

# QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Oral History

# Crosson Family

July 17, 2023

Interviewed by Jennifer Deinard in Charlestown

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Q: Today is July 17<sup>th</sup>, and I am sitting with Diane and Carrie and John to talk about the Crosson family history in Quonnie. So, how did your family start coming to Quonnie?

DIANE: I'll start. This is Diane Crosson McEnroe.

Q: Can you spell your name for us?

DIANE: Yes. Diane, D-I-A-N-E Crosson, C-R-O-S-S-O-N, married last name McEnroe, M-C capitol E-N-R-O-E. And our collective parents bought the house in 1968, is the year I have it.

CARRIE: '66.

DIANE: '66, says Carried.

Q: And which house?

DIANE: The house that was sitting at 70 Neptune. And the story goes that my parents had been looking around, and they had rented here on East Beach, on Buddington and a few other places. They had also gone out to East Hampton on Long Island. And they had been looking around. They did know the Peaseleys, who are our next-door neighbors who bought the house on the corner of Central and Niantic from West Hartford. What did I say?

CARRIE: The neighbors.

DIANE: Neighbors from West Hartford, which is where we grew up—West Hartford, Connecticut. The Peaseleys. And they bought a house down here. It was a little

cinder block that is now owned by Heather Katie Flynn—Heather and Mike Flynn. So, they brought us down here in part. But my dad, who was an insurance salesman, and cruised around seeing accounts throughout Connecticut and Rhode Island, came to visit in the middle of the winter one time, and actually purchased the property without mom’s review, and then called her and said, “Oh, by the way, I think we have a house in Quonnie,” and she said, “Which one?”, and he said, “ Oh, that one that you said was the ugliest house in the beach area.” So, that’s the story we have of how that house ended being our house. But there are two more stories that go with that. So, one is, John will tell what we know about the hurricane.

Q: Okay, John, state your name.

JOHN: Okay. John Joseph Crosson. J-O-H-N J-O-S-E-P-H, Crosson, C-R-O-S-S-O-N. And I’m the youngest, born in ’64. So, they were coming down here before I was born renting. So, my first memory was in a rental. I thought it was in a rental house. Yes. But I do remember being here and being across from the ball field in this house that we’re in, which I had heard floated across the pond, was driven across the pond to this spot, or near this spot. Mr. McGlone—it was Ida and John T. McGlone.

DIANE: Which, by the way, just as an aside, the mailbox, McGlone’s sign we gave to the Historical Society. So, it is with Ann Doyle and the Historical Society, because it sat in our garage until two years ago.

JOHN: Yes. And then I think it was Mike Wood, who was a handyman down here.

DIANE: George.

JOHN: His father George supposedly helped build this house, or put it back together with found lumber from—I’m sure this was a big thing. After the storm, there was all kinds of houses that were strewn apart, so people just found what they could and started to build again.

Q Are you talking about the 1938 storm?

JOHN: Yes. The ’38 Hurricane. So, that’s how this house came to be the McGlones, and then dad purchased it from Ida, who was a widow at the time.

CARRIE: Dad proceeded to drive her up to Providence and put her in a retirement home.

JOHN: Helped her.

CARRIE: Helped her move into a retirement home.

DIANE: She couldn’t take care of herself.

CARRIE: No, she couldn't.

DIANE: That was a good purchaser's job.

Q: Carrie, do you have any memories of the purchase story, or your first memory of it, because you might have a better story.

CARRIE: Yes. I'm Caroline, or Carrie, C-A-R-R-I-E, Crosson, C-R-O-S-S-O-N, Gilpin, G-I-L-P-I-N. I am the oldest of the three of us. I was born in 1960. We have three older half siblings, who are also in the house. They were much older. My father's first wife died of cancer in 1958. He married my mother, and the three of us are the children of the second marriage. So, Cathy, David and Ann, who all live in Cape Elizabeth, Maine or Portland right now, were almost in college, or, if not, starting college. So, they don't have the memories that we do. But we all had a bedroom and a bed. There were four bedrooms in the house that my parents bought from Ida McGlone. My grandfather, my mother's father, also lived with us, because his wife, my grandmother, died much earlier. He was a handyman himself, so he finished the basement of the house, and he made two more bedrooms down there. He did masonry. He did gardening. He did cooking. He was a great deal of help to my mother, because back then there was no washer/dryer, so you had to take your clothes to Westerly to get washed and dried. You had to go pretty far to get food too. So, my grandfather would cook a lot and hang out with us and kind of babysit, play cards with John a lot. He played solitaire when John wasn't around. But I remember coming the first time my parents looked at the house when Ida was here in the house—not this house, but the house that Diane—Diane lived in that house that my parents sold to Diane and Mark in 1990.

DIANE: Yes.

CARRIE: Yes. So, 1990. And then Diane and Mark lived in that house. I bought a house two blocks away. John bought a house with his wife two blocks farther away. So, the three of us have our own places now, but Diane and Mark just did this house. They got the CO several months ago, so this is new for them. It's a great thing that they were able to buy it, first of all, for the whole family, because they were generous enough to let all of the siblings come and use it during the interim. And now it's great that they're here more permanently in a winterized house going forward. I remember being in the house, and it was very dark. It was beadboard, which is this brown wood that nobody ever painted. There was no insulation in the house. I don't know how Mrs. McGlone lived in it. There was partial heat in the house, but it was like a big vent that just blew hot air upstairs from the basement. They had a private well. Then, of course, there was the Central Beach well. She was one of three people at the time that lived year round in Quonochontaug. Most people—it was just a summer community. I think she was really grateful to my dad for asking her if she was interested in selling,

because she didn't know she was going to go, or what she was going to do. She didn't have any children. Mr. and Mrs. McGlone had no children. So, he moved her. She was freezing in this house. It really was cold. So, the house was built with a lot of stuff that came in through the '38 Hurricane. When it floated over, they moved it, but then they built another floor above it. When they did that, they literally—and this was not particular to them. Everybody did it back then. You'd find something on the beach that washed up, a window, for example, and you just put it in your house. If it didn't match the other windows, it didn't matter. They recycled everything, because it was just a summer community.

DIANE: Can I add one thing to that? My memory of my dad is that Dad did everything. We painted this house. By the time we took it down, there were probably 40 layers of coated paint. He would take the windows, because there were so many windows, and we have a picture of the house. But so many windows. And he would take them down, but he'd have to code them, because none of the windows were the same size. To Carrie's point, they were all debris from other people's houses. They would go in different places. But then to put the house back together after he took all the screens out, and had whoever paint it that particular time, and put them back in was torturous.

CARRIE: Yes. And I hear this all the time from the original houses in Quonnie that people did this. My next-door neighbor on Lucas right now, same thing. His father built the house with George Wood. Went walking on the beach every day to see what wood would wash up. One of the furnaces washed up, and they used it. They carted it back to the house and used it. So, what I remember about that day, though, is besides the brown inside, which really bothered my mother a lot, she painted it.

DIANE: That's Carrie and my mother in the kitchen one of the first times we walked in the house.

Q: Wow.

DIANE: And that's the beadboard she's talking about. Scroll across and you'll see some others. I'm going to send all this to you.

Q: Okay. Great.

CARRIE: It was rustic, to say the least. My mother put her stamp on it, which she said, well into the time that Diane and Mark raised their family, my mother would come and visit and say, "Diane, it smacks of me." Because her decorations were still—Diane and Mark let her have it as her house. She died, and now they've done it over. She would have loved it. But she was happy to have her contact paper on the wall.

DIANE: On the other hand, the other thing she also said, “Diane, any time you’re ready for that thing to go down, if you need some help,” she was read for it as well.

CARRIE: Yes.

JOHN: Yes.

CARRIE: I remember that back then there really wasn’t much to do in Quonochontaug. You could go clamming and boating. We didn’t have a boat as a family. We did at one point, but we didn’t use it very much. So, we weren’t boaters. A lot of tennis lessons. A lot of beach time. But I was kind of a bookish child. I was not as gregarious as my family members. I would go and hang out in the shad tree in the back, and climb the tree with books, and I would stay there. I don’t think anybody knew I was gone. I would stay up there until I had to either go to the bathroom or I was so hungry that I had to come down. And it was glorious up there. The beautiful back yard that we had, right? And we had dogs. It was just like a sanctuary and an escape for us. I feel like we all think of it that way, that it was more than just like a beach house for every person in our family.

CARRIE: Yes.

JOHN: Yes.

DIANE: It’s special to them. I’ll tell you another story about the tree.

JOHN: The maple tree.

DIANE: It was a big maple, and it went down I think in Sandy. There’s baseball here. John, you should tell more about the baseball, but I’m only going to tell about one part of the baseball. So, there’s baseball here, and we’re right across from the baseball field. It was mostly for boys. But there was a guy up here, Bill Wilson, who one of his daughters lives right next door to us know, but his house was over a little bit further away. He would do the boys on the weekend, pitch and coach and everything. On Wednesday afternoon, he started girls softball. Do you remember that? I would hide in the tree, because I was too embarrassed to go out and play. In fact, I was actually probably a pretty good player, but I was so embarrassed to go out and play. But he would drag us out, and he would convince me to get out, because he knew I was up in that tree. That was my tree story, because I’d go up in that tree to hide on Wednesday afternoons and not get called down for the ball game. Talk a little bit about the ball game.

JOHN: The baseball, they had three games, one of the really little kids. That was sort of like a teaching game. And then the teenagers played. Then it was the young men, old goats. This goes back to the ‘50s when this field was developed.

DIANE: It was ’38.

JOHN: So, it was supposed to be the married guys versus the single guys. That got a little bit loose at that point of the interpretation of that. But there were some great rivalries, and there were some really good athletes and some amazing players. I also used to hide, because I didn't want to play. The problem was, it was hard to hide. I found out about the tree. It must have been you guys. No boys allowed in the tree. But it's hard to hide, because you're right across from the ball field. We had these picture windows that I believe my parents put in.

DIANE: Yes. They totally did.

JOHN: They were huge. The biggest one that he could buy. It was a giant pane of glass. There was long bench seating, and he used to sit there any watch. My dad was a good swimmer, a good tennis player, but he wasn't like, "Let's go throw the ball." I wasn't unlike some of my friends. I didn't know how to play baseball.

CARRIE: Right. We didn't either.

JOHN: I kind of messed around a little bit once in a while playing, but I didn't really know that much about it. And then one day I think my father tried to get me to go out there, but I would have none of it. Then one day, this old man came up. His name was Dan McClain. He came into the house, and he said, "Johnnie, I'm Mr. McClain." I sort of knew who he was. But he said, "You're coming out with me right now, and I'm going to show you how to throw a ball," or something like that. He dragged me out of the house nicely. Then Mr. Wilson, Mr. Linsey, from East Beach, Mr. Twineham—there were like five or six guys. Dan McCloud as well—Dannie McCloud. They all loved to come out here and coach the kids and teach us how to play. Before long, I wouldn't miss a game. I'd even come back from after college, and when I was in Newport for the summer, my buddy Rob McAndrew would drive all the way back here to play the softball game, and then we'd go back to Newport. It was crazy. That was amazing and fun.

DIANE: And you still have quotes. Tell them.

JOHN: Yes. It was crazy. Growing up, Joey Cavanaugh, who played third base, who could play any sport—an incredible hockey player. He went to Harvard. A tennis player. All the sports. He was just a wonderful athlete. He would always play third base. Any ball that popped up in the air, if it was possible for a human being to get it, he would get it. He would go through the trees, up against the fence leaping and diving. After he retired and left, we were all playing, and years later a pop fly would go and land in the tennis court nearby, or land in the bush, and someone would inevitably say, "Joey would have had it." And everyone knew what we were talking about, except maybe the new people. "Who's Joey?" And then we'd tell the story. So, there was that. And there are a bunch of other stories.

DIANE: And that game still goes on. There are generations of people that just keep coming back. They still flag each other. But it's still great, because you get different generations playing together. I think it's amazing.

CARRIE: Diane's husband brought the baseball commissioner on the board of governors, so he ran it for a long time.

JOHN: But then also, every July 4<sup>th</sup>, the first game, my father made a sign. We still have. "Welcome Quonnie Ball Players." He put it out there, and have a cooler of soda and beer for all the guys to come out. I think a few teenagers had their first beer there. But that was just really nice. Nobody asked him to do it. He just did it in the beginning of the summer. We lived in West Hartford, and literally the last day of school we'd pack up all of our stuff, and we would come here. Sometimes we wouldn't even go back home until Labor Day.

DIANE: Not at all. Yes.

JOHN: We had sand in our ears.

CARRIE: Truly. Sand in our toes and our ears.

JOHN: Yes. And our friends would come down. Sometimes our dad would bring a new friend down. And we'd invite somebody down. As we were driving down, he would say, "It's not a big house, Joey," or Melissa or Bridget or Michael. And I'd look at my father and say, "What are you talking about?" "I hope you don't mind bunking up real close." "Oh, yes. No problem." The kid would always be very friendly. And then what my father would do is he'd turn down West Beach Road, and do you know the Boulder Cottages?

Q: Yes.

JOHN: He'd pull in there and take the first left. That tiny, little cottage. He'd pull and go, "Here we are." And we would be a car full of six people jammed in there with coolers. The visitor or friend would sort of look at the house and see that it's like a 10-by-10. Then my father would wait and wait and wait. I would be, or one of us would be so embarrassed and ready to die.

CARRIE: Inevitably the kids were like my friend Bridget, who had seven siblings and lived in a tiny house with one bathroom. She would be like, "Oh, it's so nice, Mr. Crosson."

JOHN: Yes. Or there would be silence. And then he'd be like, "No, that's not the house." And I'd be like, "Phew."

Q: It was like a test.

JOHN: Yes.

DIANE: This house that we're going to send you pictures of, you walked in, a little eating area and the kitchen off to the right, and then the living area to the left, a wall, a bedroom, a bathroom and bedroom. And then the sunporch out towards the back. It was a screened-in porch. Because my parents had six kids, they took the screen-in, L-shaped porch, put plywood between them and made three bedrooms back there. So, six people slept back there, and then two other slept by the bathroom door and this other bedroom that always existed.

CARRIE: King beds.

DIANE: You'd get to the point where my two boys, or you and David probably slept together occasionally in this room. It was a box with no way to get air. Or when we brought our friends, which they all loved it, because we weren't here to sit in the house. But there were rules. There was no sand in the house. Towels went right outside. We showered outside. There were lots of rules about it.

CARRIE: And we were out pretty much all day.

DIANE: All day long.

JOHN: All day.

Q: What were some of the other rules? I love the rules.

CARRIE: Quonnie rules, or my parents' rules?

Q: All the rules.

CARRIE: For the longest time, I thought that you lived in your bathing suit all summer long, because we were in and out of the water all day. We'd go and roll in the sand. Especially John. He loved to roll in the hot sand, and then go back in.

DIANE: We had black sand back then.

CARRIE: We'd come home for lunch. There was no eating on the beach. We'd come home from lunch and I'd be wet, and I'd want to change, and my mother would be like, "Just dry off in your bathing suit." The reason why I didn't realize, until I was a mother myself, that we didn't have a washer/dryer. So, if your kids stay in their bathing suits all day long, you're good. You wash it off in the shower later, and then you put on the line, and you don't have half the laundry that you would have had.

JOHN: Oh, gosh, yes.



CARRIE: So, we totally lived in our bathing suits. We went to the library all the time.

DIANE: Yes.

CARRIE: And we had to read. We wanted to read. There was a reading contest there. But she took us to the library every week.

DIANE: There's one right across—the Westerly Library.

CARRIE: The Westerly Library. We didn't have a TV for the longest time.

JOHN: Right.

CARRIE: Eventually we did have a TV, but it was never on.

DIANE: It was one TV. We had it for tennis and sports and stuff.

CARRIE: Yes. But very rarely. My mother would read, and she played tennis. She loved art, and there wasn't much art down here. There was a gallery in Charlestown, and that was a big deal. We would go see the art at the gallery. We never went to Providence. We went to Westerly. We pretty much stayed here. You didn't get in your car unless you had to. You were in bare feet. You rode your bike everywhere. And you were independent at a very young age. And we had jobs, all of us, at a very young age.

Q: What were your jobs?

CARRIE: My first job was I was a pantry girl up at Wilcox Tavern. I remember calling them on a Memorial Day, because we'd come down on Memorial Day, on a pay phone, because I wanted to have a job. It was expected that you would have a job, so I figured I better start calling on Memorial Day. The two sisters who owned it, one of them answered the phone and said, "If you come in tonight, I'll give you a job for the summer." So, I worked on Memorial Day. I think I was fifteen. I was definitely not sixteen yet. That might have been my first job. The following year, I went to the Willows, and I was a switchboard operator with the old-fashioned switchboard with the switches. And Liz Lavery, another girl, had the same job. I would ride my bike three miles there and back for an early morning shift, and I had no business being a switchboard operator. I didn't know what the heck I was doing. These guys have some very funny stories about their jobs.

DIANE: Yes. My first job was also to bike, because I went to the Lobster Pot, which is sitting up there ready to burn down.

CARRIE: I worked there too.

DIANE: I would bike every morning, because we were not driving. No one was driving us there. So, I biked to do the morning shift. Mr. Tanner used to come in and torture me—someone from this neighborhood who would come in and say, “Can I have salt?”, and you’d get him salt. “Now can I have syrup?” None of it would have anything to do with his breakfast. He would just be asking you to go get him things.

CARRIE: He liked to tease.

DIANE: He liked to tease. But that was my first job. Then I found Misquamicut Club in Watch Hill, and so I started working there where they would buff my shoes and make sure I had pantyhose. He did an inspection of our white shoes, and we had to wear hose. It was that white outfit with the yellow--

CARRIE: Yes. Apron.

DIANE: Right. Apron. But I still loved that job. I did it five years in a row, because I’m sitting on the beach serving. It’s the beach club; not the golf club part. It was spectacular. Napatree Point. Gorgeous out there. Incredibly money people, but many of them super nice. Then they would pick us up for working their dinner parties at their homes. So, I made loads of money working at their houses.

Q: Can we just talk about Ashaway Line and Twine?

DIANE: I did do Ashaway Line and Twine. I had a factory job one year. I was at Ashaway Line and Twine, which made fish line and tennis gut. The job was with Eunice and Gertrude and Joseph, who fought all day long about whether the window should be open or closed—these older women, that were like 80, and they were just so hot or cold. You’d sit there, and the machine would go, and you would have your hands out like this, which you can’t see, but you’d have your hands there, and the wire would cut through. But then if there was an imperfection, it go—and rip your finger open. You’d stop it, you’d splice it, you’d roll that roll off and you’d roll out—we still have rolls in the house. And then we’d roll off, and you’d start all over again. That was the job. But it was because it was from 8:00 until 3:00 shift. It was a factory shift, and that meant I was like 3:45 down on the beach. But we did have one really good friend also, McAndrew, from the same beach community, and he went and got the cleaning—like the janitor job. He’d walk around. What was the guy’s name on Carol Burnett who pushed that cart?

CARRIE: Harvey.

DIANE: Harvey. He was just like him, and he would go scrolling through. That was his summer job. So, that was my first. And no one believes I worked at a factory. My family all says, “That didn’t last,” and I said, “Six weeks I did it.”

CARRIE: Yes. For sure.

JOHN: Before there were the real jobs outside.

DIANE: That's true.

JOHN: Like weeding and mowing people's laws. I would walk around with my lawnmower and just walk the lawnmower all the way up to the club tennis courts and do that way back there.

Q: Do you remember what you got per lawn?

JOHN: I got like 20 bucks for that.

CARRIE: And we babysat, and we also worked on the block. All of us did that.

DIANE: I never worked the block. I babysat.

JOHN: I babysat a little bit, because I inherited your jobs.

CARRIE: I don't think we had a block for a while.

DIANE: I don't know.

CARRIE: We didn't have a guard for a while on the beach, but when they did, our kids did. All of our kids have had terrible jobs here too. Like we have a contest to see who had the worst job. His wife had some funny ones too.

JOHN: I remember weeding just down the street for Bud and Peggy O'Brien. It was like \$2.50 an hour. That was awful. I just remember pulling—I don't know if he had gloves. "Here's a bucket." Four hours. "Do the next one." But that's what we did. Then we got to be able to drive, I got my first job at Almacs, which was a supermarket. I was a service clerk bagging, and also cleaning the toilets for employees' bathrooms. God awful. So, I worked there for a little while. I had to punch a clock. It was unbelievable. The worst was, "Hey, John, we're low on carts. Go out in the parking lot." The parking lot was huge. Now I don't even know what's there. And it was sloped, so all the carts were just all the way down to Fishers Big Wheel, which, to my mind, was like half a mile away. It was hot pushing the carts. I return my cart every damn time now. I'm 59 years old, and I still ride the cart. And then, I'd get half an hour for lunch, and I'd go right to Friendly's and I'd get the same thing every time: A Fribble and a double cheeseburger and fries.

CARRIE: Because you could walk.

JOHN: Yes. Just walk over to Friendly's. That lasted for a little while. I think one season. They my buddies all got landscaping jobs. I didn't really want to. And our friends, the Goggins—that's another story. The Goggins were at East Beach, and they had a swimming pool. All three of us, or at least two of us had lessons there.

DIANE: All three of us did.

CARRIE: I was too old to have swimming lessons.

DIANE: It was very embarrassing.

JOHN: We were all too old.

CARRIE: I was sixteen.

JOHN: We did not know how to swim. And our dad was a great swimmer.

CARRIE: It wasn't for lack of trying.

DIANE: No. I think the point was we knew how to survive the ocean, but we weren't pool swimmers. My friends at home were at Cornerstone Pool in West Hartford every day. We know how to ride waves and survive buoyantly in the ocean. We didn't know how to do this. And you went right to the base of the pool with your broken arm.

JOHN: I had a broken arm in second grade, so I don't know how old you are there. Maybe seven or eight years old. I almost drowned. My cousin saved me, and my father was there. I think that was the summer where I was like—

DIANE: Right. Someone's got to learn.

JOHN: But Dave Goggin was the head bellman at the Ocean House, this was the old Ocean House before the new one. He was the head bellman, and it was his last summer, and Diane goes, "Who's taking your job?" "I don't know." "My brother needs a job." I think he drove me there and introduced me to Carol Brankert. Remember the Brankerts? I got the job, and I probably did that for two or three seasons as a bellman. Then I too became the head bellman. They only let two of us run the old elevator where you'd close the door, and the gate.

DIANE: The metal gate.

JOHN: It was like driving. You could only stop once on a floor. If you missed it, it was like this high, and whoever was with you—an elderly person—you'd have to help them up, or you'd go up a floor and come down again and try it again. It was kind of embarrassing. But that was good. Then I ended up, also through Diane's

connections, getting a job as a bartender at the Misquamicut Club, which was also a cushy job. Most of the time, there weren't that many people there. But it was very busy if there was a wedding. You're always in black and white, almost like a tux. But there was a breeze going through, and you were in the shade. Oh, my gosh, great memories.

DIANE: But I do think it's amazing, because even now with the next generation, our kids all grown up here for some amount of time—actually all of them were always here and had summer jobs here, which is unusual. I was always surprised that my kids—not one of them said, “No, I really want to play ball all the time in our other home,” or stay at the pool club or whatever. It amazed me that they all wanted to. But you do get your first job here. You get checks. Kids don't have that these days. Everything is connected. But if you work around here, there are little jobs for everyone. Carrie mentioned the block, but you can also open the tennis courts. Or there are things around the neighborhood, like my son Liam taking after this one, who is a clammer, would walk around knocking on people's doors—I didn't know this; I was working back in New York—offering to clam.

CARRIE: Yes. Jason would have a fishing thing down on the boat. He'd go out early, and then clean fish for me and put it in my fridge. It was the best thing ever.

DIANE: Yes.

CARRIE: I had an early job with Ann. My sister Ann had a newspaper route.

JOHN: Here?

CARRIE: Yes. And I would help her.

JOHN: The Times?

CARRIE: It was the Westerly Sun, or the Times.

JOHN: Yes. There were two.

CARRIE: But whatever it was, we had our own. I was on my bike, she was on her bike, and we would have bags and would fling them all the way down to Surfside. It was mostly in the front row. All the neighbors had it. We would deliver it. That lasted two summers. I was young when I did that. And babysitting. I made so much money babysitting down here.

JOHN: How about this memory? The delivery trucks. When we were little, they would deliver milk, eggs, groceries, liquor.

CARRIE: The vegetable guy.

JOHN: The vegetable guy. Laundry service.

CARRIE: Ice cream.

JOHN: The laundry service delivered. And then when we were kids on the beach, before they outlawed it, there was a Good Humor truck that would come up at 4:00 p.m. ringing the bell.

DIANE: And you literally need a dime or a quarter.

JOHN: I think that was what may have caused the rule of no food on the beach, because I think people in—some of the old timers with some of the sticky ice cream sticks—

CARRIE: There no vendors, though.

DIANE: We have local government here, which is like old-time politics here. We run our own—West Beach is a little different. We're a fire district, but we also deal with all our roads and water. And we have an annual meeting at the end of the year in September, and you can vote on things. There was a hugely contentious meeting at that time, because they were trying to get rid of the Good Humor Man, because it was a messy thing down at the beach, and they didn't want their kids running off, or whatever. And so, there was this whole thing. Someone stood up. I believe it was dad.

JOHN: Yes. Dad and Nick [inaudible 35:14]. But go ahead.

DIANE: “And what are you going to do when we all start to vote no booze delivery?” And that was going to be really contentious. So, I think it took another year for all those other things to fall by the wayside.

CARRIE: And then they finally got a permit.

DIANE: I want to say one more thing about the little local politics. It is so important that everyone go to that meeting like just once to see how things get run.

CARRIE: We raise our hands, or we have these cards.

DIANE: You have paddles.

JOHN: And there's drama.

DIANE: West Beach has a different setup.

CARRIE: There's drama. And it's great, because it works itself out. It does.

DIANE: Usually.

CARRIE: What do we have? We've got tennis stories.

JOHN: Tennis stories. There's also the parking lot at the beach, and giving the beach back to nature, and saving the beach itself. That's a story. I actually have a report on that.

DIANE: You should just tell that story about saving the beach, because we were going to lose the beach to—

JOHN: In 1978, the beach was down to nothing. The sand literally went away, because there were a bunch of storms in the winter, and they had gouged out all the sand. We were literally just left with cobbles. They're still there, but they're covered by five or ten feet of sand. But because in the '60s or '70s pushed to make a parking lot, and pushed all the boulders almost up to the high-tide spot, it was not good. They kind of wasted the dunes to make a big parking lot so that everyone could drive their cars down there. And by doing that, they call it a rip rap with the giant boulders, and I remember sitting there and remember that he dropped something down? God forbid if you wanted to put your hand down there, because there might have been a rat down there, or skunks.

CARRIE: Yes.

DIANE: Someone got stuck. Do you remember? We had to call the fire department.

JOHN: I do not remember that story.

CARRIE: And big steps to get down there. You'd have to wear sneakers, because you couldn't walk on those cobbles. The stones were so hard to walk on.

JOHN: Yes. It was a deterrent. It definitely cause the erosion. And then in '78, we all suffered, because we literally had a summer without sand. I don't know if it was all summer, but it was a good deal of it.

DIANE: Yes.

JOHN: You could barely go to the water, because a wave would come and the cobblers would wash back and forth. You would go in there and turn an ankle. It was brutal. So, everyone was freaking out. "What do we do?" This guy, Peter Skipper—he was from Holland. His family had come down here for a long time.

DIANE: They're still here.

JOHN: They're still here—his descendants. He stood up at a meeting and said, "I am Dutch. I know about the sea." And it was like, "Yes, you do." And he was like,

“You must go back to nature. You must put sand and have a gradual beach.” Maybe it was the accent. Maybe it was the way he spoke. But people listened to him. He oversaw the project. There are great, great stories about him working with Coastal Resources engineers. You weren’t supposed to touch anything where the water would come up to. So, he made an appointment with an engineer. He got him to come in the morning. “No, I must meet you in the afternoon,” because he knew the tides. He knew it would be dead low. And at low tide, it didn’t appear that the work that was to be done would actually impinge on—he made sure that the guy didn’t look towards the Central Beach area, because that was where it was closest. He was really smart. Anyway, they pushed it back. They planted the dune grass.

CARRIE: They got rid of the bushes.

DIANE: You took the time to interview him as part of his semester at sea in school and college, and he has an interview, which also should get put into the Historical Society of some sort, because that is an amazing interview.

CARRIE: He’s got a file up there.

JOHN: I’ve got to find that paper.

Q: That’s great.

JOHN: So, that was ’78. We’ve had tougher summers than others, but it’s never been that bad.

Q: I met with the coastal geologists this last fall, and we had a cliff, and they’re saying what has been done, because of Peter Skipper and Art Gantz, it’s a very unusual part of the Rhode Island coast because of the work that Peter Skipper did. And then East Beach followed it. Now they say that there really shouldn’t be any houses along the front, and there definitely shouldn’t be any seawalls or rocks down near West Beach, or even in Central. We’ve got a whole bunch of houses right on the water.

JOHN: Right. But there are all those natural rocks in there. Those are big boulders. They sort of act as a break wall.

Q: We have a family down here, the Breck Shampoo family. They had a house. It was a beautiful home. But they owned the property across the street on the waterfront, and they never built there. They knew that the house should be farther away from the water, and there should be dune grass. They didn’t plant a lawn there. It was just dune grass sloping down to the water. They could have moved their house forward and built right on the water, and they didn’t do it. They knew that it needed to be pushed back. Had we all been that wise or that wealthy, we



could have had a different beach. Anyway, it's a challenge today because of rising seas. It's going to be tough to deal with in the next—

DIANE: A very unusual thing about this is the generational and the friends.

JOHN: Yes. Oh, my gosh. Yes.

DIANE: There are friends that I have from growing up, and we were wildly different, because you come from different places. It was better, in my view, back then, because you would come and you'd plop yourself here, and then you'd go back to your own home and there wouldn't be social media, there wouldn't be anything in the winter. You then had your other life, and then you came back and this was super unique and special that you were here for two-and-a-half months, or two months with that same pocket of kids from different worlds. You didn't vie for spots in school with them, or sports teams or anything. You just had this love of each other.

JOHN: Yes. It was intense.

DIANE: Even though we were very different people. Now they are very different people from you, and you're really great friends. It's a richer life.

JOHN: We had two lives. We were like doubly blessed, because you had this intense two-and-a-half months of time down here with just your Rhode Island friends. Without this—without the phones, you literally saw those people maybe once a year, and then it was every day, all day with them, and all night. I had two friends here. Somebody would come over if it was raining. We'd go on our bike, or you're on the beach. We rode our bikes everywhere. "Let's go to the breachway." "Let's go crabbing." You had to make up stuff.

DIANE: She asked about rules. Another rule was West Beach had the casino back when we were growing up where the tennis court is.

JOHN: They sold cigarettes there.

DIANE: And you were not allowed to go to West Beach. That was a rule. But we broke that rule repeatedly. And so, we would go down there, because it also had penny candy.

CARRIE: Penny candy and pinball.

DIANE: We weren't supposed to go down there, but we went down there.

CARRIE: That was like a risky thing to do. It was all the fishermen, so there were cars going in and out of there all day. My mother, in her wisdom, wanted to be able to let us go free rein. In September, when we got back to school, she had to rein us

in. Down here, she'd kind of let us go, which I love her for. She was not on top of us at all. But she wanted to give us a boundary. We were allowed to do whatever we wanted all day long almost like without telling her where we were. We could be at the pond or at the beach. She didn't know where we were.

DIANE: No, she didn't, because one time—sailboat.

CARRIE: Yes. In other words, she said, "You guys can do whatever, but don't go down West Beach Road." She didn't want to have to worry about a transient population with cars and her little kids down there at age six.

JOHN: The casino was like where the [inaudible 44:02]. That's something my dad would say.

CARRIE: She just didn't know who was there. It wasn't the community.

DIANE: Right. And she didn't want to have to get in her car to go find us.

CARRIE: Right.

DIANE: Nor would I.

CARRIE: Right. We were allowed a freedom that we never had at home.

DIANE: One other thing is Mom would get plopped here, and we would be here. Our dad knew how to fly from the war, and he kept his license. So, he would fly a little Cessna that he would rent at Brainard Airfield in Hartford, and fly down here on Wednesday night just to see us Wednesday and Thursday, and then fly back home. He would land on the grass field down at the Willows.

CARRIE: At the place where I had the job. There might be a connection there.

DIANE: Right. But he would first buzz the beach. That would tell my mom, "Okay, I'm here."

JOHN: He'd circle our house right here.

DIANE: He circled the house.

JOHN: He would circle the house and wave a little towel out the window.

CARRIE: Right. There were no cell phones, so she'd be like, "Jack's here. Got to get in the car and go get him."

DIANE: But then years later, Bill Myer, not so long ago, he started to do the same thing. Bill Myer also had his license. He kept it going, and he would fly down and buzz the beach.

JOHN: But I think throw him \$20, and throw a cord around the plane, and he'd come here sometimes for the weekend.

CARRIE: He was an independent insurance agent, and he got Duhamel's insurance. So, he was like, "I'll give you a deal on your insurance if you let me land my plane there when I come down in the middle of the week."

DIANE: It was a field, though.

CARRIE: But instead of going to Westerly Airport, he was landing in the grass field.

JOHN: What a deal. He'd go all over that traffic in 22 minutes.

CARRIE: It was very cool. And it was easy for him. My mother loved it.

DIANE: Yes.

CARRIE: They didn't have to wait a full week to see one another.

DIANE: Back to Grandpa, our grandfather did live here, and he was amazing. He knew how to cook, because his wife died pretty early. So, he had to pick up cooking on top of everything else. He was an amazing cook. You tell the story, because you've got some good stories about the clams.

JOHN: Yes. He'd make these cheese pies. All my friends love them. They couldn't understand him, because he had broken English. He said, "Johnnie, you get the clams, I make the [inaudible 46:15]," and that was a deal. And he'd work all day from scratch rolling out the dough, and putting the cheese pies, and then frying honey and lemon zest of warm zest on it.

CARRIE: It was so delicious. It was great having him.

DIANE: But people around here remember him. They were like, "Oh, we miss"—we had a porch up there, and they would say, "We miss your grandfather." Because he would sit in that corner and say hello to everybody. Everyone would stop and say hello to him.

JOHN: Drink a little red wine. Have more cigarettes.

Q: What year was this?

JOHN: This was all through the '70s up to the early '80s.

CARRIE: He lived until age 96.

JOHN: In '82? '81?

Q: That is one thing that we didn't cover, like the food. I love when you said there was no food around here, so you would have to go to Westerly.

DIANE: We had delivery people, which was great.

CARRIE: They asked them,

JOHN: We also stopped almost every time at Chickadee fried chicken, which was like you'd get a beach bucket of chicken. I don't know if you've heard about that. It was at Dunns Corners. I think the people that used to work at Sandy's used to work at Chickadee, which was literally right on where the Webster Bank was.

DIANE: Grandpa—it sounds like we might have had money, recorder, but we didn't. We actually didn't. We were very blue collar down here. But he liked Sandy's, because he was Sardinian, and they would have figs and dates and things that were so Mediterranean to him. Apricots. I remember the summer food—

CARRIE: They were Italian, so he loved it.

DIANE: And so, he would spend his pension money that came in at Sandy's.

JOHN: Yes. He loved it.

DIANE: And he would ask us to take him to Sandy's.

JOHN: Good fruit.

DIANE: But we ate summertime foods. We grilled. We cooked.

JOHN: We didn't go out.

CARRIE: We never went out. Mother was not for eating out.

JOHN: We bought a hibachi every two years. My dad would put it together wrong, and then he's say, "John, you've got to figure that out."

Q: Two things we didn't talk about: The 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade.

JOHN: Yes. You do that. I've got to go.

CARRIE: I'm sorry; I do too.

DIANE: And so do I. I'm late for a phone call.

Q: Thank, you guys, so much. That's so fun. The fact that you guys got to play off each other is such a treat.

JOHN: If it was each of us alone, it would have been lost.

Q: Thank you.

