

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

KATHERINE WATERMAN

October 2, 2019

Interviewed by Paul Mathews

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Q: My name is Paul Matthews. Today is October 2nd. We're at Kate Waterman's residence in Stone Ridge, in Mystic, Connecticut. I'm interviewing Kate Waterman. You have to state your name, your birth place and date, if you so desire.

A: I have no problem with it. I got where I am one day at a time. Kate Waterman. That's Mrs. George William Waterman, for Quonnie people. And I left Quonnie in 2011 after being there for 30 years on Neptune Avenue.

Q: What was your address on Neptune Avenue?

A: 65 Neptune Avenue. That was the second of two Waterman houses on Neptune and Ninigret. The big house on the corner was built in 1929. It was Neil Thorpe's father who divided the property up from scratch in the beginning. Because George's grandparents—he was William Henry Waterman—he married, God forbid, a Randall.

Q: Just for notation, I'm a grandson of a Randall.

A: Mr. Thorpe took the pair of them around while he was in the process of just beginning to subdivide. He took them down and offered them a waterfront lot. I have praised Great Grandmother Randall to the skies, because she said, "Heavens no; that's too close to the water. I want to be on high ground." And they worked their way back and she picked out the lot right at the corner of Ninigret and Neptune, which is probably the highest point of the whole peninsula. That house was then built. They bought four lots, because the big house is on two lots. One of them goes down Ninigret, and then there were the two lots on Neptune. When Dr. Waterman bought the house from his father, New England style--his father didn't give him the house. He bought the house from his father. And then his father built the little cape cod next door on those two lots. He only lived there a couple of years before he died. That house was inherited by Dr. Waterman's sister, Harriet Waterman. It's an interesting family, because Grandfather Waterman was chairman of the Carpenter's Guild in Rhode Island—president. He had a lovely gavel, which I gave to one of his great grandsons, who is over in Switzerland. His father was a blacksmith. George Waterman, Harriet Waterman and Randall Waterman, the three

children, George Waterman was a physician, Harriet was a professor of zoology at Wellesley College and Randall was a professor of history at Dartmouth. This crew had some smarts to them and were pretty impressive. There is also something I want to say about the Waterman family. I never knew Randall well, but both George and Harriet inherited not only the smarts, but they inherited the kindness gene. They were the kindest people I've ever met inherently. They were just genuinely kind people. I've very happy to say it may have skipped a generation, but one of my daughters inherited it. It is as obvious as an artistic gene. It's amazing. So, the Waterman's and the Randalls proliferated coming from the outside in, because I was born and raised outside of Baltimore, Maryland. I came to Quonnie the first time in the '50s to visit George. We were just dating at that point. I had my first introduction to all of these cousins. Every time you turned around, this was a cousin, cousin, cousin. But it was a great big happy family, and a happy family atmosphere in Quonnie in the '50s where kids ran free and didn't go in the water without somebody there. The social structure of the place was—it takes a village, this was a village. Everybody was part of it, and everybody was there. It was wonderful. That's the genealogy. I got married in '52. George went off to the Army. I stayed, much to their surprise, with the Watermans so that I got to go to the beach in the summer while my husband was over in Korea. He came back in April of '54. I had time to introduce myself to both Providence, where the Watermans were, and Quonnie. One of the interesting things about Quonnie—actually before this. I have to go back a little bit. Dr. Waterman had the only phone in Quonnie for miles around. But we an obstetrician, and if there was a baby coming in Providence, he needed to know and jump in the car and whip up there. It would take an hour and a half back then. He'd get there just about in time. Anybody who had an important telephone call to make or get, the Waterman house was the center for communications back in the day. I am gathering this would have been in the '30s and '40s. It was “the” telephone in the area.

Q: You were talking about the culture in Quonnie at that time. I call those the Camelot years.

A: You're right.

Q: The more I have interviewed people who come from that generation, whether they're the kids that have grown up, or the adults, like you, they've all responded and said, “You're right. That was a different time and a different place.” It was very special. The Watermans were so welcoming, and they were the center. Tell us about how you developed your friendships with different people as the years went by. The things that you did with your closest friends and associates.

A: It's funny; the longest relationship that I have is with the Shulthouse family, because we were both popping out kids in the '50s at the same time, and they were going down to Walter's father's house, Aqua Marine—it was called then. I think it still is, although it's much larger now. It was one of those wonderful 1950s cinderblock little houses. Those were also all along the front row. I have some pictures of that. It's a marvelous contrast to what's there now—the great big houses—because everybody had a one-story cinderblock or close to it.

Q: That was down on Ocean View right next to Little Red House, which is Nancy and Jeff Matthews' house now.

A: Yes.

Q: I don't know the address, but that's the location.

A: Yes. They were right next to the Matthews. So, we spent a lot of time together. I'm trying to think of other friends. Oh, George's friends—of course, George had a whole lot of friends from way back. I haven't written down their names. I have a problem with names, so I'm not going to go there. Let's talk about something else. Whoever it was lived right behind us. The Gorms were there when I left. I don't know the Gorms are still there behind my little house—behind the cape cod.

Q: The Henrys.

A: No. That's one up from the Henrys.

Q: Is it on the corner?

A: No.

Q: I know who it is. This is the part that I'm going to edit. Buzz Conrad.

A: No.

Q: Before Conrad then.

A: No. It's the wrong house. Never mind. He was a good friend of George's growing up. Carol too. George had a sister Carol.

Q: Your husband George?

A: Yes. My husband George had a sister Carol. Carol married and went off the Switzerland, so she hasn't been part of the scene lately, but she certainly was when she was growing up. They had a swing set, and there are pictures of lots of kids in the yard kicking a ball around. There was a horseshoe pit. It was a very convivial—and the location was sort of central. Not on the water, but central. That house stood through several wing dingers of hurricanes, not being on the water. It lost a few shingles, and that's about all. It was well put together. Because Grandpa Waterman, who built these houses, was chief of the guild of carpenters, the house was put together quite well. When I sold the cape cod on Neptune Avenue, the people who came in and made some structural changes said they had never seen a house put together so well. It too withstood its share of hurricanes with minimal damage. It was back from the edge, thank you

Grandma Waterman, over and over again. I would not have liked to have lived on the front row either. It's too intrusive—the noise.

Q: It's constant.

A: Yes. Maybe you get used to it, but it would make me restless.

Q: It's windy down there all the time.

A: And it's damp. You can't help but be damp.

Q: When you go back to Neptune, you're in a different world.

A: Absolutely. I remember thinking how hot it was, and going down to the beach and there was breeze. Flashlight tag, back in the days, the kids were out playing flashlight tag at night. I had never known there was such a thing, but there was lot so yelling and screaming and carrying on after dark. During the day, they went to each other's houses and had running Monopoly games that just went on and one and on from house to house to house. I don't know how they did that, but that's one of the things that they did. They went down to the bowling alley. The bowling alley was still there, but we never did that. There was ice cream to be had down there. I remember that too. I have a picture of George walking through the woodpile, because the big house originally had a wood stove. In 1929, that's what they had. The people who lived in there were Dr. Waterman's father and wife, Aunt Nettie and Harriet and Mama and Papa, and then George and Carol as little kids. The house was just teeming with people. Aunt Nettie apparently did a lot of the cooking. I can't put her in the chain. She's somebody's sister. Sorry about that. I just married into this family. I'm doing the best I can. But she was standing at this hot wood stove all day preparing meals for an army. George's job was to bring the wood in. Apparently one day he was really angry at having to have to do that, and he kicked the stove, because it was burning wood, and he was mad at it. He kind of learned a lesson. I don't think he broke anything, but he was able to tell the story, because I think it amused even him. That doesn't get you much. Don't kick the stove that burns the wood. I can't imagine how hot it must have been in that kitchen. The other thing that is interesting to me, we moved down there in 1980 year-round, and up to that time, one of the things you could absolutely count on was the afternoon breeze that came in between 12:00 and 1:00. You could almost set your watch by it. It moved steadily all afternoon. It was always there. It didn't come in the morning. It came up in the afternoon just after 12:00. In 1980 that stopped happening. It became more and more irregular. Now it comes up, but it isn't steady. It comes up when it feels like it. It's just totally different. As far as I'm concerned, that was the beginning of climate change, because up to that time, the houses had been situated in such a way as to take advantage of that breeze. It was such a constant that you built your house so as that the bedrooms got the breeze at night.

Q: You're crowded with more and bigger houses, and many more trees that are in the way of that breeze. It has changed it.

A: That was the beginning of climate change to me.

Q: You were right across from the ball field. Can you tell me about any events down there?

A: Every Sunday morning I remember gathering there. George was never a part of the baseball scene.

Q: George, Sr., or George, Jr.?

A: My George. Neither one of them were ever baseball players. But it was a social gathering spot while the game was going on cheering on the Old Goats. One of the pictures that's vivid in my mind for every year as long as they were able to walk, Mr. Moran, Albert Randall and George Waterman took a walk on Sunday. You can just see the three of them always together, heads down, moseying up the road towards the ball field from the front row, and it was just part of the scene. It was a stability thing, because they were always together on Sunday morning. It was a ritual. You wanted me to talk about parades.

Q: Fourth of July. There was a famous year that you had a funny outfit on.

A: I had a couple of hysterical outfits. Peggy O'Brien and I had fun doing this. I had fun doing it. It was funny, because nobody in the Waterman family took part in this at all. But I couldn't help it. I had to play. Peggy O'Brien was delightfully eager to join me. One day the theme was cartoons, and we did Helga and—was it Herman? The cartoon characters. You know who they were. They were Vikings. I was so impressed with Peggy, because she took a brown towel, but a hole in the middle of it and stuck it over her—pretended it was a fur costume. We had the best time. We did The Way We Were. My theme for that was we were much thinner, and I put on a t-shirt that had a lovely bikini figure. It just worked perfectly. There was also another event—I didn't do this myself, but I got Peggy to put on a 1950s—I don't know where she found it—bathing suit. I'll remember her name in a minute. Across the street. A young thing in a bikini. She walked the whole parade in this teeny, tiny, barley-covering bikini. She was more naked than not. It was a lovely contrast. What was so funny was I won a couple of prizes, but it was always great fun. My kids got into it. I even got my nephew, Michael, to do King Neptune once. He was perfect for the job, because he was a big, stout fellow. We made him a trident. That was Carol's son. He's a sweet guy. He's taking care of his mother right now. There were some very funny costumes. It was fun.

Q: Did you go to the beach on a regular basis?

A: There wasn't any particular ritual. I remember thinking how strange it was that Mother Waterman never went down to the beach, or rarely went down to the beach. And now that I'm older, I understand better. It's not as comfortable when you're in your 80s is it was when you were in your twenties. She was cooking, because there were always so many people in the house. She didn't have a chance to go. At one point, she decided I

did the breakfast dishes before I could go to the beach. I remember being very frustrated, because it was time to go to the beach, and I was stuck with the breakfast dishes. I wasn't an easy guest. I had taken for granted a lot of lovely things all my life. The Watermans brought me up to New England ways. Everybody pitches in, which is fine. I'm glad.

Q: Were you a clammer?

A: I didn't do any clamming. I made clam chowder once—a huge cauldron of clam chowder. I was from Maryland. All I heard during the whole meal—it was cream, and it was really yummy. The clams were really tough. All I heard through the whole meal was, “When you're doing this, you really have to grind up the clams.” I never ground up clams before. It never occurred to me to grind up the clams. I wasn't up to snuff as a cook.

Q: You were probably more crab cakes or soft-shell crabs.

A: Show me a crab, and I'd be fine. Of course, learning how to do a lobster was a whole new world.

Q: Do you recall East West Farm up at the corner?

A: I do. We would go up there on Sundays. I wonder why Sundays. Maybe it was because that's when I was there mostly. What would we get? Eggs and some veggies.

Q: They had milk and cream in their refrigerator.

A: One of the wonderful things was that there was a—Sammy came by with his truck every day. We didn't have a washing machine. We used to put sheets in the tub, rinse them out really quick and hang them out on the line. When there were too many people, and the turnover was too fast, you couldn't send the sheets out. Mother Waterman just swished them around in the tub.

Q: Identify Sammy.

A: Sammy brought vegetables. I'm trying to think of where they got meat. I don't remember that. But the milkman came every day. The dry cleaning and laundry person came once a week. There were all of these services brought in, because the houses weren't set up. Not too much refrigeration. I don't remember the size of the refrigerator, but I'm sure it was little. It was interesting. The vendors came to the door. Sammy was the vegetable man. Every afternoon the Good Humor man came just about dinner time and drove mothers crazy, because the kids wanted their ice cream before dinner. They usually got it. He was there at 5:00 going through the community and ringing his bell. “Ice Cream!” That was a big treat. That was carried out when my kids were still there. That went on into the '60s.

Q: Do you remember the Seabreeze Inn and the dance hall?

A: That was before my time. I did go to a dance in Watch Hill at the original Ocean House with my husband. I think we were married, or we might have been dating. I don't remember. But in Watch Hill at the Ocean House, which has been completely rebuilt, there was a ball room, and there were orchestras on special occasions. We went in tuxedo and full evening dress. It was elegant. It was marvelous. It was very romantic. That was beautiful. Nobody does that anymore. That would have been in the '50s. Whether it was early '50s or mid-'50s, I don't know. But it was part of the old world. It was pretty much long gone even then.

Q: My first time in Quonnie was when I was three and a half, or maybe four, which would have been 1951 to '52. I think the summer of '51 was the first time we were up visiting my grandparents at Old Salt. I can't remember when the roads changed. There is a picture of Quonnie from about the top of the crest where Dr. George's home was down, and it's all gravel dirt road.

A: They were paved by the time I got there by 1950. So, some time in the late '40s they must have been paved. One of the things that cracks me up about then and now, every car just went right on the lawn and parked there. The lawns dried up in the summer, and you didn't have to cut the grass anymore. That was no biggie. And nobody had a cultivated lawn. It was just sandy grass. You could walk barefoot on it. It was perfectly adequate. And you parked your car on it and got it off the street and didn't think twice about it. These lawns—

Q: Manicured and irrigated.

A: Irritating is what they are. It's too bad, because nobody thought anything about it. It wasn't about having a beautiful lawn. It was about having fun, and not having too much to worry about. You had to pick up your doggy things, though. I remember having to be taught that. I was sort of oblivious. I always had a dog, and the dogs were able to run free and there was no problem. But there weren't so many people, and there weren't so many dogs. It was different. Now you wouldn't want everybody who has a dog to have them all running loose. There would be packs.

Q: We have a map from '55, and at that time there were maybe one third of the homes on Neptune that there are now. Past Neptune all the way out to Seabreeze, there were maybe a home here or a home there. There wasn't much there. When I was a kid, I don't think I ever went beyond Neptune. That was sort of no-man's land.

A: Picture looking through the two Waterman houses. There was a swing set at the big house. Looking between them and down, there were no houses at all. It was right to the water. They were on the front row essentially. But that was way back.

Q: At the archive center, there are several volumes of the famous Waterman clam bakes that occurred. It's in one of the cases. People need to visit the archive center and look at that clam bake.

A: Those pictures were taken by your father, who was a professional photographer. That's the most important thing. Paul Matthews was an artist. And his depiction of that clam bake is probably the greatest thing that ever happened to Quonnie, because it really captured the extended family idea of multi generations. Nellie was there with my son, Willie. That was five generations. This was Harriet's aunt. There were a whole lot of aunts over the years. Aunt Nettie was Papa's great aunt. There were five generations there. They're depicted in all of these pictures with the little ones. There is a delightful one of Carol's daughter, Christine, holding a beer can. Carol's daughter at that point was not quite two. I don't think there was anything in it. But it doesn't matter. It was just a really cute picture. The picture of—I don't remember her name. Aunt Ellie sitting at one end of the table, and all the chairs are empty and she's waiting patiently. That speaks such volumes. It just does. Those are very artful pictures.

Q: The one thing about that event that is so special, and really speaks of those times with your family, today a caterer would come in and cater it. That was an event that started early in the morning up to the piers in Narragansett to shop and buy the lobsters, the building of the fire, the heating of the stones to the dinner and the aftermath of the dinner. That was a whole day of family.

A: Cooperation. One of the first pictures is George walking up the road with a huge burlap sack of black seaweed—eelgrass—over his shoulder. That started in the morning. He built the fire in the outdoor fireplace, and threw stones on it to heat them up. The night before he put water in the barrel to swell it up and make it tight, because we used a barrel. We didn't dig a hole. We used a barrel—Dr. Waterman did. I had very little to do with it. Get the barrel wet and all tight, and then you throw in the rocks—the hot rocks, which you picked up with a shovel. There are pictures of this. Every single stage of that, he got a picture of. Throw the hot rocks on top of the seaweed, which steamed immediately, and then more seaweed and more rocks. I don't know how many layers. Then in go potatoes, corn, lobsters, clams. I think that's it. And then you got a top for the barrel that gets put on, and synched down with a rope to make it really tight. Everything pressure cooked. The people played ball. I don't know how long it took to do that. I have absolutely no idea how long it took between synching it down and opening it up again.

Q: I think it was four to six hours.

A: I don't think it was that long. I think it was two. You were young.

Q: It seemed like forever when I was that age.

A: Yes. But the great long table had to be set up and ready to roll. I guess there were salads that were made also, although I don't remember anything much. But your grandmother—Grace was your grandmother. The picture of her doing the dishes at the

end—boy, that just sort of closed it down. There was so much food. We ate it leisurely. We just kept eating and talking and eating and talking. The little kids were running around. My firstborn was there. He was under two. I was pregnant with my second. This was in August, and I had her in December. That's Hope. Carol's first was there. I think she was pregnant too. Christine was there. Christine alas has left. Dreadful—she got that pneumonia that you can't cure. Carol misses her terribly. I can't imagine what it would feel like to lose one of those daughters. Very special.

[pause]

A: This isn't in any particular order. The year we moved in year-round, which was 1980, I went to the very first annual meeting. I don't remember exactly who it was—had a grand plan—I had at one point been working for the Rhode Island Audubon Society in Providence. I had learned a couple of things over the course of a couple of years. Somebody was standing up and talking. They had gone to a chemical company, and they were going to spray the phragmites in Fresh Pond with a helicopter. I rose up out of that seat like a rocket. I don't even think I waited to get acknowledged. I said, "Over my dead body!". I meant it. I was able to put a stop to it, because they had absolutely no—they had all kinds of assurances from the chemical company that this chemistry was perfectly harmless. Well, consider the source, folks. I could not believe that grownups were proposing this, because it turned out later that it wasn't safe at all. As a result of being so forward at my first meeting, I was made chairman of "what are we going to do instead". It seems to me that not too long ago they were talking again about spraying the phragmites. I found somebody who had burned it down in Connecticut. That was a pretty hairy operation, because the tops of the phragmite—it's very fine just before the blossom. It would catch fire, break off and go flying around. That wasn't a good plan. I had a big meeting—this isn't important, and you can cut it out, but I will never forget it. I was having skin cancer burned off of my margins of my mouth, and I looked just dreadful. I was running this meeting with about 200 people. I had to stand up. I never explained to them why—that was very embarrassing. We did not come up with any solutions. Digging it up is virtually impossible. It is the natural death of a pond—that's all it is. You really can't stop it, as much as you might like to. It's going to happen. It is happening. It's been slow. There is a very, very strong fresh water spring fairly close to the road—Seabreeze road. Even when the pond freezes over really hard in a really cold winter—there is another story about the pond. This is good. I remember this one. It would stay open in a little circle where the circulation of the spring came up. One year some of the smart guys—I can't remember who did this, but they figured they would drown the phragmites. They bogged up—the pond flows under the road. It goes all the way around to the west. So, they decided they would drown the phragmites. They closed off the pond right in front of the road. The pond rose, and it got higher and higher and higher. It's winter, and there's nobody there. This was late '80s. In those days in wintertime, people really went home. It was pretty desolate. Pretty soon it was in Hamshore's yard and beginning to flood over his septic tank. That's not good. So, I got a little anxious about this. I was about the only person around. The Skippers were there year-round then. I asked Danny McCloud to—Danny would be mortified if he heard this—I asked Danny McCloud to go take those bricks or stones or whatever they had

used away, and let that pond—he said, “Hell, no. I’ll be sucked right through the pipe.” So, I went down to Peter Skipper, who was an engineer. I figured he would know what to do. He came storming down to the pond, waded in and threw those stones to one side. The water went out of there, under the road and then just almost vertical on the other side as it came out of the pipe. There was so much pressure. But he was not the least bit worried about getting sucked through the pipe. He just knew what to do. And the water went down to where it belonged. But this idea of, “Okay, we’ll fix it this way”—not so much. Peter Skipper and I had a lovely relationship.

Q: He reengineered Central Beach. That was his project. He was an incredible contributor to Central Beach.

A: Yes, he was. He was really long in the tooth. We played tennis together when he was 80. We were in a doubles match. We made it to the semi-finals. I was proud. The tennis courts down there, back in the day, were sand. It was really hard to manage. They had a backboard. Do you remember that?

Q: The old green blackboard with the white stripe.

A: I would go down there and just bang that for a half hour or an hour by myself. It was wonderful exercise. It got me back in to the rhythm of playing tennis, which I hadn’t done for years. I can’t imagine what it was like for the closest houses near by. But nobody ever said, “Please stop.” Nobody ever complained. I think the sound of that now wouldn’t be tolerated.

Q: You were going to talk about the ’54 hurricane.

A: George and I lived in Providence. We were both working in downtown Providence. This was before there were any kids. He drove me to work, dropped me off and said—I’m trying to think of what time of day this was. He said, “I don’t like the way the air smells, and my folks are down in Quonnie. I think I’m going to go down and make sure everything is okay.” On the radio was an ad “It’s a rainy day. Come on down to Providence and go to Gladdings and do your shopping.” There was absolutely not one word of a potential hurricane. But he could smell it. I think that’s amazing. He drove down. That day I’m sitting at my desk in Providence overlooking the Point Street Bridge. The whole office was standing there just looking out the window. Nobody was doing any work whatsoever, because the hurricane is here. The water in the river is rising under the Point Street Bridge. It gets up, up, up and up. It gets to the bottom of the bridge. I didn’t know it, but my boss was taping the conversation. I’m heard saying, “That looks like that’s about it. It sort of stopped there.” Within 10 seconds, it was over the bridge and about 10 feet above it, because when they talk about a storm surge, it’s not a wave; it’s the compression or depression—what is the right word? The level of the water doesn’t—there is no wave. The level of the water is just up. It happens instantly. It’s hard to believe what happens. Downtown Providence is flooded. One of the things you don’t know or don’t think about is when the water runs out, every car in downtown Providence—the horns short out, and they all start blowing. They will keep on blowing

until somebody gets to them. And you can't get to them, because the water is still there. Looters are coming down—this is Providence; not Quonnie. It's the '54 hurricane. The looters come down the hill in trucks, and they jump on washing machines and refrigerators and stoves that are going out with the tide. They jump on them. I don't know how they think they're going to get them. I don't understand that at all, but that's what they did. My boss leaned out the window, and he picked out a beautiful leather pocketbook for me, because it went into Rounds Leather Store. I got a very pricey handbag. He just reached out and brought it in. I went home that night by myself. George was not knowing anything about what's going on down there. I had to wade through knee-deep bunker oil, because that floats to the top. It's very slow to find its way out. That was what was left when I went home—bunker oil. It's pretty gross. But he came back and got me—George did, the next day—and took me down, because everything was at a halt. How thoughtful, because here's Mother Waterman. There's no water. There's no electricity. All of these people—Aunt Dorothy, Uncle Jim—were there. That's her sister and husband. Aunt Nettie was there, her aunt. George and me. I think that's all. So, she's supposed to take care of us—feed us, and keep everything going, and we're having a lovely time swimming, because the water was clear and beautiful. She carried on very well. At that point, the well house was—

[audio skips]

Q: ...hurricane, and you were back with the whole family.

A: We all descended on Mother Waterman as if it was still party time. I just can't get over that. I don't think I remember stopping at the store and bringing any goodies down or anything of that kind. He just came and got me, and we went down there and carried on. There was a well house right across the street. Do you remember that?

Q: No. Was it where the ball field is? Or was it on McEnroe's property?

A: No. Across the street from that on the ball field side. Right across from our house. It would have been above the playground where there are big trees now.

Q: Where the red bulletin board is?

A: To the right of that right where that clump of trees and invasive stuff is. Everybody is going up to the well house hand pumping water. I don't think I ever did it. You had to get water somehow. I don't remember too much else, other than reflecting back. There is no other word for it. We were totally oblivious to the difficulties of managing.

Q: It was a different world back then. People were used to living life that way. They knew that you had to accommodate.

A: And you just did it without thinking. I don't remember being put out by it—the difficulties of it. I thought mostly it was because I was oblivious, selfish—sort of self-absorbed at that period. It turned out that I was exactly two weeks pregnant at that time,

because when I did have Willie, about three days into it, a nurse comes into my room—we were able to stay in the hospital for a while in those days and recover—and she’s laughing hysterically. She says, “They’re stacked up outside in the hallways, because at that point no lights—there was nothing else to do. Everybody was having babies the next year nine months after the hurricane. I did want to talk about Monday Club. Monday Club was after we moved down, so it was the ‘80s and ‘90s. Do you remember Dr. Libe?”

Q: No.

A: Is that the right name? It goes so far back. The members—Mrs. Skipper was one. Mrs. Skipper was such a lovely lady. The Skippers were Dutch. Peter and his wife both had come over from the Netherlands. He worked for, as did almost everybody, the airplane—Pratt & Whitney. He was an engineer for Pratt & Whitney. Lots of people were.

Q: Yes. Dick Henry was in charge of engineering at Pratt & Whitney.

A: There were several—a bunch of people from Pratty & Whitney. Mrs. Skipper and Dr.—the house past Peg O’Brien’s house. I’m trying to remember who was—Joanne Thompson. In any case, the Monday Club has gone on replacing people.

Q: I think Jean Mace was in it.

A: Jean Mace was in it. Carol Strickland was in it. It has kept on—we are about to have the last meeting of the Monday Club in the middle of October. We’re trying to get Kay Noonan.

Q: And Janet Morkin was part of that for a while, wasn’t she?

A: She might have been. I don’t remember Janet being there. There are very few of us left. I’m so bad with names.

Q: When did you meet? And what did you do?

A: We met, and we always had a glass of wine. We talked about what was going on, but we did not gossip. It was an unwritten rule. It was just understood. It was very, very nice and polite. When I got to be council person—we directed it towards town politics quite a bit, because I was there. I was older. I needed a forum. For the most part, it has been the most delightful—you brought your own sandwich, and somebody provided you with wine and dessert and coffee. It met once a month. It was a very, very convivial group. Jean Mace belonged to King’s Daughters. We didn’t do good work. We didn’t have any reason to get together other than social. It was very sociable, and very pleasant and nice to be included in. As I say, the last meeting is going to be in two weeks, which will be the middle of October of 2019. That went on for quite a while. We’re talking about the 65 Neptune Avenue, the cape cod that is still there with Dede Consoli. The topiary of the bird and the rabbit are still in front of the house. Those were my creations. They were two little round blobs when I moved into that house. That house was designed by Peter

Paul Gettis. It was his first assignment after graduating as an architect. There is another house exactly like it with the garage in exactly the same position in Bristol, Rhode Island. Peter Paul Gettis became a well-known architect. It was built in 1940 for less than \$4,000. Should I say what it was sold for? Nine hundred and sixty.

Q: And today it would probably sell for 1.7 million.

A: It's a little cape cod with two bedrooms and a bath. It's called a floor and a half. The up is not considered a full floor, which I don't understand. That is so hard to wrap your head around. George would have been mortified. When the Waterman house was sold, after both George and Helen died, I rented it out for a couple of years. When I say I rented, of course it was George's inheritance. I did the work. Renting is not easy. You've got to get everything spiffy. Since nobody is living in it year-round, there were always mice chewing through things. I remember throwing the moth balls all over the place to keep the mice out, and finding baby mice in bureau drawers when the springtime came. And cleaning out all the cupboards in the kitchen—literally taking everything out of them and washing them down again, because there were mouse tracks all through everything. And getting all of the linens put out and set up for people. We rented it for about four or five years to a guy who used to be—one of his daughters lives now on the road—

Q: West Niantic?

A: No. It's east.

Q: Lucas? Boulder?

A: Coming out of Central Beach and going towards the pond.

Q: Seabreeze?

A: Yes. He was the tennis pro—Wimbledon tennis referee. It begins with a G. We rented it. When I sold it—heaven knows what it cost to build it, but George let me handle the transaction, because he was embarrassed. George never understood real estate. He understood stocks and bonds, but he never got it that location, location, location is worth money. He could not wrap his head around that to save his soul. I sold that one for 500. Think of what it would go for now. That was so much an embarrassment. I can imagine what it would go for now, because it's a five-bedroom, two full baths and showers and everything. It didn't have a basement. It wasn't winterized. But location, location, location.

Q: And the architecture is beautiful from the outside. It's classic. Absolutely spectacular.

A: Beautiful, beautiful view at the time. It has since been planted, so the view is cut off by the owners of the property. That needs to be inserted somewhere when I'm talking about the house. You could sleep thirteen in that house. Joanne Thompson was part of the Monday Club. It wasn't until after George died that I got involved in the conservation

commission. Having worked for the Audubon Society, I was focused that, and I got on the conservation commission and learned a little bit about the town of Charlestown. After a couple of years somebody convinced me to run for the town council. Looking back on this, I am awed, and I don't know whether it was guts or stupidity, because I did not have a clue about Charlestown politics. But in any case, I did run for town council and was elected. The council consists of five folks from all over Charlestown. One of my first chores trying to get some backing when I was running for this, I talked to groups all summer long from house to house, and I carried with me a map of the town of Charlestown. The people at Central Beach had the feeling that that was Charlestown—that little peninsula. I would hold up the map of Charlestown and I would get, "Oh, my God," because Central Beach was one twentieth of the town. That's a rough guess, but it's really not where the action is at all. It's purely a summer colony at this point. So, this is in the middle '90s. When you said that I went to represent Central Beach, that was Central Beach's attitude. It was not mine at all, because the town was much bigger, and there was much more to be dealt with than summer colonies, as much as they provided us with the tax base. But town council was, and still is to this day, divided by the same two factions: open-space faction and development faction. I find it amusing now—I ran for three two-year terms. I was on the council for six years. One of the years I got a call from the Westerly Sun, and they said, "Can you give us a statement about the three most important things that face the Town of Charlestown?" and I said, "Yes. Water, water and water. We have fresh water ground water that we rely on, because we have no reservoir. We have the salt ponds that nourish all of the fish that come out of the sea. That's the nursery bed. And we have the oceanfront and whatever it's doing. That's where we should be focused." And here it is 2019, and finally Central Beach has had its comeuppance, and water has to be boiled, and has been since the middle of the summer practically. So, they were a little late to the picnic there. I think the issue of planting trees is very much a part of it, but I don't think that's the answer. I'm not sure that larger wells—digging more wells—water is a limited resource, and it's very hard to wrap your head around that it is finite. Because it runs, you think it's always going to run, I guess. You can run out. Desalinization may be the answer, but I don't think sewers—where are we going to ship it? We don't have a sewage plant. I don't think you could build a reservoir big enough for the people who want to irrigate their lawns. Going back to the lawns that you parked cars on and didn't have to mow all summer, because the grass died in August and September, it would help quite a bit, but it's not the answer either. I don't know what the answer is. I do want to congratulate Vin Rapuchy for his patience and he even, steady voice throughout this past year. And what a job for a volunteer to make sure that Central Beach has its drinking water. I commend him, because he has been so steady where people could get very alarmed. Imagine the value of your property, if there is no drinking water, bingo. Out of business. I know you can truck it in—ka-ching, ka-ching, ka-ching—but you can't take a bath on that. I hope they find a solution. I have no idea what it would be. Anyhow, the town council was very interesting. The two factions were at war then as they are now. They were led at that time, in the '90s, by Mr. Jim Mayjo. I have no problem using his name. He suffered from a disease called ODD, which was oppositional defiant disorder, which is a real thing. I didn't make it up. School teachers can tell you about it, because they run into it every now and then. This is a psychosis, which is against everything no matter what. It's very difficult to deal with.

He was volatile. His face would turn scarlet. He was on a term. It was on hellish period that I was most unprepared for. He called me up one night—I lived on Neptune Avenue all by myself year-round, and in the wintertime there we no lights. I was at the end of the habitable part of Central Beach. I got a telephone call one night from Mr. Mayjo, and he was saying some things to me about how I'm supposed to vote. At some point I indicated that I was not in accord, and he said, "I hope your homeowner's insurance is paid up." That's what being on the town council was like. I went to the police station the next morning and filed a formal complaint and said that that was the second time he had threatened me. If there was a third, he was going to be in deep doo-doo. He never did it again, because he had friends on the police department, and that got back to him very quickly. That was how I handled that one. But there were a number of confrontational periods that were not what I had signed up for, and was not in any way prepared for. I'm fascinated to find out that I still have credibility in the town with some people who were there then and remember it all. I asked why, because, to the best of my knowledge, I accomplished absolutely nothing, except keeping him at bay in the whole time I was there. I don't think I really could say there was anything I did. The answer I got from somebody who is still around is, "You were unflappable." Timely place to be there, I guess. But the nicest thing I had while all of this real angst, anxiety and nasty tension—I was president of the council for one year when Mr. Mayjo was on the council. I would go in and sit in the middle. Right directly in front of me, Carol Strickland, Peggy O'Brien and Jean Mace sat themselves in the front row right directly in front of me, and they were my support system. All I had to do was look at them and know I was okay. They had absolutely no interest whatsoever in what was going on in town, but they were there for me. That was huge. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was so stressed out by this turmoil, I actually had a mini stroke, and my right eye crossed. The stress was real. My blood pressure must have been huge. I would come home to an empty house at 11:30 or 12:00 at night after a meeting, and I'd be about six feet off the ground with incredible energy, and nowhere to put it, and nobody to talk to. I would call up my friend Ruth, and she would talk me down for about 45 minutes before I could go to bed.

Q: I remember talking to you back then at one time. You didn't go into any detail, but you told me how stressful it was, and how it was affecting you.

A: I can't remember the exact chronology, but the Indians did their smoke shop while I was on the council. That was a bad scene, and it wasn't handled well. Then we had some other issues with the tribe. One night Chief Sachem, Matthew Thomas, is talking to the council, and he called me—I was chairman at the time—he called me a bigot. I reflectively said, "I don't think so." He said, "Bigots never do." That was part of the kind of scene that we were faced with. That was a water issue. Afterwards I wished I had the sense to say, "If I went to the long house in front of your group, I wonder if I would talk to you that way? I don't think so." He did a lot to victimize his tribe. His tribe was actually assimilating fairly well and not riled up. I know very little about it, but I'm sure things were not perfect by along shot, but there was no unrest. He came in there and got hem totally roiled up. That's where the smoke shop thing came from. It was confrontational from square one. It was very unfortunate. It did very little to help the relationship between the tribe and the town. I've always been amused. The tribe has a

large health center right on Route 1 across from the town hall. Eight or nine years ago, they decided they needed a bigger one. If you go down the road beside it—have you gone down? Probably not. You wouldn't have any reason to. Go down the road beside it, and completely out of sight of anything is the most enormous building you have ever seen. There are 300 members of the tribe. They have a health center facility. There are never more than two cars there. It is federal money. You and I paid for it. Total bamboozle. It's just shocking.

Q: It's underutilized.

A: Big time. Oh, well. I don't know why or how—Chief Sachem, Matthew Thomas, would come and berate us, because his elders were impoverished. He's wearing an Armani suit, driving a Cadillac. He has a house in Charlestown, Palm Beach and somewhere in Arizona. His elders were impoverished, because he—all the federal money that was going to the tribe—and there was some—he was doing a wonderful job with it. He has since been decamped. I don't know who the elder is now. But all that roiling has gone away with him, so that's good. I hope they're doing well. They have a beautiful health center.

Q: For a while, I think they were trying to get people to come into the health center—physicians that would operate outside of the tribal community. I remember when we first moved here, we were looking for a general practitioner for the family, and the general practitioner that came up was located there. Within a month, he moved to a different location, but he was located in there, and he was seeing patient outside the tribal community. I think they knew they had an asset there that was underutilized. I don't know if they're still trying to fill the space.

A: Drive back there and have a look at it, because it will blow you away. It's one of the biggest buildings in Charlestown. In answer to the developers who want to change the town, I said very sincerely, "We have a bank. We have a grocery store. We have a very active library. We have a couple of beautiful gift shops and a grocery store. If you want anything else, you've got Providence, you've got Wakefield and you've got Westerly right next door. We have something that neither of them have, and that's huge amounts of open space. It's very special. We have dark skies. You can fly over Charlestown, and you can see where it is at night." People don't accept that as a benefit. People don't recognize the fact that this is something that nobody else has right next door.

Q: The unfortunate thing is, there can always be a tipping point. When it gets there, all of a sudden, the complexion of the whole area will change, and the desirability will be reduced. It may become desirable to more people coming out of New York City that go out to the Hamptons and are willing to put up with all that sort of thing, but the special community that's here now—I'm talking not only about Quonnie; I'm talking about Charlestown itself, and the back area of Charlestown as you go down 102. It's a special character when I drive up there. I say, "This has a feeling where I'm in Vermont."

A: And you're right smack on the east coast, which is as densely population as it can be. The fact that this is a virtue seems to escape people. They see it as an opportunity to make money. And the kinds of things that they're offering up, the Dollar General, for crying out loud. What an antithesis to what Charlestown represents. You come back to the water, water and water situation. The more development, the more taxes, the more water you use, and people need to reflect on what they've got that's special before they give it away. Amen.

Q: That's a good summary of what's going on. I think there is a special beauty here, and a lot of it has to do with bucolic nature, which once that's gone, there is no bringing it back.

A: No.

