

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

SISTER PATRICIA CORLEY

May 21, 2023

Interviewed by Steve Young in Charlestown

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Q: It's May 21st, 2023. I am Steven Young of the Quonochontaug Historical Society, and I'm here to interview Sister Patricia Corley today, who has been associated with the Nun's House for almost 60 years. And we want to capture her knowledge of the Nun's House. And, Sister, before we start, do I have your permission to film and record this interview?

A: Yes, you do.

Q: And I mentioned to you that this is going to be part of a presentation in July at the Grange to people interested in Quonochontaug history. And do we have permission to use the film and the recording, or portions of it for that educational program?

A: And I'm glad you mentioned the word educational. Yes. It absolutely does—yes, I give my consent, particularly because of its educational purpose.

Q: Yes. And then for future people who are interested in history, we need to make it available on our website, the Quonochontaug Historical Society website, for, again, educational purposes and people who are interested in Quonochontaug history, we always capture our presentations so they can be checked out by people who are interested in the future. Do I have your permission for putting it on our website?

A: Yes, you do.

Q: Okay. Great. So, let's start. Sister, tell us a little bit about your background, where you were born and when you joined the sisters.

A: Okay. I was born in New York City in the Bronx. I went to high school in Manhattan, St. Jean Baptiste. And that's where I first met the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame. When I graduated, I worked for the telephone company, and then entered the

congregation one year later at a mission that was out in the Midwest. I was there for two years, and then came to a college on Staten Island for two more years. I was then sent here to Providence to teach at St. Mary's School Academy of the Visitation in Providence.

Q: What year are we up to now?

A: We're up to 1964/'65. That's correct: '64/'65. And that is the year that I came down here when the congregation was considering purchasing the Quonochontaug Inn.

Q: And you were one of the most junior sisters at that time, correct? How did you get to be in the room where it was happening?

A: Well, I was indeed the most junior sister. But the fact of the matter is that I was the only sister available in Providence who drove. We didn't have cars, and nobody drove. But because I had been working before I entered, I did have a car, and I did drive.

Q: And at that time I believe Mr. Lewis had passed away, had he not?

A: Yes. I believe so.

Q: And Dorothy Shanley-Lewis owned the Quonochontaug Inn?

A: Yes.

Q: The Quonochontaug Inn was vacant for a number of years.

A: I believe that it was. Yes. Because it was simply more than she wanted to handle without her husband.

Q: I know the Lewises took over the property in 1946 and ran it as an inn for many years well into the '50s. Do you have any estimate of when they stopped using it?

A: No, I really don't.

Q: But at least a few years before 1965?

A: A few years. Actually, they just stopped and left, because the building was totally furnished. It was like they had left the weekend before.

Q: How many trips did you help facilitate during the negotiations when the order was considering buying the property?

A: Only that one trip. And it was Columbus Day weekend 1964. The superiors from each of the houses in Providence came down. The provincial of the congregation came up. Our headquarters were in Connecticut. She came up. They all toured the house. They

had their little high-level conversation on the porch. This is like a motto for me about Quonnie: at one point the provincial—she’s the leader of all the sisters in the United States, our sisters—she’s standing looking out at the ocean, and she just turns around and says, “Sisters, in the middle of winter, remember Quonnie.” So, we knew she was going to go ahead and do whatever had to be done, like find the money to purchase. And that was Columbus Day weekend.

Q: Did a realtor show you the property, or was it just you and Mrs. Lewis?

A: I don’t believe that there was a realtor. Mrs. Lewis certainly. And the pastor of St. Vincent in Bradford, who knew the sisters from Providence, and knew Mrs. Lewis from here. So, he was the go between that suggested and that was with her that day. I believe he was with her. He was certainly the source of the information.

Q: The Columbus Day weekend that you came up, did you tour the building from top to bottom?

A: Yes.

Q: What type of condition was it in?

A: Actually, it was 1964, so it was in top-notch condition. If I were to tour the same building today, I’d have some suggestions.

Q: I noticed the legal transaction occurred in June of 1965 where the deed is recorded of Mrs. Lewis selling it to your congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

A: Congregation of Notre Dame. And the distinction is important, because there are several communities of Notre Dame sisters. Each one is slightly different.

Q: Was that Columbus Day weekend price negotiated, or did that happen later?

A: That must have happened later. The October walkthrough was simply that. It was, “Do you like it? Would it be useful to you? Would the congregation be interested?” It was that kind of a walkthrough. Somewhere after that they decided and began negotiations.

Q: Was Mrs. Lewis in favor of selling it to the congregation?

A: Yes. Mrs. Lewis was particular about the fact of wanting to sell it to a religious congregation. She apparently offered it to another group, who then didn’t want it. So, Father Eagan, Pastor of St. Vincent, suggested that she ask us.

Q: And you were able to raise the money, or you raised some of the money and took a mortgage?

A: You know, I don't know all the particulars about that. But the story goes like this: there was a pastor of St. Mary's in Providence. His name was Father Grace. He owned a house in Narragansett—a summer home in Narragansett. And his house was called Grace Haven. The sisters were often invited down. When the war started, the government took his property for some money—I don't know what. The government took his property. He had given the property to the congregation so that the congregation received the money from the government for Grace Haven. So, somewhere passed around our community, there was some money saved for the next time we were going to get a summer home. It is my understanding that that's what got used to purchase this house. That's why it's called Grace Haven 2.

Q: I also see the name Margherita Villa.

A: Villa Margherita.

Q: How did that name come into—

A: Going back to the 1600s, when they were negotiating with the Native Americans, Margaret Bourgeoys is the foundress of our community, founded in Montreal. She was born in 1620 in France. She came to Villa Marie in 1650. So, you will find a lot of our convents and schools are called Marguerite Bourgeoys. That's where the name Marguerite comes from.

Q: If I'm correct that on June 24th, 1965, Dorothy Lewis sold to the Congregation of Notre Dame. When did you occupy it? Did you occupy it that summer?

A: Oh, yes. July.

Q: How did it start off?

A: I had been transferred to New York at that point, so I don't think I was here for the first summer. I'll take it back. I was here for the first summer. It started off with a bang. Every room was filled. Sisters came from far and wide. This was like a gold mine to us. This was heaven. I was assigned to be the housekeeper for the first month, again, because I was finished with college, and I didn't have to go to summer school. And the second month I was the cook. We could have as many as 40 sisters on a Sunday, because who was leaving stayed for dinner, and who was coming came for dinner. So, it was wonderful.

Q: One thing I forgot to have you tell us is when Mrs. Lewis sold the property, she sold it lock, stock and barrel, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: And describe what you were buying besides just the brick-and-mortar building.

A: Well, if we could get into the other building, in the dining room, all of the tables and chairs are still there. A lot of the furniture in the living room is still there. Everything was in the kitchen: plates, pots, pans—everything was in the kitchen to start immediately. The beds were upstairs. I laugh about the beds that were upstairs, because, again, it's 1965, so they were metal-framed beds with wire mesh springs.

Q: Squeaky?

A: Squeaky isn't even the word. And rusty. That's what I remember—rusty. And we had to put a tar paper between the springs and the mattress. If not, during the winter, the rust would be on the mattress.

Q: How many rooms?

A: Twenty-eight bedrooms.

Q: Besides the bedrooms, there's the kitchen and the common area on the first floor.

A: And the dining room. Several years later, a bathroom was built on that floor.

Q: On the first floor?

A: Yes.

Q: When you bought it, there were 28 bedrooms, and they were all on the second floor and the third floor?

A: Second and third. Yes.

Q: What was the bathroom situation when you bought the property?

A: Two bathrooms on the second floor. Well, actually, two bathrooms on the second floor and two bathrooms on the third. There were stalls with wooden partitions. There was also a tub room on the second floor.

Q: But not on the third floor?

A: No.

Q: So, to take a bath or a shower, you used the tub on the second floor?

A: Yes.

Q: Was everything communal? Individual rooms were just rooms with a bed and a bureau?

A: And a sink. Every room had a sink.

Q: So, they were plumbed?

A: Yes.

Q: When the order moved in, you could move right in and it was all equipped?

A: It was like the convent that we were coming from. You had a room. Maybe the room had a sink. And then showers, etcetera, were more communal.

Q: How did mealtime work?

A: They worked, because at that point we were accustomed to living in large communities. And you served yourself and sat down and ate.

Q: For some of the years that you were there, there was a hired cook, was there not?

A: The more recent years to now. Yes. For the first lot many years, the sisters did their own cooking.

Q: In the 1960s, the 1970s and maybe the 1980s?

A: Could be.

Q: You did your own cooking?

A: We had a sister assigned to be the cook and a helper. Then there was a housekeeper who was a sister also.

Q: The building that we're sitting in now, the little home by the road at the foot of the driveway, was this in existence when you bought the property?

A: This building was not in existence, but a building was on this footprint. According to some of the people who have visited us, this was where some of the help slept.

Q: The help from the hotel?

A: From the hotel. Yes. Back in the day. And so, there was plumbing in the building. There was a bathroom, etcetera. But they slept here. When we first took this over, we made that entire building our chapel. That went on for many years, but I really can't tell you how many. Then it became more of a storage area, and we have a chapel in the main building. Mrs. Lewis and Father Dudack, was his name, he said mass for every day for a month, and Mrs. Lewis would come. It was in the living room.

Q: You said Mrs. Lewis built a home close by, correct?

- A: Right at the end of the road here.
- Q: At the end of the road across the street?
- A: Literally across the street. She would just have to look up the road to see the ocean.
- Q: How did she pick that spot? Did they already own the property?
- A: She wanted to see the ocean, and it had a straight-line view.
- Q: You were in Providence and New York for some of your career. Were the sisters from all over using the property in the summer?
- A: At the very beginning, we had another summer home in Connecticut, and many of the Connecticut sisters went to Milford for vacation. That did not go on for too many years. I'm not sure on the dates. And Milford was closed, and then everyone came here for vacation. But our sisters were frequently in summer school, so it wasn't always filled. We had large numbers of sisters who came from Canada, French speaking—our sisters who came. The musicians. The artists. It was wonderful. As the number of sisters declined, we opened up space for our families to come for vacation, for our associates to come for vacation, for sisters from other communities to come. So, it was always, "This is what we have, and we'd like to share it with as many people as we can fit in here."
- Q: So, the 28 bedrooms were well occupied during the summer months?
- A: Yes. Until a couple of years ago when we had to close off the third floor.
- Q: What as the season that the sisters would visit? This wasn't a twelve-month—
- A: No. Definitely not. Typically what I can remember is that the first event would begin maybe Memorial Day weekend, and the last scheduled event would be September for big numbers coming on vacation. But during the month of September, and early October, there would be other events going on. So, for example, retreats would be given. Sisters involved in campus ministry would have events for those students. Sisters who could give retreats to various groups, usually groups of women, they would give retreats during that period of time. So, before our vacations began at the beginning of July, and after Labor Day, other things went on with sisters involved using it related to their ministry.
- Q: Were most of the sisters teachers?
- A: Most of the sisters were always teachers. Not all, but most.
- Q: I saw a glint in your eye when were you talking about the Canadian sisters, and some were musicians and writers. It must have been a treat to get to know other people and other cultures.

- A: Yes. Even if, in fact, many of us did not speak the other person's language. It was a wonderful time.
- Q: Would some of the sisters perform or play their instruments?
- A: They were always out practicing the flute or singing in little groups or something. Yes.
- Q: Let's start with 1965. In those days in the summer would the sisters wear their habits?
- A: In the very beginning, and I have a picture to show you, first of all, that one is an article from the paper here.
- Q: Vacation home for nuns, and it shows two nuns pointing towards the water at Quonochontaug.
- A: That's what the first one looked like. And then there's a second one. That might have lasted our first year here. Then that for a few years after that. So, we went from this to this.
- Q: From a more formal habit to less formal with a head dress?
- A: Back in the 1600s, that's what they wore.
- Q: And this started in the late '60s?
- A: Yes. To totally casual, or professional, because we were schoolteachers. But when we were here on vacation, we changed to secular clothing completely.
- Q: 24/7?
- A: 24/7 360.
- Q: Was this picture taken in the last ten years?
- A: No. These sisters would have been among the early sisters, who came on vacation. But also I can tell that they're sisters who would have been setting the house up, getting it ready for the seasons. Maybe doing the cooking, and then vacationing. But this I can tell is a hardworking team.
- Q: You really had to roll your sleeves up and get the place ready, cleaned and opened?
- A: Right. We still do. We have a weekend where it opens, and another weekend when it closes. A lot of our associates, women and men, who are associated closely with the congregation, and are very much a part of our lives.

Q: Do you remember any conversations you had with Mrs. Lewis about her and her husband running the Quonochontaug Inn?

A: She would always stay a little bit after mass, and there would be conversations about many things. But they were both very Catholic, which is how they made the connection with the pastor. She was a devout woman, as I presume was her husband. And she and he loved it here. They loved doing this work. They loved the people. They loved being with the people who came here when they were running the hotel. So, any particular conversations I don't remember, but somewhere in there, there was information about how lucky we were. But she said how lucky she was, because it was offered first to a group of brothers, and they turned it down to our advantage, and she wasn't sorry they turned it down either.

Q: I heard a story, and tell me if it's from you, because I can't remember where I got this, that there was some relief in the community, because the property had been vacant for quite some time, and people were afraid that it was going to be sold to a commune of hippies. Did you ever hear that story?

A: I've never heard that one. And then one could kind of designate that we were the group of hippies that it got sold to. All people knew about religious life. Some people were not happy that we were here I think because there were so many of us.

Q: I've heard people say that they remember the sisters taking walks in their habits and speaking French.

A: They were the early French sisters. Yes.

Q: Other than just normal neighborhood things, was there any real contact between the sisters and the Quonochontaug community in Ashaway Colony, West Beach or Central Beach?

A: The house right next door to ours has changed ownership several times, but each time, except once, it was a lovely, lovely relationship between the folks who were there and us so much so. There was a family living there for several years. I don't know why they didn't make coffee in their own house, but they didn't. So, it could be 7:00, it could be 7:30 in the morning, and the dad would come over and get himself a cup of coffee in the dining room, and go back over. Or he'd send one of his children, who was simply come in and say, "My dad wants his cup of coffee." "Come over here," give her the cup of coffee, she goes back home. That family had young children. One of them, if not two of the girls, would come over every evening to say goodnight to the sisters, and to whoever was sitting in the living room got a kiss good night from the one or two that came over. That's how close we were with that family.

Q: So, this was the family that if you're looking out to the ocean, their house was to the right?

- A: To the right. And the original people, when we came, again, a very nice family. They had it divided. One piece of their family came up for July, and one piece came for August. Wonderful. It was like small-town USA in terms of the relationship between them and the sisters.
- Q: Tell us more about the meals. The sisters would cook for the early periods of time. What was a typical menu? Was it three meals a day?
- A: Three meals a day served, which was a little unusual and very hard. I can think only of the first year. The sister who was the cook for the first month knew how to cook, and she knew how to cook for large numbers. It was not an issue at all. We ate the way we ate in our convent. Sunday was a big deal—Sunday dinner. Other than that, it would be very ordinary fare that any family would have.
- Q: Meat and potatoes?
- A: Meat and potatoes. That was us. I think we have Italians now, so we get a few more Italian meals. But it was meat and potatoes. Fish on Friday. That kind of thing.
- Q: How would you get your supplies? Would vendors come to the house?
- A: I think the company was Sysco that delivered to big institutions. The vast majority of our food was delivered.
- Q: S-Y-S-C-O?
- A: Yes. I believe that's how you spell it.
- Q: They're still in business and still doing that.
- A: I believe they're still in business. Now we would just call up Stop & Shop and they would come and deliver, because you can't shop for that number of people. I never heard a person complain about a meal.
- Q: You would buy many quarts of milk and many boxes of cereal and many loaves of bread?
- A: Everything in abundance.
- Q: Was alcohol allowed?
- A: At the beginning, we never drank. Now it would be in the dining room somewhere. If you wanted to get a glass of wine or whatever, you would be perfectly free to do that. I will tell you a story about the cooking, though. Like I said, I was the cook for the second month. I knew nothing. I had never cooked at home.
- Q: On-the-job training?

A: You bet. So, the sister who cooked the first month was good. I worked with her. The superiors are here from who knows where, and the provincial is coming on that particular weekend. So, they're discussing what they're going to have for dinner. I'm the cook. I'm just standing there until they make their decision. Finally I said, "I don't know how to do that." And so, this one was going to do it, and that one was going to do it. Finally the sister—she had the same name I did—Corley—she looks at me and said, "Okay, we'll do this and that, and you will make the quiche." I had never heard the word. My philosophy is if you can read, you can cook, but you have to know how to spell. Quiche—I had never heard the word. So, it could be challenging. It could be daunting, but it always worked.

Q: Tell us about the sisters using the beach.

A: We used the beach. We had bathing suits. It was the 1960s. It wasn't the 1930s. But we had swimsuits. Typically it would be a swimsuit with those skirts. But most women wore the same kind of thing. We could use the beach. We usually did in the afternoons. We had more time. Last year I met a woman when I was walking around the neighborhood. She has been here that same length of time. She was a little girl when we moved in. To this day, she remembers what we were dressed like when we first came, and how we went swimming, what we looked like when we changed and when we were swimming. She told us the whole story of what we looked like, and how excited she was when she finally saw sisters in bathing suits. So, we were a novelty.

Q: A curiosity.

A: Yes. A curiosity.

Q: Did some of the sisters walk the beach in their habits in the early days?

A: Yes. I don't recall that exactly, but you didn't stay in your swimsuit the whole day. If you walked in the evening or if you were just walking—but that they would have walked the beach, yes.

Q: What other memories do you have of your 58 years at Quonochontaug?

A: Just about every year. What I remember initially, and any of our sisters would say the same thing, if you're looking back over 50 or 60 years, we were great fun when we were here. We were good fun lots of times. Not just walking around, but enjoying the beach. Swimming way, way out. This was something that a whole crowd of us used to do. We would swim way out down the beach, down the ocean and come in by the breachway, and then just walk back up on the road. Nobody does that anymore. You don't swim halfway down there. And climbing on the rocks, and investigating the remnants of the hurricane, and talking to the neighbors down there. There was a store down there at the end of the road. The pond was a great fascination. Because there were many of us, many of us who were quite young in the beginning, we had a lot of fun.

Q: Besides the meat-and-potatoes normal diet, would you ever have seafood?

A: I would imagine yes.

Q: Clams. Lobster. Swordfish. Flounder.

A: We have that every Friday now that I'm the cook. But I don't remember.

Q: Were there every any hard times where the sisters went hungry or there wasn't enough?

A: No. Never. The hard times we had was when the hurricanes came. The police came to the door, and you had to leave.

Q: Do you remember Hurricane Carol in 1954?

A: That's too early for me.

Q: Hurricane Bob?

A: Bob sounds familiar. I can remember a couple where we all had to leave the house and go up to Providence. They didn't have room enough for all of us, and so we had to figure out where we were going to live when we went back up there.

Q: Did the police say that you had to get out?

A: "You must. You cannot be here when I come back."

Q: You didn't have much warning?

A: No.

Q: And not great transportation either?

A: No. But speaking of hurricanes, there is another fascinating thing about this house, which I think you and I spoke of before. Think of what this house has been through since 1925. Think of them.

Q: And that it survived the 1938 Hurricane.

A: With barley a twig out of place. Let me think of what we had a couple years ago. Was it Sandy?

Q: Sandy.

- A: I was stationed in New York. I happened to come up that weekend and said, “Let me drive past Quonnie.” On our porch I would say a few twigs—literally twigs—had been blown off evergreens. Not even big logs. I drove over to Central Beach, construction, construction, construction. In the front door, out the back door. I could have swept off the porch what was left there.
- Q: I’ve been told that this is one of the highest points in Quonochontaug.
- A: And you can see the geological marking on the rock.
- Q: And you’ve got the biggest granite boulders in your front yard to take some of the pressure.
- A: Yes. The biblical build upon rock and not upon sand.
- Q: Do you remember having to build any walls or do any reinforcement?
- A: Not in the wall. You’ll see that the whole front of our house is a wall. I know you’ve done the research. There was a boardwalk all along there. Now, there are segments of that remaining. I don’t know which hurricane took that out, but there are segments. And then a cement wall. We put a middle fencing on top of that.
- Q: For safety?
- A: Safety. People walking, and then walking right off the wall onto the rocks. And on the stairs we put a railing, and down all of the house we put a railing.
- Q: Were there any catastrophes at the house?
- A: Broken arms. Who fell on a rock? What French sister lost her false teeth right out into the ocean? A sister actually lost her bathing suit right out into the ocean.
- Q: In a big wave?
- A: Gone. All of these actually became laughable. They’re little tragedies, but no big tragedy. That’s why we still talk about them, and we laugh.
- Q: In 1965 and on, were there any problems with building inspectors, fire inspectors or regulatory issues? Or have those only been more recent?
- A: Not that I can remember. I don’t recall. I was here the very first year. Then not for a couple of years. Then for almost a year after that. I don’t recall. One I asked them, “Why did the fire department come out here a couple of years ago?” One of the things we installed was fire alarms in the building, and frequently—I don’t mean every week, but frequently enough someone in the kitchen would cause the first alarm in the kitchen to ring.

- Q: The smoke detectors would go off?
- A: Yes. So, that's where the fire department would come out. There was never a fire of any significance. At one point, the chief finally said, "I really have to go in and take a look at that place."
- Q: Darn.
- A: Darn. It was all because the fire alarm did ring, and they came out.
- Q: You were saying what a miracle it was that this property, unlike almost every property east and west was devastated by the 1938 Hurricane, this stood like a rock. Tell me about the basement of the house.
- A: To use the word basement or cellar is a stretch of the imagination. However, there isn't another word that really describes it. The gigantic rocks that you see out front continued across the lawn before it dipped down. Those rocks are the foundation, around which wooden pillars were built. That's all. I'm going to call them two-by-fours, but I'm not smart enough to know that they were actually two-by-fours.
- Q: Big support beams for the house?
- A: Support beams. The rocks, the support beams, 100 years. That's it.
- Q: The support beams were in footings around the rocks. Were some of the support beams actually bored into that rock?
- A: I don't know the answer to that, if they were bored in. I know things were stored down there. When I say things, like jelly that had been preserved. It was stored in jars down there. That is the only thing I ever saw on crossbeams.
- Q: It's not a finished basement?
- A: Oh, my God, no.
- Q: But it's more than a crawlspace? Can you stand up down there?
- A: You can stand up in there.
- Q: Through the whole property?
- A: No. A very small portion around the giant rock. I have a picture. I'll give it to you.
- Q: Sister, one picture that I saw hanging in the dining room was of a blue house, this house being turquoise blue. Was there really a blue house, or was this the artist taking license?

- A: There really was a blue house, which made our house kind of famous in the whole area. Even the police knew and referred to us as the sisters from the blue house. It was aluminum siding that was painted blue. I don't have the exact date when that was done. Nobody liked it. The neighbors really didn't like it. We wondered why it ever got put up there given the way everything else is constructed at the oceanside. But, yes, there was a blue house.
- Q: I think you calculated for me that it was probably in the mid- to late-1980s that it was blue.
- A: Could be the '80s. I can get you an exact date.
- Q: You showed me a picture of where the siding either came off intentionally, or you shingled over it with cedar shingles.
- A: It came off with the typical Cape Cod shingles, beige, etcetera, which are now gray. It fits into the décor of the beach.
- Q: So, it's had at least three facades: its original 1925 façade, then the 1980s blue aluminum clapboard façade, and then back to the original cedar shingles?
- A: Yes.
- Q: You also shared with me this article. What is that article?
- A: This article was when the sisters first came. You can tell that by the habit that they're wearing. It was just a description of the whole process of the congregation purchasing from Mrs. Lewis, and what the sisters were planning on doing, like fishing as soon as they possibly could. Many of our sisters at that time were Rhode Islanders, and making clam chowder from scratch was a task to be done on our porch.
- Q: Was this a local newspaper, or a Providence paper?
- A: I'm guessing Westerly, but I'm not sure.
- Q: It's from the 1960s entitled "Vacation Home for Nuns".
- A: I'm guessing it's more local, because Providence wouldn't be interested.
- Q: You can figure the time because of the context, and because of the very formal habits that they were wearing them.
- A: Yes.

Q: You wanted to say something about the importance of this home to your order over the 58 years that you've been here.

A: Yes. Over the more than 50 years, one of the things that I think is critical to us having stayed here for so long, given the diminishing number of sisters, is the way we have chosen to use this house to invite in so many different categories of people. I don't want to say types of people, but categories. So, first of all, extending the invitation to our French Canadian sisters who came and vacationed here for years. Extending the invitation by our sisters giving retreats. Several of our sisters were campus ministers in the state schools here, and they came for workshops, for day retreats. There were retreats given for over 35 consecutive years to women in a twelve-step program every year, filled to capacity. Giving retreats for 35 to 40 years to our own sisters in the United States and elsewhere, and inviting in key speakers. Then our families were invited vacation with us. Then our associates were invited to vacation with us. So, that we always have not just sisters, but groups of people from mid-June to mid-September enjoying what we consider to be a gift, and sharing what we think in the congregation is our spirit of visitation, going out, being with, inviting people in and sharing all the good things that we have been blessed with. So, to this day, to this moment it remains exactly that kind of a vacation retreat.

Q: And that inclusion, I would think, has been very enriching for the sisters.

A: All around. All around. Yes. The neighbors even.

Q: Sister, thank you very much. I sure appreciate all of your cooperation in making this happen, and driving up from New York City in your Prius in the rain. I really, really appreciate the extra effort.

A: All of which turned into sunshine. I think you very much for your persistence in getting me to get permission to do this. It's been a delight working with you, doing all of this, and showing off the place. And when we can get in to get pictures, we'll do that.

Q: Sounds good. You should be proud.

A: Yes. Thank you, very much. ...high up it is.

Q: Oh, my gosh, yes.

A: Perfect.

Q: I didn't realize that was Mrs. Lewis' house.

A: That was the building right there. At some point, the chimney was—both of them were painted also. You see the chimney on this side?

Q: Yes.

A: That is in the kitchen.

Q: The chimney on the left side?

A: Yes. You see one window is hooded. That's where we have a fan at the moment. But that goes directly down into where I told you the coal shoot would have come in. I don't know if they heated or what the story was that they used that chimney. Long before our time. And then the fire escape was just not adequate, so it's a total waste of time. The windows are too skinny.

Q: Has that fire escape been there for a while?

A: Forever. Or probably since they got that letter from the fire department.

Q: Now you have propane gas.

A: Propane gas, two places. The folks next door eventually put up that fence to create even more privacy. This one isn't in the original pictures—this little one here. And that, the next one over, her name is Domino—Ned Domino. She moved—what was that?

Q: The wind blew this sheet of plywood. So, this is the single job from the late '80s, '90s?

A: '80s, '90s. But I'll check with her and let you know.

Q: So, the screens go here?

A: No. Only that side. That half is screened. There's all kinds of furniture that goes in here. People can sit and read and make their clam chowder without being bothered by bugs and mosquitos. Once we leave in October, the shingles come down on the front windows; not the other windows. And then you can see the railing. We put in this one. And then the stairs. The little thing that I'm talking about probably says "Quonochontaug seven steps to the sea", because there are seven steps right over there down onto the beach. Somewhere during the course of the season, one of these rocks would be covered. Sand will come in, and you can simply walk down the stairs and right onto the beach. Now the sand has all been taken out. Someone has also planted seagrass over here as a protection, because so much of the property got taken away during one of the recent hurricanes. So, the seagrass is there.

Q: What a beautiful spot. You've got Montauk daisies.

A: Yes. If you look over the fence, you'll see the remnants of the boardwalk. Do you want to see?

Q: Yes.

A: Come.

Q: But this is nothing that you put in?

A: No.

Q: This was here when you got here?

A: You see the hole?

Q: Yes.

A: That has fallen in since we've been here. It was a much smoother—from here to there. But in truth, it would have been right down to the breachway. There was a boardwalk. All of that would be covered before the season is over with sand.

Q: You don't think the hotel operators leveled this out for a place for people to sit?

A: Yes. And that, of course, is Block Island. On a clear day, you can see the wind turbines.

Q: This is such a beautiful spot.

A: It is.

Q: You're very lucky.

A: It is. I can see not everybody put their curtains—pulled their shades the way they should. The end one right here, second floor end, that is the chapel.

Q: As you go through this door, that's into the common dining room?

A: That's the dining room. There is a door between.

Q: What is to the left of the door?

A: All left is living room all the way to the other side of the house. Here is dining room, sink room, kitchen.