story, and I didn't know it was true or not.

**Waterman:** As far as I know, it is true.

**Doyle:** But you didn't—there was no other activity as far as submarines, and no confrontation of any kind.

**Waterman:** No, no. No confrontation. Of course not. We used to watch the PT boats going back and forth. And it seemed to me, if I remember correctly—and maybe it’s just fantasy—that they would be sometimes followed by schools of dolphins or porpoises. Because I know that we saw porpoises off of this beach. I don’t know if they are still there or not, but at that time they definitely were.

**Doyle:** But you definitely remember them?

**Waterman:** Yeah, I remember the schools of porpoises. And I guess a porpoise is a small dolphin, isn’t it?

**Doyle:** I don’t know.

**Waterman:** And my brother George, he would be able to—to say much more about this because he was two years older, and at that age, that makes quite a bit of difference. But the fishermen who lived—and if I remember correctly, they were professional fishermen, a colony—there was a colony down on the beach of small fishing houses.

**Doyle:** Now where on the beach are you talking about?

**Waterman:** Well, down toward the direction, going toward the direction—on our beach, going toward the big rock. You know that—what do you call the—Kate’s family called it the pirate rock, but for us it was the big rock.

**Doyle:** The big rock you mean between Central and East Beach?

**Waterman:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it was—and I watched that rock be blown to pieces. [I.e. Fresh Pond Rock]

**Doyle:** Oh, you did! Oh, I want to hear about that.

**Waterman:** Well, that was in—I think—Columbus Day in early October. And we had come down; it was a beautiful day, and we had come down for—just for the day—and I was with a little friend from Providence, a school friend. And we walked up the beach, and we saw them standing around that big rock. And they told us to get out of the way because they were going to dynamite it.

**Doyle:** Now this was . . .

**Waterman:** This was during the war; this was the beginning of the war, because they thought, you know, that if there was an invasion along that coast that that rock would be in the way. Crazy idea!

**Doyle:** [Laughter} I was going to say, why?

**Waterman:** Frankly I think they just wanted to explode something, probably. To train, do something. But we were—that rock had been a landmark forever there, and so we . . .

**Doyle:** How big was it? I mean, was it really huge?

**Waterman:** Yeah, it was big. It was, it was-- it was-- I think it was bigger; at its highest point, I think it was maybe. . . five feet tall. And maybe more. It was a considerable rock. Well, you can see remains of it now.

**Doyle:** Yeah, I have.

**Waterman:** So we got down in the sand and looked and . . .

**Doyle:** Did you— You saw the explosion?

**Waterman:** Yeah, we saw the explosion of the rock. Yeah. And that was an exciting thing for kids to see.

**Doyle:** I would say so. Wow!

**[Brief pause on tape; abrupt change of subject]**

**Waterman:** It was between Central Beach —it was really on our beach, our bathing beach. And these fishermen would do this; I think it must have been every two weeks. It wasn't every week, but it was regularly at certain times, and then of course everybody—all the summer people and everyone around would get down to watch it. And help. And they had these immense nets which were pulled down onto the beach, and you could see all the critters, the fish and what-not that were in there. And it was –

**Doyle:** And how did they get the nets out?

**Waterman:** Have no idea. They must have put them out with boats, of course; yeah. And it was just an event; it was called the pulling of the seine, the pulling of the seine. And I can remember the wet sand under my bare feet, and I can remember scurrying along the beach with a great deal of excitement; and it was dark of course, at night and all the grown-ups. . .

**Doyle:** They always did it at night?

**Waterman:** Um hm. Always did it at night.

**Doyle:** I wonder why that was?

**Waterman:** I don't know.

**Doyle:** They wanted to fish.

**Waterman:** Must have been, yeah. And there was one—I didn't observe this, but there was a story that was told that once they had a sand shark in the seine, and that it bit somebody's finger. And that was part of the mythology of childhood.

**Doyle:** And we'll believe that story.

**Waterman:** You can believe it or not, I don't care.

**Doyle:** Now the fishermen actually lived on the— do you think—or you don't know where they . . .

**Waterman:** I can remember that there was a boardwalk down there. And it was, you know, by "Spray Rock," the house at Spray Rock—that was a very old house. And that was there, and that survived the hurricane.

**Doyle:** The hurricane, yeah.

**Waterman:** It got turned on its axis, but it survived the hurricane.

**Doyle:** I've seen pictures of that.

**Waterman:** And then just behind that, on the land side, there was a wooden walk that went all the way up in the direction of East Beach. And I remember that very well, because I got a foot full of splinters once walking on it.

**Doyle:** This is like right near the road, then.

**Waterman:** Yeah, yeah. Right where the parking lot is now. And when you were walking, of course, in the direction of East Beach, it would be on the right-hand side. There were all of these wooden, small wooden houses.

**Doyle:** That's where my—

**Waterman:** There must be pictures of that somewhere.

**Doyle:** My fam—I have a lot of those pictures. Because my family stayed in these little houses right in that section.

**Waterman:** In that section, yeah. And I remember those were the ones that completely disappeared, in the storm.

**Doyle:** Yes, right.



**Waterman:** Because of course they were terribly exposed.

**Doyle:** Now were there houses on the other side of the road as well?

**Waterman:** No, the only houses—no, because of course there was the pond.

**Doyle:** Yeah.

**Waterman:** Was there.

**Doyle:** Did you know Mr. McGlone?

**Waterman:** Oh, I knew Mr. McGlone very well. His house was down there.

**Doyle:** Was it on the wa—was it on, right at the edge of the, beach? Or was it. . .

**Waterman:** No; it was in a position so that he, you know, Mr. McGlone, went across the pond in his house.

**Doyle:** Yeah, I know. I have four spoons that were in that house that were given to me when I was married—Mrs. McGlone did that.

**Waterman:** Oh, how lovely.

**Doyle:** She wrote a little note saying . . .

**Waterman:** The four spoons . . .

**Doyle:** Came over—whatever the . . .

**Waterman:** He went over, I guess, with his dog. Mr. McGlone—Jack McGlone— was a good friend of my father's.

**Doyle:** Would you mind talking a little bit about that?

**Waterman:** You mean about the—

**Doyle:** Jack McClone or

**Waterman:** Well, Mr. McGlone was just a figure, rather taciturn. He never spoke very much. But he was a very friendly man. He was very nice to my children when they would come over for visits. And of course, Mrs. McGlone, she was a—I guess a really typical South County, Rhode Island, lady. And she had her hair back, her gray hair tied back in a bun. And we always made a point, my mother and father and children too: When we would come down in the winter and the spring and the fall, we always went and

paid a visit to Mrs. McGlone in her house. I remember it was always much too hot.

**Doyle:** This was obviously when you were little, so before the house was...

**Waterman:** No; this was when the house was here, yeah. When the house was down on the beach before the hurricane, I don't remember it. I just remember where it was, and I remember that it was Mr. McGlone; but I don't remember anything, any details about that.

**Doyle:** So, when you say he was a friend of your father's—

**Waterman:** He was a good friend of my father's.

**Doyle:** That was a summer—I mean that's—they knew each other before.

**Waterman:** Yeah, he worked—he worked on our house. He could, you know: he was the handyman for the whole area, but he was a very—he wasn't just a handyman; he was a person of stature. And I know that my father enjoyed his company.

**Doyle:** Would you like to talk about your father a little bit? You know . . .

**Waterman:** Well, my father, I think the first time—his first trips to Quonochontaug: if I remember correctly, his family would stay in a house right next to the old Quonochontaug Inn, up where the nuns are now. And there were a couple of farmhouses—I think they were painted yellow at that time—where they stayed there; and they . . .

**Doyle:** This was with his father.

**Waterman:** With his father before his father build the house here. And they also stayed in a little house that's called "Fo'castle," which is still existing. That was one of . . .

**Doyle:** Was it still in the same place?

**Waterman:** Yeah; that was still in the same place, yes. And I remember, I think the Randall family stayed there. In fact, I seem to remember one summer when Albert and his family were in that house.

**Doyle:** Why don't you mention that connection between. . .

**Waterman:** Oh, of course you see my father's—well, his best friend in many ways was his cousin Albert Randall. And they were—I have an old diary of my father's which he kept when he might have been . . .15-16 years old. . .

And he tells, among other things, of taking a tram, if I'm not mistaken, a trolley car, from Westerly to Watch Hill.

**Doyle:** Yes, I've heard of that.

**Waterman:** You've heard of that?

**Doyle:** Yeah.

**Waterman:** To—with his cousins from Westerly. They remained very close friends. We have a lot of contact with the Randall family, with Albert's family. They lived in New Rochelle. And of course, Janet and Bobby and young Albert were so much older than I—that we didn't move in the same circles at that time. But John is my age, and he now lives in California.

**Doyle:** I remember John.

**Waterman:** And so I had a lot of —George and I had a lot of contact with John when we were growing up. And then John went to the University—well, he first went to Moses Brown School when we were at Lincoln and Moses Brown, my brother and I; and then he went on to the University of Rhode Island, and the contact is still very close.

**Doyle:** I have heard, in talking to a couple of other people (because there are other people from Providence coming down here) that there were connections with families in Providence with the people that—you know, somebody knew—they knew each other from Providence before they knew each other at Quonnie.

**Waterman:** Oh; well, that was the Crouters probably, among other things.

**Doyle:** Um, well Mrs. Henry was talking about their family, the Parrots and the Walcotts, all from the Fruit Hill area in Providence. Is that where xxx, where you lived?

**Waterman:** No, no. No, no unh uh.

**Doyle:** Where did you live?

**Waterman:** Well, we lived in the East Side of Providence.

**Doyle:** So, you don't know of any other family that you knew in Providence that came down here . . . ?

**Waterman:** Oh yes, yes Yela and Franz Crouter.

**Doyle:** Crouter, okay.

**Waterman:** Whose house was right—two down. No, just one down. And they were friends of my mother and father's in Providence; and through that friendship, they decided to build their house near Quonochontaug at Central Beach. And their daughter Joanne was my father's godchild. You knew Joanne? Oh yes.

**Doyle:** Yes, I do.

**Waterman:** Oh yes.

**Doyle:** Were you friends then with Joanne, or . . . ?

**Waterman:** Well Joanne was six years younger than I, so I mean, we were friends; but at that age, six years of course is practically a generation.

**Doyle:** Two or three years . . .

**Waterman:** Two or three years can make a big difference.

**Doyle:** Who were some of your friends when you were growing up?

**Waterman:** Oh, down here. Well, starting down at the Surfside Avenue, there was Nancy Bray whose grandfather we called Grandpa Saunders. And if I'm not mistaken, I think that Saunders family might have been from Providence, but I'm not sure anymore. Nancy and her sister Skipper were part of our little crowd of friends. And then next to them were the Brown family and Hester. Hester Brown was just my age, and she was a friend from early childhood, I would say. And then . . .

**Doyle:** Was that Cornie —Cornie's sister?

**Waterman:** Yeah, Cornie's younger sister. Yes, Cornie's younger sister. And Cornie and Kenny, of course, Kenny Brown, were elder generation. And then we go along to the Sutherland family, and of course Jean is a very dear friend.

**Doyle:** I'd love to hear some of the things that kind of went on in your little group of friends.

**Waterman:** Little group of friends. Well before we go on—let me describe first, let me get down to Leslie Cass, whose family had the Treasure House. And in the Treasure House there was a so-called loafing post, a loafing post, which was a very — a little annex, almost a little independent apartment.

**Doyle:** Oh yes, okay; I've heard of it. It was the Crapo house. It was the Crapos that built that. I have heard of it.

**Waterman:** I don't know who built it, but it was—it's still called Treasure House. And we had—a lot of my memories of this time (which would have been 1945, probably, 1943) involved the Casses. Because they were, they were the Quonochontaug eccentrics. And with all of the—everything that goes along with being an eccentric, of course. I don't have to ---. Anyway, we kids adored them. And we were a group—there was Bill Saunders of course; I forgot to mention Bill, who was very much a part of our friendship—and we would . . .

**Doyle:** Was he—any relationship to the Brays, is that ...?

**Waterman:** No, no; this was with the other Saunders.

**Doyle:** There was more than one Saunders?

**Waterman:** Yeah; there was George and Bonnie.—His parents were --they lived in Bayberry Lodge.

**Doyle:** Yes, I remember him.

**Waterman:** And he was—Bill was an only child, and he came from Toledo, Ohio. But if there was—I don't think there was any relationship between those families. I think it was two different Saunders. Anyway, we would collect each other. We would—Oh, I forgot to mention that in Mrs. Jordan's cottage, for years there was—that was the one that the Gibbs bought that one house from Mrs. Jordan, right next to, right down from ours—

**Doyle:** Oh, all right; okay.

**Waterman:** And that was the Welch family, from Tenafly, New Jersey. And they were—I think Tommy is still down here, isn't he? [*Kate Waterman responding: "Tommy came by to see George."*] There was Mary Lou and Tommy and Jimmy. [*Kate W. interjecting: "Their house is on Lucas Avenue now; the Welch house."*] And of course, Tommy— [*Kate W. interjecting: "Did you mention the fish that they used to catch?"*] Who was that? [*Kate W: It was your brother.*] [*Carol Waterman reading: George Waterman, September. . .*]

**Waterman:** Well, I never caught fish like that, but George did. They were bass, striped bass and bluefish.

**Doyle:** So, this was . . .

**Waterman:** This was a little bit later. This was when George was maybe 16, 17.

**Doyle:** This was like you put your line out. . .

**Waterman:** No; it was offshore offshore. Oh yeah, we had a whole lot of boats. [*Kate W. asking if they'd gone out through the breachway.*] Oh yes, sure; out through the breachway. [**Doyle** and others laughing about difficulty of going through the breachway.] [**Carol W.**] I got stuck with the Welch family, yes, and they were next door to us. And they were also very dear friends. And we would collect in the evenings; and we all had, I think we all had a curfew of about 10 o'clock.

**Doyle:** This was when you were . . .

**Waterman:** 12—13 or 14, when we were, you know, beginning to socialize. And we would walk around the beach and first to one person's house, and we would collect Nancy Bray and then Hester, and it took us quite a long time. And if it were rainy, we'd end up at the Cass' in the living room on the floor. And Mr. Cass—Lee Sherman Cass was his name—and he would read us Edgar Allen Poe mystery stories.

**Doyle:** That's scary.

**Waterman:** Scary.

**Doyle:** And you always went back for more.

**Waterman:** We always—And then as we got a little bit older, our route extended itself a little bit; and we would sometimes go down to the Quonnie Casino for bowling or sometimes we'd walk up to Mrs. Craig's, along the beach and back through the woods there, for ice cream cones, or we would take a portable Victrola and records and march up to Mr. Nurmi's. That was the white house. [*Kate W. Interjection: "It's yellow now."*] [**Carol W.:**] It still exists. Anyway, that was just an empty room [ at the Sea Breeze Inn].

**Doyle:** See I remember radio tubes and everything. I remember going up there Friday nights and square dancing.

**Waterman:** Well, this was before they had any organized activities of that sort, and we just took over. I don't know if we ever got permission to go in there or not, but we would just go in and dance, to all sorts of wonderful old, romantic records.

**Doyle:** I've got to turn this in a second, so . . .

**Waterman:** And . . .

**Doyle:** So your whole group would just go over and . . .

**Waterman:** Yeah, we would just dance and . . .

**Doyle:** Can you imagine in these days letting the kids do that?

**Waterman:** No, no.

**Doyle:** That wouldn't happen, I guess.

**Waterman:** No. I don't remember that we ever did anything really wicked or naughty except that once we were in—we got sort of high-spirited and we went around and turned off people's water.

**Doyle:** How did you do that? With a little . . .

**Waterman:** They had little spigots, and so they would have—all of a sudden, they would turn on their faucets, and nothing would come out.

**Doyle:** Naughty, as you . . .

**[Turned to side B]**

**Waterman:** Now there are certain things that I remember very well, about the time that I must have been maybe five or six years old. And one was that the ice man came around and delivered ice, big chunks of ice, because we didn't have electric refrigerators. We had in the kitchen of our house, my grandfather's house, a real ice box. I think it had four compartments, two up and two down; I see it very well against the wall in my mind's eye. And in the top part of it, I guess, they put these huge chunks of ice. And that was our refrigeration. And then the other thing that I remember very well was a man named Mr. Pendleton.

**Doyle:** Oh yes, he was from the farm then.

**Waterman:** No, he was from the —up in Carolinas, the —there was a store up there. I can't remember the name of the store; I ought to remember it, but I don't remember it. But Mr. Pendleton was a burly man with a round face. I guess he had a—he was bald. And he was the delivery person for this food store. There was food and meat. And you'd call up in the morning and you'd make your order, and then Mr. Pendleton would come around; and he always came into the house, sat down at the round table in the kitchen, and talked. And delivered his —and I remember once when he

was there delivering food, I went out to the porch and I got my knee stuck between the porch rails. And it was Mr. Pendleton who saved me!

**Doyle:** [Laughter] He was a very important person in your life!

**Waterman:** You know, it's amazing: when you're a small child, the important people in your life often are the delivery people: the milkman with his horse, and. . .

**Doyle:** Now do you remember the milk man. . .

**Waterman:** Oh yes, certainly.

**Doyle:** You do? With a horse? You remember a horse?

**Waterman:** Oh no, not here. I remember horses elsewhere; in Providence there were wonderful horses. But I don't think we had a horse coming around here here. But I couldn't swear to it. We had, I know that we had—for years we had an Italian from Westerly, Sammy, who brought along his —  
[Unintelligible conversation, remembering Sammy]

**Waterman:** Sammy bringing his vegetables and his—and then we had, Mr. Lamb, the fish man. And he was a sort of a tall, willowy, faded sort of a character, Mr. Lamb: he looked a little bit like a fish! And white, you know! But anyway, he came by, and we bought fish from him.

**Doyle:** So he was from—where was he from? Local?

**Waterman:** Where was he from? Weekapaug.  
*[Kate Waterman interjecting: "My daughter Sydney ended up college with his granddaughter or great granddaughter; --was a friend of hers.]*

**Waterman:** Oh, so you 've met—was a friend of hers—Well maybe I shouldn't have said that about Mr. Lamb, but I don't remember him at all; it was just my impression of him as a child. — And then of course the Louttit Laundry man came by and collected the laundry; all of these nice things, you know so you didn't have to . . .

**Doyle:** Now did they go—everybody had these people that did their laundry and did—

**Waterman:** I don't know; I don't know who all had them, but apparently enough so that it was worthwhile doing this. I can remember we even had a diaper service that came around down here. *[Kate W: "And the Good Humor man"] Oh yes, sure; the Good Humor man. [Kate W: "Because the women didn't have cars; the men had taken the car back to the city. And the women were stranded; they couldn't go to the market, they couldn't go*



*to the [bank], they couldn't do all those things. And they did not have washers and dryers, so the services came to them.”]*

**Waterman:** I remember how we used to wash sheets during the war: We put them out on the line and turned the hose on them. [Laughter] But I can also remember as a small child, fresh water didn't touch me from June until September!

**Doyle:** Yes – just swimming in the ocean!

**Waterman:** And I also don't think I put on shoes during that time! And it's funny, even today, my idea of heaven is to go to bed at night between fresh sheets with a little bit of a sunburn and some sand in the bed. [Laughter] It makes me think of this sort of idyllic time because it was for children; it was an idyllic time. We were footloose and carefree. The way it's not possible to be anymore.

**Doyle:** It's given us a lot, hasn't it.

**Waterman:** Oh yeah, it's an incredible store of memories.

**[Slight gap in conversation]**

**Waterman:** The water supply that we got through the taps was brackish, slightly; so we didn't use it for drinking water. And children would line up for the pump; I guess the pump was now in the middle of the baseball field. And it was a lot of fun in the evenings because we'd— I remember Mary Lou and Tommy Walsh would be out there, and I guess Bill Saunders; and everybody would be standing around waiting the turn to fill up these gallon jugs full of water. I mean these are also things that are fun for children to do. I can remember— What do kids do nowadays that replaces that sort of simple experiences? [*Kate W: Your brother did not think that bringing the stove wood in was much fun, because there's a story about him, bringing, kicking the wood, and his grandfather telling him that that really didn't work.*]

**Waterman:** Well, you see, that was because he was old enough to bring in the wood and I wasn't! [*Kate W. It was a wood stove in the kitchen, though, I mean, to cook on; it was a cast iron cooking stove, wood stove. It was hard! They made seafood— seaweed pies or something, according to George.*] According to George. I don't remember any seaweed pies!

**Doyle:** Did your mother—your mother stayed in the house most of the time, and did all the cooking? When you were here? Is that —

**Waterman:** Well, it wasn't all that simple, you know. We had an electric stove too. But mainly they used the wood stove to heat, to heat the water on the boiler, for baths and for washing up and just for that purpose. I said "for baths"—well every now and then I guess we did have a bath. [Laughter] No, the stove was — it was very cozy, particularly in the autumn, for weekends—

**Doyle:** So, you would come down here through the fall and —

**Waterman:** Oh yeah; we would start coming on Memorial Day weekend. And I can't believe it now, but we would go swimming on Memorial Day weekend. And I think it was a matter of. . .

**Doyle:** Were there other people here?

**Waterman:** Oh yes, oh yes. People —cottage owners from Connecticut and Massachusetts, you know, with family—families would come down for that weekend. And then of course our school, Lincoln School, was a multi-xxxx they got out in the beginning of June. And as soon as school was out, my mother would move down, with us. And that was a very nice time in many ways because it was before the summer —uh —people arrived. And our friends who were in public school would only come down for the weekends; I remember looking forward to that very much: to have our pals with us again. But it was a time when we read a lot, and picked up seashells, and did things like that. That was a nice part of the— And we stayed — we would come down in autumn, and we stayed usually until— oh maybe around the 20<sup>th</sup> of September. And then went back to— uh, for the start of school. And then weekends through October. And when George and I were a bit older, I mean when he was maybe —when he could drive, and I was maybe 15— 14 and he was 16, or I [was]15 and he 17, we would come down alone, in the autumn, for weekends. And I remember particularly we'd have to get up early on Monday morning to go back to town, and I remember looking out of the window over the ravine one morning and seeing little clumps of fog: like little sheep, all through, through that ravine. And I think these are wonderful experiences when you are growing up because they're things you never forget. You don't forget what looks you've experienced of nature, of the natural world.

**Doyle:** It's those influences that are enormous on us, that we don't know until now, the impact that they've had on us.

**Waterman:** Yeah, yeah. The impact that they have on you—and you don't—you can't imagine that other people haven't had those experiences. Of course, you can live in the mountains where you have a different, — but it's the same basic connection.

[Gap on tape]

**Waterman:** . . . of the stove, there, and Rusty was behind it. And poor Rusty was traumatized. [*Kate W?* “*Forever. By the wood stick.*”] Yeah. Oh she was—we had this Cocker Spaniel dog who loved Quonochontaug, because although she was the sweetest, most gentle animal, she was a born hunter and a born fighter and just loved to get at woodchucks. [*Kate W:* “*I wish we had her now!*”] And Rusty would go off, and we’d hear sounds of battle going on, and a little while later there would be a dead woodchuck deposited at the front door. Usually with its liver removed. [*Kate W:* *She also chased stones at the beach, didn’t she?*] Nope; that was Bailey. The Browns, the Brown family had . . . You’d better get Cornie to tell about this. They had a terrible dog. Sorry, Cornie! But they had a—the dog was really not very attractive looking, and he was called Bailey. And Bailey had practically no teeth left because his idea of a good time was to chase, chase stones. People threw stones, and Bailey went and retrieved them. And in those days, dogs were allowed on the beach. And also, I think picnics were allowed on the beach. All sorts of things were allowed on the beach; but of course, we were in a way probably better behaved, and we didn’t make a mess. [Laughter and unintelligible conversation broken by *Kate W.* asking: “*How many families were on the beach at any one time?*”]

**Waterman:** Oh, I don’t know. Maybe fifty. Fifty people. [*Kate W.* “*On a busy day.*”] Oh, I don’t know. It was a nice —It wasn’t—What was fun about it was (if you remember, probably you do) you could walk around from one group to the next, and you knew everybody.

**Doyle:** Yeah, yeah. You’d all sit together on the beach and all that, with friends.

**Waterman:** Well, usually families sat together. And then we kids, when we got out of the clutches of our immediate family, we would sit together. And we would stay in the water so long that we were blue. And then we would rush out and rush back into what we called the hot sand. Yeah, the black sand. And we’d bury into that hot sand and get warmed up enough to go back in and it was fun—the rubber rafts that we used to have were a lot, an awful lot of fun. Riding the waves with those rafts. And I really don’t know why some of us didn’t drown. But I guess we just weren’t afraid, and we knew how to swim.

**Doyle:** I can remember though that we weren’t allowed to go in by ourselves. You always had to have somebody with you. Did have those kinds of rules? Because of the undertow.

**Waterman:** Well, I don’t know. I think that we—I don’t remember having gone swimming by myself alone at that stage in the game; but we certainly went

in sometimes when nobody else was around. And, you know, I think you have guardian angels sometimes. They keep you from being washed out to sea.

[*Kate W: Did you talk about sailing at Weekapaug? On Quonnie Pond?*]

**Doyle:** Do you have a sailboat? You had all kinds of boats.

**Waterman:** We had all kinds of boats, yeah. And my father decided at one point that he should have a little sailboat, so he bought himself one, actually. It was mainly for him I think, more for him than for us. And we started out—I remember the first time we went out, he took Mr. King, George King, with him because George knew something about boats. And of course, my father knew the basics, but he had never owned a sailboat before. But this boat that he had was an Old Town, an Old Town sloop; and it was—I think George—my brother George—and Bill Saunders did I think sail once to Block Island in it.

**Doyle:** So, you got out of the breachway. You just didn't sail in the pond. How did you get out of the breachway?

**Waterman:** Oh yeah, no, no. Well, we sailed, we sailed in the pond. And we not only had a little Havershaw dinghy which was a one-sail boat; and that was a tippy thing but I don't remember ever tipping over. But when we got a little bit older—I was maybe 17 years old?—I had a friend, a friend over in Weekapaug, Bob Prosser, who is still over there; and Bob—I used to crew for Bob in races for the Weekapaug Yacht Club. And those races were Wednesdays and Saturday afternoons. But then we got a little bit emboldened and we decided that it would be fun to take our sailboat, my sailboat, my father's sailboat out through the breachway and sail around to Weekapaug, to where Dede and Jack Walter, who were friends of ours, had—their house was just over the breachway there, toward Misquamicut. And Bob spent the night here in our house, and in the morning, we sneaked out; nobody knew where we were going. And he got the boat, and we had to tip it of course to get it under the wire, the electric wires. And then we were—it was—of course the water had to be calm to do this. And then you know, I don't remember how actually—we didn't row; somehow or other we sailed it; [*Kate W: "You were gone with the outgoing tide."*] Oh sure; the tide had to be out of course; you couldn't go against it. And we sailed it around to Weekapaug. [*Kate W: Did the wires go across the breachway then?*] Yes, yeah; they have always gone across the breachway. And of course, you didn't ever get your mast involved in those. [*Kate W: No—whether they were telephone wires or electric wires.*] They were electric wires.

**Waterman:** So anyway we were— we got a little bit—We used to sail —This Walter family in Weekapaug— they had a Lightning, an 18-foot Lightning in Watch Hill, northern Watch Hill. And the same crowd of us: Bob Prosser and Jack Walter, and I don't remember who the other girl was, but there were four of us. And we would go off to Fisher's Island without telling anybody where we were going, because of course if you told somebody, it would be "No!" But these boys were very, very good sailors. And once Bob's mother I guess got the Coast Guard out after us, but we had already gotten back by the time the Coast Guard was about ready to look for us.

**Doyle:** It doesn't sound like there were any near disasters.

**Waterman:** No. No, no, no, no, no. But I do remember when Mr. (what was his name?) Mr. Wolf—You know that house on the—If you walk in the direction of the breachway, it's—you know the white house, the one that had been with white shingles or it's now been re-shingled—had asbestos shingles on it, the square house right out on — and next to it was Mr. Wolf's house. Anyway, he was a figure. And he got caught in the undertow one day, on a quite stormy day, and he was rescued by people on the beach; but he got down onto the rocks there. And I remember harrowing stories about the rescue of Mr. Wolf. And I was present at the rescue of a couple people. Once they even had the Coast Guard; I think they even had a helicopter come and somebody was way far out, but that was in the direction of the big rock.

**Doyle:** And he was swimming or sailing?

**Waterman:** Swimming, swimming, swimming. And then somebody was—you know Bill Saunders' uncle I think was Mr. Riley—the Rileys are still here, aren't they?

**Doyle:** Yes.

**Waterman:** I think it was Mr. Riley. He was an excellent swimmer, and I think, if I remember correctly, he was involved in the rescue of somebody out there. Somebody would have to swim out with a [life preserver]—and then everyone would pull them back in. You'd have the rope on the end, and you would pull them back in. There were a couple of times that that was going on. That was, of course, dramatic. What else do I remember?  
*[Kate W: DAUB is still going on; the rescue at the rocks. Usually about one a year, similar to xxxx. You have to be down there a lot.]*

**Doyle:** Yeah, I'm not down there a whole lot.  
[Gap on tape]

**Waterman:** I think it was my grandfather who started the xxxx clambakes. Because I know that my father learned how to do it from him. But where he learned how to do it, I have no idea. And then you have —

**Doyle:** Was your grandfather from the city too?

**Waterman:** Yes. He was—yeah, he was—it's a Rhode Island family that goes back in the history. And what they had was this old, I guess it was a wine barrel; it's on the pictures here. Yeah. And that was always kept under the house where the wood and the wheelbarrow and all sorts of things that had no other place were kept under there. And the day before the clambake, that barrel would be hauled out and filled with water with a hose. We would fill it up so that it would be tight—so that it would be tight. And then in the morning of the clambake, one group would go down to the rocks to get rockweed and burlap bags. There were maybe two or three great big burlap bags full of rockweed pulled off the rocks. And then the others would start, in an open fire in the yard, to heat the stones. And it would take several hours to get those stones, maybe 4 hours, to get the stones white hot. And the stones then went, with seaweed, in the bottom of this barrel. And then in wire baskets, clams, soft-shell clams at that point; and a little bit later on they used the other ones too, but the soft-shell clams were the ones I liked the best. And lobsters, of course. I don't know what lobsters cost at that time, but it was not too much. And then ears of corn that hadn't been husked. I mean you'd put it right in—the corn would go in there. And I remember once or twice they put fish in, but they decided that the fewer things that they put into the bake, the better it came out, for some reason.

**Doyle:** So, all this would go into one barrel?

**Waterman:** Yeah, in one barrel; and we had these wire baskets xxx, and they would go in one on top of each other. And then the whole thing would be sealed up like a pressure cooker.

**Doyle:** And those were the pictures of the rope tightening?

**Waterman:** Yeah, yeah; it was a xxx and wood and ropes. And then there was a whole ceremony going on all this time of course. My father was—it was his production. And he would put his ear up against the barrel, and he always claimed that he could tell when it was done by the sound. And in the meantime, everybody involved would go for a swim. And my mother would—my mother and cousin Grace would get the table ready, the picnic tables for everyone; and of course, we used paper plates and used all the xxx. It wasn't that much. I think they made tomato salad and cucumber salad, something like that to go along with it. And of course, beer, and of course there had to be a couple big watermelons for dessert. And when

the bake was finished, then of course we all scrambled to get a lobster; and my father was very—of course as a surgeon, he was very good with knives, so he would slit open the lobsters on that bench over there, little wooden bench; and everybody had lots of—we had enough of everything; there were lots of lobsters and lots of clams and lots of corn. And then afterwards the watermelon would be cut, and the kids would all get up on the porch of the house and have spitting contests to see who could spit the watermelon seeds the farthest. And then it was—it was sort of the harmless good fun.

Once, when George and I were about ready to go to college, in that age, we put on a clambake for our friends; and it turned into a—sort of turned into a real festivity. We got hold of the hose —somebody always got hold of a garden hose at the end of a clambake and started spraying everybody, you know, cleaning up; but then the hose would go off in all directions. And this one turned into a— this time it turned into a real water fight. And in the end, we were on the roof of the house throwing buckets of water down on people. I think the hose even shot through one of the bedroom windows at one point. Of course, my mother was quite livid—they were helpless; they couldn't do anything. The whole thing got quite out of control, but it was an awful lot of fun. And then of course, with the years, the lobsters got to be so exorbitant in price that one didn't do 4 or 5 clambakes in the course of the season. But I think the last one that I went to was in about 1957.

**Doyle:** They just aren't done anymore.

**Waterman:** I don't think there's any, and there's nobody. I thought that George might, my brother George might continue the tradition; but I guess it just petered out.

**Doyle:** It's a lot of work.

**Waterman:** It's a lot of work, and maybe it was—people have more sophisticated ideas of fun so that it was one of those things that was lost, at least in our family. And of course, every time I hear about professional clambakes going on, I think, oh, they couldn't possibly be as good as ours were.

**Doyle:** I'm sure they weren't, either. Because we had clambakes, too, once a year with the Fishers in the log cabins. They would do it.

[Gap in tape]

**Waterman:** I was married in 1954 in Providence; and Hans Peter and I spent our honeymoon traveling around visiting people in New England, and then we came back to Quonochontaug where my parents were still staying. And it

was a week before we were sailing from New York back to Europe, and we arrived in time to experience the Hurricane Carol, which I thought was very appropriate because it's my name. And I thought that Hans Peter was very fortunate in experiencing a hurricane named Carol. And he, coming from a land-locked mountainous country, it was all quite an experience. And we woke up—I woke up in the morning that the storm arrived in Rode Island and saw that the rain was coming in around the frames of the windows from the northeast. And I went out into the living room and looked at the barometer. And it was so far down that I turned the radio on, and they were announcing that there was a hurricane named Carol and it was off Montauk Point. So we—everybody got up and started battening down the hatches as well as we could; and I remember very well Hans Peter and I put on bathing suits and we went out to get the porch furniture secured and to come over to Ira and Aunt Ellie's house to see if they were okay. And the rain was like being stung by bullets; it came horizontally. It was really quite an experience.

**Doyle:** You stayed here though.

**Waterman:** We stayed; we couldn't get out. It was—by the time we realized what was going on, there was no way out; and of course, we were worried about my father's boat, the *Sabrina*, which was on its mooring in Stonington, Connecticut. But there was no sense in worrying about anything. So we filled the bathtubs up with water as we always did when a bad storm came and just looked out the windows and watched and listened to the radio.

And then I guess it was around noon sometime, the eye of the storm came over, and the sun came out for a moment. And we rushed out and saw that down by Jim Byrne's house, I think there was just the roof of a car visible, but the water hadn't come any further than that. So we kept thinking back, of my grandfather, and how wise he had been to have built the house a little bit on the hill. And then, in the course of the afternoon, the wind came from the other direction and xxxx in again. As soon as it was safe to go, we went down to inspect the damage, and it was a sobering sight to see a chimney left in the house at one place. Of course, I think then we had a little bit of trouble with electricity and with the other problems that you face, but I mean when you're young, his calls for improvisation, and that can be for a few days: an adventure as long as nobody's hurt.

But then we went down to Bobby and Paul Matthews' house in White Plains to spend the night before we sailed for Europe, and then Hurricane Diane came along! And Paul Matthews was fabulous. He managed to get us by car, in spite of flooded highways, to get us to the piers in New York and get us aboard the— I think it was the *Liberté* or one of those boats.



And the boat had canvas all around it, and nobody was allowed on deck and—

**Doyle:** Did you sail? Did they xxxx?

**Waterman:** Oh yes. They sped right through, full steam ahead; they went as fast as they could, right through— right out of New York Harbor and right out as far as the Gulf Stream. And then I guess of course everything was quiet and peaceful for the rest of the trip.

That was my husband's first introduction to New England.

