

## QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Oral History

# BARBARA (ORNBERG-HUTCHINS) COON

Interviewed by Anne Schafer Doyle

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**Doyle:** This is an interview with Barbara Hutchins, who has recently moved back to Charlestown at 15A Bobolink Drive, in Charlestown. Barbara lived in the [Quonnie] breachway area in the early part of her life and will tell us the stories of that area. The first question, then, Barbara, is: just state your name and where and when you were born.

**Hutchins:** All right; my name is Barbara Mae Ornberg Hutchins, and I was born March 22, 1933, on Main Street in Westerly, at 201 Main Street, which is still standing. And my mother's father had his blacksmith shop right next door. The house really was my grandfather's sister's place, Mary Peckham.

**Doyle:** Now, your parents: can you give a little background?

**Hutchins:** They were married in 1931, and just before the marriage, my father built his home on Quonochontaug, at the breachway, on a strip of land. And then they were married, and that's where they took up housekeeping until the '38 Hurricane. My mother was born in Westerly; her maiden name was Pendleton. And my dad was born in Westerly, too. His parents came to this country—his dad was 14 years old--from Sweden, with his parents; and set up housekeeping where Tower Street School now stands.

**Doyle:** Why did they pick that particular place, beside the Coast Guard Station, to live? Do you know?

**Hutchins:** I have no idea. I just know that my father, he was an avid fisherman and a hunter; and they loved the beach area. [Probably it was the lay] of the land—I have no idea. I really don't know. It wasn't a great big piece of

land, but it was big enough for them. And they had electricity and a crazy old outhouse that in the course of the Hurricane, when the wind came up, kept toppling over; and he kept standing it up. Finally, the third time it went over, he just let it go! [Laughter]

**Doyle:** And, why don't you mention how you would get to the house, from the mainland –

**Hutchins:** We would come down Langworthy Hill Road from Dunn's Corners and come across—yeah, let's see—we'd have to come down Noyes Neck Hill Road—Langworthy Hill Road, across the old road, which would be the Shore Road, cross the Shore Road and go towards the Weekapaug Inn. And that's where the road began; it went down—the road went the whole length of the barrier beach at that time. Now it's very difficult getting down there.

**Doyle:** And you lived there for five years.

**Hutchins:** Five years. Until the Hurricane. After the Hurricane, we moved—we stayed in a couple of places until the house was finally moved out of Quonnie to the Woody Hill Road, at Dunn's Corners, where it still stands.

**Doyle:** Just to talk a little bit about any memories you have before the Hurricane – you know, what you did—the kind of a life you had –

**Hutchins:** There was family all the time. There was constant company. And as kids, I can remember we always went clamming and crabbing – we had our crab nets; and the old breachway there was a zillion little inlets that was just right for us kids. We had to be careful of deep holes, and we shrieked and yelled a lot: “Watch out for the hole” and “Stay over here” – and we had our own little buckets and rakes and stuff to go clammin'—

**Doyle:** So you would go right out from your house and go right into the pond—to go clamming—right from home.

**Hutchins:** Into the water. Right. Yeah. From the Pond -- from the breachway and the old pond, there were several little inlets around, which are no longer in existence. And every few days we had company; I can remember my grandfather, Bill Pendleton, and his wife Adelaide coming down; they were always there visiting us. And I had a little –little two-wheel bike; and he was a big strapping man. And he'd get on that bike and you couldn't see the bicycle when he used to ride it around! And, we had rabbits, and there was always ducks around. Dad always had mallard ducks and some geese, that were domesticated –but even though he was a good duck hunter, we still had our own for pets, and the rabbits and –

**Doyle:** Did he go duck hunting right along the barrier beach there, or out on the pond?

**Hutchins:** Out on the pond, in the pond. And he'd go out deep sea fishing. We always went out the breachway; we always had a boat. My mother used to go out with Lyle Burdick. And Thanksgiving time they'd be swimming, 'cause the water was warm -- In fact it was the only time it really did get warm.

**Doyle:** Was this ocean swimming or --?

**Hutchins:** Ocean. Ocean swimming and she'd go out in the bay -- the ocean.

**Doyle:** What was the boat like that he had?

**Hutchins:** Just a plain old wooden twenty-foot boat, you know. That was it, with oars. There was no outboard; it was oars.

**Doyle:** You didn't have to go out with somebody else.

**Hutchins:** No; we took our own stuff out to go fishing. We had a good life. And of course Dad, he put a lot of the mosquito trenches in during the Depression; that was in '33. I was born in '33 during the Depression, and work was very difficult even though he was a cabinet maker, a carpenter by trade. And he was one of the men that dug the mosquito ditches down there in Quonnie.

**Doyle:** In the pond, you mean --

**Hutchins:** On the pond side. These are trenches that are dug-- and there may still be some around, I don't know. But they were pretty well destroyed and filled in after the Hurricane. But we used to walk them, too and go crabbing; that's where the crabs were, and blue-shell crabs --

**Doyle:** Now, can you describe the mosquito trenches, because I've seen an aerial photograph; and you can -- there are hints of these trenches.

**Hutchins:** They look like walkways in the water, actually; and they're not too wide -- maybe eighteen, two-foot wide.

**Doyle:** So you could actually walk down the trenches.

**Hutchins:** We could walk down the trenches. Yeah.

**Doyle:** They were in the marsh area?

**Hutchins:** In the marsh; and they were kind of mucky. You know, you put your foot in and say ugh—sucks in ---and pull your foot back out again.

**Doyle:** At high tide, didn't they fill in though?

**Hutchins:** Yes; oh yeah. There were only certain times you'd be able to go in there. I suppose that's why they sprayed the larvae. That's why they called them mosquito trenches. So the mosquitoes would lay their eggs there. Because it would be almost like standing water; there wouldn't be a big influx of a lot of warm flow in the trenches. It would be more shallow.

**Doyle:** So it was to get the mosquitoes—

**Hutchins:** And then spray them. Yeah.

**Doyle:** I see. And he actually was involved in digging them.

**Hutchins:** It was CC boys; the summer boys that did it—he was part of that crew.

**Doyle:** Do you remember him doing that?

**Hutchins:** No. I remember him telling us about it, but it was just when I was born; the only thing I remember is the Hurricane. And I can remember about the family, friends; and they'd go out in the old breachway, and we'd go across over to Jeanette and Colby Crandall's house. And—

**Doyle:** Where was --that was --?

**Hutchins:** On the pond, it was across—not too far from us-- there was a jetty of land, and in my mind's eye I would just see this jetty of land. And a house and they had a big diving board we used to go diving off—I didn't but my parents went diving off into the pond side; it was actually an extension of the breachway. And it was pretty deep.

**Doyle:** So, in other words, the Crandalls': this was not on your little piece of--

**Hutchins:** No; it was across from the [little] islands that went around. That would be land that would stick out around. And I don't really remember too much other than that they were there. And Jeanette was the one that ran Martha's Grove Gift Shop on Route One. And that's where her son Henry now has his -- Henry's market and fruit stand.

**Doyle:** Oh, I see!

**Hutchins:** And her house is still there.

**Doyle:** Now, did you also remember going on the other side of the breachway; like Mother Brindley's and—

**Hutchins:** Oh yes! Oh that was a treat! Yeah. There was a rope at the trolley, and you'd take this rope and secure it with a rock to your boat and pull yourself across the breachway, and go to the other side and secure your boat. And you'd go to Mother Brindley's and have ice cream. [Laughter] And I guess we did some visiting, too. The Pendletons were on our side, and we used to visit them, and Albert and Clifford and Margie –

**Doyle:** Did they live right on the –

**Hutchins:** They were on the ocean side.

**Doyle:** On the ocean side –is there something remaining there now?

**Hutchins:** Yes; Albert's house is still there. Albert Pendleton's house is still there, in Quonochontaug on the ocean side of the old road. It's on the eastern side of the breachway.

**Doyle:** OK; maybe sometime we could –

**Hutchins:** We could even do it today – it would be kind of fun! [laughter]

**Doyle:** Do you remember the King cottage at all?

**Hutchins:** No; I don't.

**Doyle:** Mrs. King brought in boarders. I mean -- obviously there were a lot of hotels around there –

**Hutchins:** Oh! Oh, yeah. OK. I can remember the big buildings. Some of the places are still there. Of course, they've made them about thirty foot high; you know they put two stories on these places and built them up. And a lot of the homes were originally homes. And one of them is where the Marguerite Hotel was, where the Nuns have their retreats – that's an original place.

**Doyle:** I remember it as the Quonnie Inn.

**Hutchins:** There's two or three others that I couldn't tell you who owned them.

**Doyle:** Now what about the families that lived on your stretch of land there, from the Coast Guard Station west?

**Hutchins:** Their names? Well, there was Charlie Larkin and his wife, and Lucille xxx Bliven, and Jack Johnson, xxx Pendleton, and my grandfather Bill Pendleton, and Frank and Eva Potter, and of course my parents. And I understand Ann Greene had a place down there too; her husband's name was Ernie, but I don't remember that. In fact, how I remember these people -- I'll be honest--[was when I] got to go to the picnics, where there was always something going on. The Fourth of July we had fireworks on the beach. As kids we used to walk up the beach with the shrubs, and there'd beach plums—always, oh yeah, lots of beach plums – and my mother used to make jelly. And then blueberry bushes: all the berry bushes on the dunes; great fun. And we'd get up to the top of the dunes, and we had a sandy path that took us down to the ocean. And of course us kids would be in our bathing suits; and we'd sit down on our behinds, and we'd slide down on the sandy path. That was a big –

**Doyle:** xxxxx worry about!

**Hutchins:** There's nothing there! It's absolutely all gone. All gone. There's nothing there.

**Doyle:** All gone. Is that because of the Hurricane?

**Hutchins:** Well, the beach buggies, or the erosion that's happened through the years; and not really being protected. They put in grass and trees and tried to protect it, but through the storms every five or ten years, it's really taken down. When I was up here a couple of years ago, I couldn't believe: there was no dunes at all. Just a very little left, and that's inside the breachway.

**Doyle:** There's a little hill –

**Hutchins:** That's it – that section right there.

**Doyle:** Um hum.

**Hutchins:** Well, the Beach Buggy Association had a lot there, and then you saw October. It's too bad. But it's not all their fault; it's just because of Nature's work.

**Doyle:** [Agreeing] Also the ocean is – where the foundation has been exposed, of the Coast Guard Station, it's much nearer the water.

**Hutchins:** Oh yeah; that was a big -- you could go a long way out. You could walk out into the water a long way without it dropping off. But through the years it's really taken its toll. Oh, it's unbelievable.

**Doyle:** Yeah. I've often wondered why the Coast Guard Station -- they put their boats out on the breachway side, didn't they. And then they went around into the ocean ---

**Hutchins:** Yes, into the ocean. Yes.

**Doyle:** I don't know -- that surprises me. -- I don't understand why they wouldn't want to go directly—

**Hutchins:** Well, you can see here; this was the pond side of the Coast Guard Station, and there was a ramp for them to take the boats, the life-saving boat out. And they'd go out into the breachway. And I think if things got pretty bad, that they probably went down into the surf, because that was open in front, of the Coast Guard Station.

**Doyle:** You mean it was open to the ocean?

**Hutchins:** Right.

**Doyle:** It was? See I was trying to figure out why --xxxx

**Hutchins:** Yeah. It was -- and that's why the water went through it so quickly [during the '38 Hurricane?].

**Doyle:** I see.

**Hutchins:** It didn't really take it down; it just went right through the building.

**Doyle:** OK.

**Hutchins:** But I have no idea when that was *taken* down.

**Doyle:** Now, did you remember going down to the life-saving station?

**Hutchins:** Oh yes. We'd go down xxxx. I'm sure.

**Doyle:** And the crew would talk to you?

**Hutchins:** Yeah, yeah.

**Doyle:** Do you remember if they did any rescues, before the Hurricane?

**Hutchins:** No; I don't, really, No. I was too little. And from all those stories -- I assume there probably were some done.

**Doyle:** Oh yes; that's why it was built to begin with, I think. It was built before 1900.

**Hutchins:** Yeah; it was on a long strip of land. If anybody was in trouble –that breachway--even to this day is--unless you know where you are going, you can really get into trouble; you can tip over, go bottoms up. And I can remember my dad saying you have to count the waves. It seems like he said it was the seventh wave: that's when we'd gun the boat and we came in, on that wave, into the breachway. We'd stay outside in the ocean, and he'd count the waves; and 'course I wanted to be making some trips with him, and I'd be petrified. And he'd count the waves.

**Doyle:** Did you wear life jackets? Every time?

**Hutchins:** Oh yes. Life jackets, yes. And a certain number of waves, that's the way you'd come-- you'd gun the motor and you'd come on into the breachway, just like xxxxx. And the sand was always, always changing. So the -- well, what do I want to say---

**Doyle:** Navigation wise -- you couldn't really tell then --

**Hutchins:** Just where the inlet was, yeah, 'cause it would change. It would constantly change.

**Doyle:** So you're life at that point, the first five years of your life there, was spent mainly with those people that lived around you, and with your relatives--

**Hutchins:** And we had relatives in Westerly that we'd go visit all the time, and --

**Doyle:** You had a car?

**Hutchins:** Yes. Oh yes. Xxx Well, Dad had an old car. That was the car, back there.

**Doyle:** Yeah, that's xxx. For some reason, it seems like you wouldn't really need a car when you lived down there!

**Hutchins:** We had to have a car to go grocery shopping! Here it is right here.

**Doyle:** Oh yes. . . Now, did you also have a garden? Plants?

**Hutchins:** Oh sure. We had a vegetable garden, we had a lot of flowers, daylilies, roses-- oh sure. Mother did a lot of canning, with an old boiler, charcoal boilers, which my sister has one of them and my daughter has the other one now. ( I'm trying to find another picture of the car --I don't have it.)

**Doyle:** Is your brother older or younger than you are?



**Hutchins:** I'm the oldest. And Billy was 14 months younger than I; he was born in '34. And I have a brother and sister: the twins were born seven years after me, in 1940. My sister lives in Connecticut, and both of my brothers lived in the State of Washington, near Spokane, now.

**Doyle:** Do you-can we get into the Hurricane time period? Or is there anything else you want to add as far as stories before the Hurricane?

**Hutchins:** Well, the only really bad trouble I ever got into was going out and buying xxx a pair of boots. And she said I was free to wander around the yard. Of course she always looked out the kitchen window after me. All of a sudden I heard her yap, "Xxxx where do you think you're going?" And I said, "Sorry Mom--I've got my boots on." Of course I'm out by the rowboats; and the water is over my boots, and they're full of water! And one time we had rabbits, and our toys were clam shells, and we had toys; but, you know, we just --got along. We didn't need material things, and we didn't have too much of material things. And I was playing house with my brother, and my mother comes out there to see what I'm doing; and he's about choking to death 'cause I filled his mouth with rabbit droppings. [laughter] And that was the end of my playing with clam shells. [laughter] But as soon as I xxxx, the pictures –

**Doyle:** But you survived that!

**Hutchins:** We survived, yeah. But we were in our bathin' suits-- and never were out of them, really. And then my grandfather had this old car, that had what they called a rumble seat in the back; and he'd come down and pick us kids up and take us up to Dunn's Corners Filling Station to get a ten-cent ice cream cone. And that would be our Sunday treat.

**Doyle:** That would be the outing.

**Hutchins:** Yes. Wonderful! Then we've got this other picture here, with a wicker doll carriage; and then my little brother, he had a little toy box there, and that was always a grand time. [Looking at another picture] See, here's the land here, too, in back of --this is--the little inlets here, from the old breach. There was quite a bit of land. I see that it just got completely destroyed from the Hurricane.

**Doyle:** [I don't know what that is--]

**Hutchins:** Some kind of a pole. Probably a power pole. Well, we had good neighbors, good times; and you know, our parents were happy.

**Doyle:** And it was a time when people really were dependent on one another.

**Hutchins:** Exactly. There was a couple called Bill and Lucy Clarke; they lived in Westerly. And he was quite a sportsman too, as well as my father. And they would come down with bows and arrows, and they would do target practice down on the beach. And you can see, [in] these pictures, how deep the beach is—that's the dunes, way up there. And xxxx--

**Doyle:** Would they hunt with the bow and arrow?

**Hutchins:** Yes.

**Doyle:** And what would they hunt for?

**Hutchins:** Deer.

**Doyle:** Were there deer right there?

**Hutchins:** No; no. But they would do target practice.

**Doyle:** That's a very good picture.

**Hutchins:** Look at the bathin' suits! They were gorgeous – we wouldn't get caught in them today! See, that's Ruthie, too. She's –

**Doyle:** And that's the Clarks?

**Hutchins:** Yeah. That's the Clarks. And the gang—they were around a lot. Of course my father's parents were always there – weekend picnics! They'd always come down; they'd built a little lean-to, with a canvas. There was three walls, with a shed roof, and a canvas on the front. They'd have it with poles. And if it was a cool day, that's where you'd gather for your meal. And then you'd come to the beach and sit in the sun.

**Doyle:** Now, your other grandparents lived –

**Hutchins:** My mother's parents lived quite near us. Yes. And he was a blacksmith in Westerly at the time. My mother's father.

**Doyle:** And he was a Pendleton.

**Hutchins:** Pendleton, Pendleton; yeah.

**Doyle:** Ok. Now, what are your memories of the Hurricane?

**Hutchins:** Well, like I said, the outhouse going over. And then, my parents – I can feel some excitement. And water –we had a front porch, and water coming up to the front porch. And water covered the road. And I can remember them making preparations, and taking my clothes and tying

them up in a blanket and burying them in the sand, so they wouldn't get washed away. 'Cause they had no idea what was going on. There was no warning about the storm.

And Dad saw the animals headed for the dunes, so he felt that that's what we should do. He had a boat, and he tried to get in the boat to get us out of there. But it was just him, to take care of the boat; and he didn't want to do that: there was too much water racin' around on the pond side. So the only thing next we could do --there was no way you could get out and walk the road, because we were at the whole end of that roadway-- So, he said, because the animals were headed for the trees, that's what we were going to have to do. And I can remember him, my parents wrapping us up in what we called Indian blankets, they were Indian prints, cotton blankets. Xxxx cold; of course this was in September xxx. And walking -- my dad carrying me; my mother had my brother. And we walked out of the front door into water, and walked up to the dunes and clung to the trees. But I can remember it raining, and a lot of water. And my dad always told the story that the ground was pulsating. And the waves would hit the dunes and fly up over us and not come down the dune, to wash us away.

And there was people that went across the pond on rooftops. And there really weren't too -- some people might have been away for that day, too-- they weren't at the cottages, because this was September and they probably had a second home. I don't know what their lifestyle was.

**Doyle:** Do you remember seeing any of the houses going across --

**Hutchins:** No; no. I don't remember that at all, because it was dark and at night, and we slept. In the blankets, we slept. And my parents hung on to us. And my grandmother was with me. And Lucy Bliven was with us at the time; I don't know where her husband was. My grandfather, Bill Pendleton, came down, tried to get down to us, to get us. And he got as far as Weekapaug Inn; and a breachway had cut across the barrier into the pond near Weekapaug Inn. And his car inadvertently got washed into the pond, and he realized there was no way he could get to us. So he turned around and walked back to Dunn's Corners, to try to get help. And of course he couldn't; there was nothing he could do. So we stayed there all night long. And the next morning, so I was told, we walked to my father's parents' place on Tower Street. And people didn't pick us up because we were pretty grubby looking -- characters who'd been on that beach bank all night long.

**Doyle:** You mean people would go by and --

**Hutchins:** They didn't know us, you know. It was really bad at the beach, not so much in town. A lot of wind damage in town, a lot of trees in Wilcox Park went down. But that's to the best of my memories.

**Doyle:** Do you remember anything that your parents said after it was over, when --you know-- how they were feeling--?

**Hutchins:** Well, people were surprised to see us because according to the paper, we were listed as missing and/or dead. And people were shocked to see my mother – and they'd give her a hug: "Oh Bertha, you're alive, you're alive." They didn't realize that she was still around; they thought that we were all gone. But we managed to get through it.

And among the stories my mother always liked to tell: [There] was this clock that was one of their wedding presents; it was a wind-up clock. And my daughter has it now; it still works!

**Doyle:** From your house?

**Hutchins:** From the house. And it was up on a shelf; never fell off the shelf and never got damaged. And it still works. And that clock is a hundred years old, over a hundred years old. It's amazing.

**Doyle:** Yes. Was there anything else in the house that --?

**Hutchins:** I imagine there was, yes.

**Doyle:** 'Cause it looks like it was fairly intact. It was a house xxxx –

**Hutchins:** The thing that saved the house was –the water floated up, but the power lines kept it from going in the pond. It just went up to the foot of the dunes; and that's really what saved it, was protected by the dunes. If it hadn't been for the dunes, we wouldn't be here. Really.

**Doyle:** Did you have a radio? In the house, do you remember? I mean were there reports coming over –

**Hutchins:** I remember saying that there weren't any reports; we had no idea what was going on.

**Doyle:** It just happened all so fast.

**Hutchins:** 'Cause I don't remember my parents' saying anything about it. You know, I was too young to realize what was happening.

**Doyle:** Did it affect your parents in the sense that they didn't want to go back?

**Hutchins:** Oh no; we went back! We drove back a lot of times, for picnics on the beach 'cause we still owned the land. We still owned the land. Eventually, before they passed away, they sold it to that couple, people from Connecticut; and they built a little place on it. If I remember correctly, their last name was Murowski. And they had a lot of good summers down there. Whether it's still standing, I don't ---

**Doyle:** I was going to ask you—

**Hutchins:** I don't think it is; I don't think the little house is still there. Whether they still own it or they passed away, I have no idea. And my dad had another piece of land—and he never could find it. But eventually in a few years I discovered it was under water; it was part of the pond. That's long gone, long gone. Then the state was here to find out who owned land to put the new breachway in, and my father still owned property there but couldn't find it; but come to find out eventually it was part of the pond.

**Doyle:** So was that--in essence—like he didn't have the land?

**Hutchins:** Really didn't own the land, no.

**Doyle:** There was no way of compensating him for it –

**Hutchins:** No; no. Now, I can remember having paper houses to play with and paper dolls. And my mother, she always played the radio, she always had a canary, and she always used to sing. And my father would whistle. They were happy people there. That's where they started housekeeping; and the only thing that took that life away from them was the '38 Hurricane.

And from there we went and stayed with my father's aunt and uncle, xxx and Sophie Burdick, off Route One at Dunn's Corners. And from there we went to a place called the Point, Whit Farm, off of Route One across from xxxx. And it was after that, when the breachway was filled in, that the Hurricane had made by Weekapaug Inn, that it grew, and George Champlin took the [our beach] house out by trailer and truck and moved it to the Old Woody Hill Road at Dunn's Corners. And [we were there] for two years, the end of '38 and part of '39--- and then the house was xxxx by a couple by the name of Stein. And they haven't changed it through the years. My father put an addition on it. And when you'd get a really damp, rainy, cold day, you could smell the Hurricane mucky smell that was impregnated into the wood.

**Doyle:** Now, you went to school once you—

**Hutchins:** Yes, Westerly –the old Coy Hill School, on Franklin Street in Westerly. There’s Burger King and McDonald’s sits there now– that was before your time!

**Doyle:** Yeah!

**Hutchins:** Ah –schools long ago! A cute story: David Greene, which was Ed Greene’s son – he was—my first day of school, for the first grade, it was his first day of school in the sixth grade. And I was a little upset because I didn’t know where I was supposed to be. And he took me by the hand – and escorted me to [laughter and comments by Doyle]—Oh yeah, this was when we lived at Dunn’s Corners – Woody Hill Road – and he took me to my classroom. That was his father that moved our home and was very helpful. We turned out to be very dear friends through the years.

**Doyle:** Now is he still –

**Hutchins:** Yes; he’s still living in his home.

**Doyle:** Right in Westerly?

**Hutchins:** Mm hm. Mm hm. [Doyle Whispering] I never hear. I should be ashamed of that. [Laughter] And his sister, Shirley, too –she – I don’t know where Shirley’s living now, but they had a place right there at Dunn’s Corners, too. Shirley worked at the filling station for years. She was a clerk.

**Doyle:** The filling station was owned by –which family?

**Hutchins:** Ed Greene. Ed Greene.

**Doyle:** Ed Greene—all right.

**Hutchins:** And his brother --With his brother, or his cousin: Charlie Greene had Charlie’s Sandwich Shop there on Route One, across from where Chickadee Cupboard was. Chickadee Cupboard used to be Crossroads, and that’s where I had my first waitressing job. Gencarelli found it for me when I was in high school, my senior year back in 19--.

**[TO SIDE TWO]**

**Hutchins:** I worked after school, and I went to work like say 6:00 at night, after supper; and I worked till they closed, 10:00 or 11:00. And I used to walk home. Or my bicycle. At night. And for a mile and a half, with never any problems.

**Doyle:** Yeah; you never had to think about it.

**Hutchins:** Never had to think about it. No; nothing to be afraid of.

**Doyle:** And that's changed. Now, where did you meet your husband? Do you want to –

**Hutchins:** Oh yeah! We used to [belong to the] Grange, and that's how I -- Quonochontaug Grange; and my father was on the Executive Board, and my mother was in charge of Homemakers. And my brother and I were on the Youth Committee. And my brother and I used to sing and participate in the variety shows; and we sang western –country western-- music in high school, in all the variety shows the school had. And we even sang on WERI one time. And I still sing in the choir at the local church, you know, do solos and stuff like that.

**Doyle:** Do you want to sing a song for me? [Laughter]

**Hutchins:** But Bob and his family were members of the Grange, and they used to have barn dances, in the East and West Farms at the head of West Beach Road. And Bob's brothers xxx before they put the hay in the barn, they always had a barn dance. And that's how I got to meet Bob. And come to find out Gibby and Jean and Phylis Burdick, and my husband, his family, and my family and myself, my brother – we used to congregate together, mostly at Elsie and – oh golly I can't think of her husband's name – Burdick anyway, the Burdicks' home –which is up in back of where the Four Seasons was (that house is still there, too). We used to meet there and play together as kids. So I knew Bob for a long time. But we just, you know, kind of came and went, till finally he joined the service. And this one day I decided to write him a letter, and I sent him a box of chocolate chip cookies.

**Doyle:** That did it! [Laughter]

**Hutchins:** That did it, I guess. Yeah, he said, "If she's not married, I come out of the service, I'm going to marry her." And that's what happened; we were married two years after he got out of the service. We had 44 years together, and he passed away December 31, 1998. Right beside me -- he went to sleep right beside me: Lou Gehrig's disease. So we had 44 wonderful years. But as kids, we didn't really realize – we were playmates as kids till we —but we were good friends. We ---the whole bunch of us-- we're all still friends today. That's why I came back to Charlestown after he died. Real golden friends. And we were down to Florida, we tried it in Florida for four years, and when he got sick-- before he passed away-- he [wanted] me to come back, and that's exactly what I did.

**Doyle:** Now that you're back, you feel it's been the right thing to do.  
**Hutchins:** Oh, it's been perfect; everything was xxxxx; and everything has fallen into place. Everything I did, every move I made, and there was a reason behind it.

**Doyle:** And you're surrounded by people that mean so much to you.

**Hutchins:** Oh, they've been very helpful, very helpful.

But you know, years after the Hurricane, we'd go down, and my dad always liked to watch high tide. And he always like to go watch the waves when there was a thunderstorm or a nor'easter—he loved to go down and watch the waves. Of course we'd all pile in the car, and down we'd go. And the minute we got near the water, I was went on this cryin' spree – because I was so scared of the water; and it was years – I had nightmares. And then once I discovered – I would see all these-- I'd see water, I'd see stone walls, I'd see certain things. And once I discovered where these places were that I'd been dreaming about, the dreams stopped. I also realized – I've been there; and then I'd see that area I was dreaming about. That was the end of my dreams. That was a lot of years before I really got rid of the nightmares.

**Doyle:** But, it really was a good thing for you to go back –

**Hutchins:** Right, right.

**Doyle:** In order to resolve –

**Hutchins:** Yeah to resolve it. That's right. Exactly.

**Doyle:** Do you enjoy, now, a walk on the beach –

**Hutchins:** Oh I love to go down in the fall– when the snow birds have gone back, when it's quiet I love to go pattin' around the edge; I love to go out on the pond and go clamming, but I don't get above my knees. That's as far as I go. My brother (he was fourteen months younger than I) didn't seem to be too traumatized by it; he was too little to really remember. A lot of the things I remember are the stories my parents always used to tell, because it was quite an experience.

**Doyle:** Oh yes, I mean that's –you can tell now, when I talk to people, it's one of the most outstanding memories that they have.

**Hutchins:** It was one of the worst hurricanes. And in 1954 hurricane Carol struck; and Bob and I, that was the year we got married. And we were just



building our house. On West Beach Road. And we were 15 feet above sea level, where it was situated. And I tried to get down the road and I finally got [shot at]: there was a guy standing at the top of the road. “You can’t go down there.” I didn’t realize that the military was there. You had to have a permit to go down the road.

**Doyle:** You weren’t trying to go down to the beach!

**Hutchins:** I xxxx, to check on the house to make sure things were all right. I wanted to go check on the house.

**Doyle:** Oh, oh; I thought you were coming –

**Hutchins:** This was after the hurricane was over; and I was working in Ashaway.

**Doyle:** I was down at the beach the whole time in the hurricane!

**Hutchins:** Oh were you? Whereabouts?

**Doyle:** We were on Neptune Avenue.

**Hutchins:** Oh – in ’54?

**Doyle:** ’54.

**Hutchins:** How about that! How early?

**Doyle:** Yeah; we never left. I was [a child?]-like I’m -- I don’t know.

**Hutchins:** They put the guard there! They do now, they do now! They make you get out; they nearly made us move out one time. I couldn’t understand it—

**Doyle:** They asked you to leave your house –?

**Hutchins:** Well, we were just building our house, in ’54. We were just building it; and I wanted to go down and check on it, make sure it was all right.

**Doyle:** Oh, I see. I see. I understand

**Hutchins:** And I didn’t realize why this fellow in a uniform with a gun [laughter]- he tried to stop me, and I thought he was wavin’. So I just waved at him and down the road, I went, and he starts running down the road, with a gun -he scared me. And he said I’m going to have to shoot you if you don’t come back! And I had to come back up and park on the main road, and wait. It was Dick Currie, though he was gone; he was givin’ out the permits. They ran out of permits -- And I had to wait for Dick to come back to give me

my permit so I could go down and check on the house. It was OK, anyway, and um –we had our wedding date set. I can remember when Carol ['54 hurricane] hit [August 31]. We were married October 2. And, Bob said, you know, “We’re not going to get married till this house is finished.” Well, we finished it just the week before we got married--yeah. [Laughter] But people -- relatives of mine, just a short distance -- down the road from us--in fact their homes are still there—water came from the pond and went through their house at my shoulder height. I’m five foot one, so it was about four foot, the water height that went through those two homes.

**Doyle:** Now who were the relatives that lived down –

**Hutchins:** That’s John and Laura Burdick.

**Doyle:** OK. And did they live right on West Beach Road?

**Hutchins:** Right; yes, just below us. On the right-hand side, where the pond kind of like—

**Doyle:** And their place is still there –

**Hutchins:** It’s still there. Yeah.

**Doyle:** I’d love to – these are the things I’d like to –

**Hutchins:** That property’s turned over, and the people -- it’s been changed.

**Doyle:** Uh huh. Yeah. Dick is going to take me around and –

**Hutchins:** Oh you can do that.

**Doyle:** You know, it talking about it, I still don’t—I need to see it. And I need to really make it stick in my head. So –

**[Static on tape; change of subject]**

**Hutchins:** We, um – xxx relatives and friends that came down and helped us salvage and pull off the beach anything that got washed away that belonged to somebody– we’d collect.

**Doyle:** And the missing pieces of your house?

**Hutchins:** No; xxxx everything—

**Doyle:** But I mean, wasn’t something put into Mystic Seaport?

**Hutchins:** Oh, that was the house on Tower Street.

**Doyle:** Oh.

**Hutchins:** My grandparents' home in Westerly, when it was demolished.  
[Looking at hurricane photos] You can see where the water –everything just got -- this was all good land, that just washed away. Just washed away.

**Doyle:** I'm surprised that it's still there.

**Hutchins:** Right. Yeah. [Looking at photo] Yeah, that's the house. I couldn't remember-- I wanted to make sure. And afterwards the Red Cross supplied us with blankets and clothes and foods and stuff. So—

**Doyle:** Now your -- the house was—?

**Hutchins:** Right over here, 'cause this is the garden here; it showed-- we took beach stones and edged the garden, and the trees, you know. See, the water's still high here, when these pictures were taken. See the power poles there, that's the power poles, the old fashioned poles with the cross arms and the insulators, the glass insulators.

**Doyle:** Now, these look like large homes down here—!

**Hutchins:** They are. They are. Yeah. It's too bad, I don't have pictures of them when they were standing. I really don't. See that really didn't go over, but it's moved; it's moved. We just had a front porch off of that –

**Doyle:** Oh, where was --? -The porch, the front porch –

**Hutchins:** This is the front door, here—

**Doyle:** Going out,—

**Hutchins:** Face the ocean –

**Doyle:** Face the dunes—

**Hutchins:** Right; yeah. Face the dunes.

**Doyle:** Yeah, uh huh.

**Hutchins:** Now here's Redwood; it really held up good.

**Doyle:** It did. Very well.

**Hutchins:** They put shingles over it when they moved it up to the Woody Hill road, and added a kitchen on to it. That's the kitchen my grandmother sittin' and lookin' out the window.

**Doyle:** It sounds from the way you talk that your parents were the type of people that—I mean they weren't overcome by the—they just picked up and they moved on—

**Hutchins:** Oh no; [they weren't overwhelmed] Yeah; that's right. They said, get on with your life. xxx This was back in 1942. And you can see that's quite—see how low this gets, here. This is where I xxx, here. With a woodpecker on the door knocker. And here's Dutch—And that's my brother and sister, there. That's Dutch's picture right here—

**Doyle:** Is this you with your doll carriage here?

**Hutchins:** Yeah. Don't know whatever happened to that. This is xxxx John; he's living in Florida now; his two sisters have passed away. That's his father.

**Doyle:** And he's a Burdick.

**Hutchins:** Yeah. ...Nick Gavitt and Johnny Burdick in the service. We farmed there; we had a small farm.

**Doyle:** At Woody Hill?

**Hutchins:** Yeah; at Woody Hill. We always had a cow; and we had geese, ducks, pigs—big gardens.

**Doyle:** Now, when you were at Quonnie did you also ha-- I know you had ducks, rabbits—

**Hutchins:** Just ducks and geese, and rabbits; that was it. Now this is back in '46, and this is looking toward the pond, pond side; there's still a lot of land there, 'cause it's still the old inlet. And this is in back of—this is right where we used to live, 'cause we used to go down there with the car. In those days, we could drive the car down. And sometimes we went on the Charlestown side of the breachway and took a boat across. It would take two or three trips to get everything over there between our picnic and our xxx bathing suits and stuff. These are all my cousins.

**Doyle:** Do you still have family gatherings now? Do you get to—

**Hutchins:** No; there's nobody at all. No; a few on my husband's side, my husband's side. That's the house the way it looks now; there's the grape arbor. It's all pretty -- Xxxx in the yard. xxx He was maintenance man at Westerly Hospital for 25 years.

**Doyle:** Your father?

**Hutchins:** My father, yeah. And this is when he retired to Nova Scotia in '64. And Bill Schilke, Jimmy Clacherie, and Pete Petrillo. Not Pete; Pete was his brother. Pete's passed away, too. They're all gone.

**Doyle:** Why did they choose to go to Nova Scotia?

**Hutchins:** They had friends, ex-school teachers in Westerly; and they were friends, the Comtrés, lived in Watch Hill. And he taught an xxx class at Westerly High School. And they invited them up for vacation, up to their – they had a house in Nova Scotia, in Ingemont. So they loved it so much they decided to buy this old farmhouse. And they did. And fixed it up.

**Doyle:** So they left a lot of friends and family –

**Hutchins:** Oh yeah; but my mother had cancer then, and we didn't expect her to live too long. And needless to say my father passed away first, in Nova Scotia, and that's where they're buried. He died there, that's what they wanted: to be buried wherever they were at when they passed away. And that was in '75 and '76, respectively, they passed away and that's where they're buried. They had a good life up there, wonderful neighbors. They would come down in the winter time, and come to our home for a short visit on the way to Florida. And they sometimes spent a couple of months in Florida and then back to Nova Scotia. Up and down the coast, and they went across Canada.

**Hutchins:** That's my husband, here. My brother's wife, my sister. Robert was in the service; he was xxx that's me, my sister's husband.

**Doyle:** But where are you? OK –

**Hutchins:** –And my two kids --

**END OF CONVERSATION**

