

# QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Oral History

# RICHARD DEPATIE

November 16, 2021

Interviewed by Steve Young

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Q: It's November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021. This Steve Young, a member of the Quonochontaug Historical Society. It's my pleasure to interview Dick Depatie, a longtime Quonnie resident, and take his oral history. He signed the permission form allowing us to use this recording to go into the Quonochontaug History Society archives. Unless there is a reason to pause, let's go ahead and start, Dick. I'm going to ask you, first of all, to try to remember the first time anyone in your family ever had anything to do with Quonochontaug.

A: The first experience I had with Quonochontaug occurred actually in 1953. I was an undergraduate at Brown University. One of my fraternity brothers had a connection to a homeowner here at Quonochontaug. So, we had a fraternity party at what is now Jack and Dottie Angel's cottage. As I say, it was 1953, and it made no impression on me other than it was about 50 miles from Providence, and it was a problem to get from Providence to Quonochontaug, back to Providence. I remember the house very well, because the house was filled with Brown University pictures—huge pictures on the wall. I asked Jack and Dottie about that years later, and they said when they bought the house, they threw all those pictures out. Then my next experience was in 1968. We had moved from Columbus, Ohio to Barrington, Rhode Island. It was late August of 1968. My brother Tom and Judy Depatie had rented a cottage on West Niantic, and their lease was going to end mid-September, and they had children going to school, so they asked us if we wanted to take the cottage for the last week or ten days. Of course, that was a no-brainer for us. We spent the time there. That's when we really appreciated Quonochontaug. After that, we started renting. Then we rented from 1969 until 1972 in various cottages. The one we liked the best was at 91 Oceanview Avenue, which is the Isaacson cottage. We rented that for two years. We rented it for a month each year. Then in 1972, we purchased our current home at 90 Oceanview Avenue. We've been there for almost 50 years now.

Q: I remember my family rented the Isaacson cottage one year when I was maybe fourteen or so. I like that cottage very much. So, you're a Brown graduate?

A: That's correct.

Q: What year did you graduate?

A: I graduated in 1955.

Q: Where did you grow up?

A: I grew up in West Hartford, Connecticut. I went to the public schools through the eighth grade, and then I went to Loomis Chaffee in Windsor, Connecticut. Then from there to Brown. After Brown, I went into the Airforce. I was ROTC in college, and I went into the Airforce for three years.

Q: So, that's '56, '57 and '58?

A: It was '55, '56, '57 and early '58. Everybody at that time was subject to the draft. As such, I decided when I entered Brown that rather than taking the chance of being drafted after I got out of college, I'd go into the Airforce ROTC.

Q: What was your job in the Airforce?

A: I was very blessed, because I went through pilot training, and I graduated as a jet fighter pilot, and ended up flying B47s, which is a six-engine jet bomber. It was strategic air command stationed in Riverside, California.

Q: Did you continue your flying after you left the Airforce?

A: That was an interesting time, because I was interested in flying, and I applied to the airlines to see if they would like another pilot. They turned me down, because at that time they didn't have jets. The jets didn't come in until 1960 or 1961, so that was several years later. I didn't want to fly the old prop planes. Ironically, a couple of years later, in 1962, I got a call from United Airlines asking me if I was interested, and I said no. I'd been out four years or more and decided not to.

Q: Were you already at work at a different profession?

A: I was working for Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, which is today Cigna. I was with them for 25 years.

Q: What year did you start with them?

A: In 1958.

Q: I've met so many people at Quonochontaug that have West Hartford roots, and roots in the insurance business.

- A: That's true. Hartford was the insurance capital of the world at one time.
- Q: When you were in the Airforce, were you ever overseas? Or were you always domestic?
- A: I was domestic, but as I was getting out, our squadron was being upgraded to the B52, and just about the time I got out my squadron was deployed to Guam. They spent six months there. They had moved at that time from Riverside, California to Spokane, Washington. I never made it to Spokane.
- Q: So, you rented for three years, and then you bought 90 Oceanview in 1972.
- A: Correct.
- Q: Did you buy from the McSweeneys?
- A: I did.
- Q: Did you know them?
- A: Not really. I can't remember their first names. They were over on Quonochontaug Pond at the time. They bought that piece of property and house a couple of years earlier. I think we're only the second owners of the cottage.
- Q: Do you think that the McSweeneys built it?
- A: Yes. Molly is telling me in the background that they built it. Montecito was the name that they named it. It means small cottage, I think.
- Q: The McSweeneys sold to you, but they had another house in Quonochontaug on the pond and they stayed in Quonochontaug for many years?
- A: I don't know how long they stayed. I kind of lost track of them. They were older. They weren't active in the community, I don't think, in the pond area.
- Q: You mentioned that your brother, Tom, also was connected to Quonnie.
- A: Yes. That's correct. He bought in August of 1972—he and Judy, his wife with their kids. They bought on Kenyon. They were there for years, and then about 1990 he was with IBM and retired and moved to Quonochontaug in 1990. Tom and Judy built a house on West Beach Road. One of their daughters is Diane Consoling.
- Q: Deedee?
- A: Everybody knows Deedee. And Beck and their two daughters, Olivia and Grace.
- Q: Are those Deedee's kids?

- A: Those are Deedee and Beck's kids. Yes.
- Q: Did you and Molly have a family also?
- A: We have two boys. They're grown now. One is John, and the other one is Dan. John is in Los Angeles. Dan is in Rhode Island. Neither of them married, although they both have girlfriends at this point. You never know.
- Q: Is the house that you bought at 90 Oceanview configured the same now as when you bought it?
- A: Yes, except in 1998 we added an addition, which consisted of at the back of the house we added a porch area. It was totally enclosed. And over that porch area room is a deck that you can get to from that room. That was done in 1998. The work was done by Kyle Collins, who was the son of Don Collins, who lived in the Isaacson house. He was related to her, I believe.
- Q: What other neighbors do you remember besides the Isaacsons and the Collins?
- A: I have my list here. Across the street was Jim and Sophie Burns. They were an older couple.
- Q: Is that where the Cansinettis live now?
- A: Where the Cansinettis live. Jim was actually an actuary for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. He was quite a guy. He used to fly messages—little flags spelling out a different message each day. I don't know if people knew that or not. Across the street was Jerry and Kathy Fisher. Jerry's mother—I can't remember her name. They were across the street.
- Q: I know you knew my grandparents, Dick and Helen Moran.
- A: Yes. Right. That was the other corner behind the Isaacson's. Your grandfather used to relate his experiences in submarines during World War I.
- Q: I did a talk to the Quonochontaug Historical Society about his World War I submarine career. It's on YouTube. I'll send it to you. It was really fascinating.
- A: I don't know how anyone would dare get into one of those things.
- Q: Maybe flying B47s takes as much nerve.
- A: Not really. Let me comment on the B47 just for a second. That is equivalent to the Boeing 707, which was the first airliner that the Boeing company put out. The difference

between the two basically was where all the passengers are on the airliner, that was all fuel.

Q: And you had six engines, and they have four?

A: four.

Q: And both made by Boeing?

A: Both made by Boeing. Correct.

Q: Were the B47s around for a long time?

A: I was looking into that the other day. They were the mainstay of strategic air command until about 1958 or '58. The B52 came in and replaced it. The B52 is still the mainstay at the Airforce.

Q: It's amazing that they have gotten that many decades out of the B52.

A: That's true. It's going to be around until 2030. We'll see.

Q: Is there a super-duper plane scheduled to take its place?

A: That's not my problem.

Q: B1s or B2s?

A: They have those now, but they've not as long-flying. We would fly for hours and refuel in the air. We could fly easily twelve hours or more.

Q: As you're at your house, with the back of the house looking towards the ocean, who was the house to your right owned by?

A: The Monstreams. I don't know if you know them or not. They were related somehow to the Isaacsons. They had that house. It was built by Jim and Barbara Isaacson.

Q: Did you know the family that lived in that house next to you by the name of Dr. Michael and Rena Ferrara? Or were they before you?

A: They were before us.

Q: That came up in one of my other talks, and I was interested to see if you knew them, or if they had already moved away.

A: I don't recognize the name.

- Q: When you bought 90 Oceanview, did you use it just as a summer house?
- A: Yes. We used it for a summer house. It has electric heat, which is outrageous. Our son, Dan, was there a couple of years during the winter, but he uses a woodburning stove to heat it.
- Q: Would you rent the house out, or have you kept it in the family?
- A: We rented it out over the years most of the time between two and four weeks. The house isn't very large, so it can hold basically six people. That's about it. Preferably, small children would be best.
- Q: Is it three bedrooms?
- A: Three bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. The porch.
- Q: What would you and Molly do to recreate in Quonochontaug? Were you beach users or boaters or pond users?
- A: We did all of that. Molly still plays tennis. That's the love of her life from an athletic point of view. She plays here in the winter. We've been members of the Quonochontaug Tennis Club for 50 years. That goes all the way back to roughly 1960.
- Q: Do you remember seeing improvements along the way in the tennis courts?
- A: Yes. That's true.
- Q: So, there are both more of them, and they're of better quality than in the 1970s?
- A: Actually, the courts have always been pretty good, and maintained pretty well. At one point, the Central Beach tennis surface was not so good, but that's been improved over the years. We do have nice facilities from a tennis point of view. Years ago, we had a Sunfish, and we used to use the Sunfish on the pond, which was great fun. We subsequently have sold it, so we're not doing that anymore.
- Q: Are Sunfish for one or two persons?
- A: You can do one or two. No more than two. It was fun. You could have fun on the pond.
- Q: What else did you do at Quonnie to have fun?
- A: We went to the beach a lot. The beach has always been the greatest attraction. We used to—Molly still loves surfing. I used to love to go surfing—body surfing. But the beach has always been terrific, and has always been well maintained. Kudos to those that take care of it.

- Q: Were you ever a fisherman?
- A: No. I'm not a fisherman, but my son Dan is. He loves to fish either in the pond or going out deep sea fishing when he gets an opportunity. My son John is not interested in fishing, nor have I been.
- Q: Were you a tennis player?
- A: I was a tennis player. Not very good.
- Q: Would you play doubles with Molly?
- A: I played doubles with Molly, and I played doubles with the men typically on the weekends.
- Q: Who were your men friends that you played with?
- A: We didn't live in Rhode Island. We moved around quite a bit. We lived in Buffalo, New York and Columbus, Ohio and Chicago. I used to fly in from Chicago into Providence on a Friday night, and then go back on a Monday morning. The fare was \$110 round trip, which was a real bargain. It must be at least \$500 now.
- Q: Was it Connecticut General that made you go from office to office?
- A: Yes. Office to office. And then I left Connecticut for Cigna in 1983. I joined Arthur J. Gallagher, which is a large brokerage firm out of Chicago. I opened their benefit operations in New York City. That's how we moved back to New Canaan, which was a great move for us, because instead of being 1,000 or more miles from Chicago, we were 100 miles.
- Q: Was that in 1983?
- A: That's correct.
- Q: Did Arthur J. Gallagher require a lot of traveling, or was that basically New York based and you just had your New Canaan to New York City commute?
- A: I was in charge of the northeast part of the country. I had all of New England and the middle Atlantic states. They weren't long trips. I could most of them in a day. I had a couple that were overnights, but not many. Then I retired in 1998 from the insurance business, and I became the parish administrator of the local church here in New Canaan, Connecticut. I did that for almost twenty years.
- Q: Was that a volunteer job?

- A: It started that way. It's a huge church. We've got a lot of parishioners. It became a full-time job, which was good for me. It kept me involved.
- Q: And no commute.
- A: And no commute. I used to tell people I drive through town to go through the traffic light for excitement.
- Q: Did you have any specialty when you were at Connecticut General?
- A: Yes. I dealt with employee benefits, pensions, life and health insurance before it got really complex. It's not like today with all the variations. But it was still challenging even in those days.
- Q: When you were doing employee benefits, would your clients be the corporations that you would visit?
- A: Primarily, yes. I didn't do any individual. It was all corporations. My biggest account was United Airlines out of Chicago, ironically. They didn't want me to fly for them.
- Q: When you switched to Arthur J. Gallagher, did your specialization switch? Were you more in management?
- A: I was in management both with Cigna and with Arthur J. Gallagher, and sales. Do you want any stories of people around?
- Q: Yes.
- A: I've got a list of people. The Shultices were down the street. Sidney died, but Walter is still around living in Mystic. He still owns that cottage down the street. Brad and Diane Gorham were right up the street. He was a moderator at one point.
- Q: And he was a politician for part of his career too, wasn't he?
- A: He was. He was I think a senator. He ran for lieutenant governor at one point. I think we had just moved to Barrington, and I went to a rally for him. I didn't even know who he was until about six months later, and I realized that he was a neighbor of ours in Quonnie.
- Q: Did you bring any families to Quonnie, or introduce Quonochontaug to any of your New Canaan neighbors or Hartford neighbors?
- A: My brother Tom and Judy really introduced us to Quonochontaug. They were living in Ridgewood, New Jersey back in those days.
- Q: My parents, Jack and Betty Young, raised us in Ridgewood, New Jersey.



- A: Is that right?
- Q: Yes. We were there from 1955 to 1964.
- A: I don't know what year he was there, but they lived [inaudible 33:23] there, as a matter of fact. There is a train from Ridgewood too.
- Q: Yes. The Erie Lackawanna line takes you to Hoboken, and Hoboken tube to New York City.
- A: Right. Of course, Ron, Dick and Sue Henry. I'll just mention a couple of people. Maybe you know Helen and Bob House. They're both gone. There are so many. That's the older generation. Bill and Liz Myer. They used to live in Newtown, Connecticut, and they moved down. They've been there for years. Nick and Sheila O'Neil. Nick was a good Brown graduate.
- Q: I think there were a lot of Brown graduates. And I see some Yale paraphernalia at some of the houses and on some of the people.
- A: Yes. At one point, the Yale Bulldog lived at Quonnie during the summer.
- Q: Right. With the Getmans?
- A: Yes. I don't know how long that lasted, but I used to like to see the bulldog.
- Q: I know they're very deep into Yale.
- A: The Ogdens. There are a number of people that have lived in New Canaan. The Ogdens were one. And the Campbells lived in New Canaan. And the Petes lived in New Canaan before they moved down to Quonochontaug. There were quite a few.
- Q: Did you live through some of the hurricanes?
- A: That's a funny question. There were two or three of them, but each time I happened to be out of town. Molly was left with the boys when the hurricanes truck.
- Q: What were some of the big ones? There was Hurricane Bob.
- A: Bob was a big one. Going way-way back to the '38 Hurricane, I was just a kid and living in Hartford. The '38 Hurricane really wiped out Quonochontaug, and Providence in particular. Providence lost a lot of people in the streets. They drowned in the streets.
- Q: I guess there as no warning.
- A: Yes. There was no warning whatsoever.

- Q: I had heard that a storm surge came up the Providence River into the city.
- A: That's correct. I read about it. But now they have that barrier that they can raise and lower when the storms come up.
- Q: I understand there's a marker at the Biltmore Hotel in Providence as to how high the water got at the Biltmore Hotel.
- A: Yes. That's true.
- Q: Hopefully we'll never have another one like that.
- A: With the weather changing, you'll never know.
- Q: It's been over 100 years, so hopefully we're not due for one like that for a while.
- A: Roy and Emily Gifts were living next to us on Ninigret in the Gray Lady. That has changed hands over the years. They were very good friends of ours while they were there.
- Q: Did they have a son named Roy also?
- A: It was Pete. I think there is a grandson named Roy. Pete was their son. Their other son was John.
- Q: And you were kitty corner from the Pitchers. I think Franny was the mother, right?
- A: That's correct.
- Q: And then Jerry had a wife, Sue.
- A: His first wife was Emilie. Then he married Sue.
- Q: And then in later years, I think he married Cathy.
- A: Right. We have the Carpenters in our neighborhood. They have been there for years.
- Q: I think the Brecks came in the early 1960s. The Brecks and the Carpenters are related.
- A: Yes. One of the daughters married a Carpenter.
- Q: What big changes have you seen in Quonnie over the years?
- A: That's a big question. Quonnie in the last few years has seen major changes. I think when we were there in the '70s and '80s, things were pretty static. There weren't a lot of

things going on. There were some things going, but I would say starting in the '90s more and more people decided to migrate to Quonnie from wherever they were living. Of course, in recent years, a lot of people moved either tearing down and building a new building, or renovating as the case may be. So, I think you've got a lot of winter residents now. They may not be there themselves, but that's their main residence. When we were there, we were really seasonal people. That has changed. And probably with COVID, it's going to be even more of a change as we go. We've always preferred the cottage. There have been some changes, and I won't get into a discussion of what's gone on. People's tastes are different, and you've just got to go with it.

Q: It's pretty hard to ignore that mansionization of Quonnie. Your house was a very, very, very typical summer cottage, and so many houses have been bulldozed and mansionized, or really, really onto substantially.

A: It's more like Watch Hill and so on. That's progress.

Q: I suppose it adds to the value of all the houses.

A: That's true.

Q: Do you go back to the period where there were some gravel roads in Quonnie that weren't paved yet.

A: I don't remember that.

Q: I've also interviewed people that remember when they hadn't cleared all the boulders out of so many people's yards, because there weren't the big cranes and bulldozers then. This one guy was telling me that he remembered there was a rock on the tennis court that was just one inch above the surface, but just enough where you didn't want to break your neck or hit the ball there. He also remembered chicken wire for the enclosure of the tennis courts to keep the balls in. I think that was before you arrived.

A: Yes. That was before our time. The courts have been a big asset to Quonochontaug. I should mention the old goats and the young men contest every Sunday morning.

Q: Were you a viewer or a participant?

A: My brother, Tom, was a permanent second baseman for the old goats well beyond the time when he should have quit. That's what I tell him. He was a very good athlete. He really enjoyed it. Although the playing field itself was—until recently, it was just a cow pasture with all kinds of ruts. The ball would take a bounce and hit you in the face, or whatever.

Q: That is another nice improvement. Now the grass is beautiful, and the fence is beautiful.

A: Yes. Before they had the fence, they just hit it into the reeds out there.

- Q: Right. And the poison ivy.
- A: Yes. They're working on the basketball courts now. That will be good for the basketball players.
- Q: Were you ever a golfer?
- A: I was a golfer, but a very poor golfer.
- Q: What courses at Quonnie did you play?
- A: Just Winnapaug. It's a public course. I was not a member of the club.
- Q: Did you or Molly ever participate on any committees or any of the governance of Quonochontaug?
- A: I was not as active as my brother Tom. Tom was very active. I was not that active, because I was kind of a weekend warrior. I didn't really get into it. Molly has been involved in various groups over the years, none of which I can remember. She was on the tennis board, or the club board of directors.
- Q: Did you say your brother Tom was a moderator once?
- A: No, he was not.
- Q: But he was more active serving on committees?
- A: He was living there. He was involved with a lot of the various committees.
- Q: Deedee is certainly very active.
- A: Yes. Deedee is very active. She's doing a great job. I'm sure he would be very proud of her. Deedee's sister is Linda. I don't know if you know her. They live over on the pond.
- Q: Is the Linda Farnum?
- A: No. Buffum, which is connected with the Weekapaug Inn.
- Q: Did she and her husband own the Weekapaug Inn at one time?
- A: No. His parents owned it. They're out of it now.
- Q: And you had another brother Gene.

- A: I have another brother Gene. He lives in California. He went to Brown as well. He graduated and then went into the Navy into their officer training at Newport. He ended up on the west coast and has never left.
- Q: He and my father worked together at EF Hutton.
- A: That's way-way back.
- Q: I'm a securities lawyer, and he went from Hutton to Shearson when they merged, and both were clients of mine, so I knew him professionally.
- A: I didn't know that.
- Q: He managed the Newport Beach office, and my father managed the Santa Barbara Office.
- A: It's a small world.
- Q: When you talk about all the New Canaan/Quonnie connections, all the Hartford/Quonnie connections, and so many people in the insurance business—
- A: Jack Cross was in the insurance business in Hartford. One of my first calls in the insurance business was on Jack. Another known name is Ham Schwarz who lives on the water.
- Q: So, you knew Ham Schwarz on the pond over by the swans and the reeds? That's a beautiful piece of property.
- A: And he was from New Canaan.
- Q: There are also a lot of Darien people in Quonnie.
- A: Yes. And Westport and Greenwich and so on. And quite a few from the Hudson River Valley—Ossining and that part of the world.
- Q: Were you and Molly travelers?
- A: I don't know what you mean by that. We traveled.
- Q: Did you travel to Europe?
- A: Yes. We've been to Europe and Hawaii. We went to the Holy Land. We've done our share. We might have done more, but it's very difficult to travel now.
- Q: What year were you born?
- A: 1933.

Q: Did you and Molly ever go on cruises?

A: We were on a cruise to Bermuda once. I'm not attracted to the big ships.

Q: Have you and Molly had your 50<sup>th</sup>.

A: A little more than that.

Q: What year were you married?

A: We'll be married 65 years next July. Molly was two when she got married.

Q: How did you meet?

A: We met in high school. Her brother was in my class.

M: He was one of the boys that my brother approved of that I should date.

Q: Did you get married when you were at Brown?

A: No. We got married after I graduated and I had gotten out of flight school. Flight school was a whole year in 1956. I went in, started in January, and graduated in December of '56. And then we got married in July of '57.

M: When do you spend time at Quonnie?

Q: My grandparents bought a lot from Howard Thorp in 1946, and built a house that was finished in 1950. They lived in that house as a summer house mainly for decades, and then they passed it on to my mother, Betty. Betty and Jack Young lived there for twenty years seasonally. My father made one winter there alone, which he didn't have much good to say about it. I think Quonnie gets pretty dark and lonely and windy and stormy. He was happy to see spring that year.

A: And nobody is around.

Q: He would say that on the front there would be no lights. Everything was closed up for the season.

A: When did they buy that property, '50?

Q: '46 as a lot. And then they built a house. It's like yours. There has been a little addition here and a little addition there, but it's basically the same configuration as it was.

A: We dealt with Paul Carney. He was the salesman. I thought it was HP Thorp.

- Q: Yes. Howard Thorp—HP Thorp. Paul Carney and Steven McAndrews were salesmen that worked with Thorp. Did you buy your house through Paul Carney?
- A: Yes. They controlled everything. If they didn't like someone, they would block them and get away with it.
- Q: Yes. That goes back to the '20s when Mr. Thorp purchased all of Quonochontaug. He was very proud of how restrictive access to Quonnie was. I think he wanted very homogeneous people, and wasn't much into diversity.
- A: You've got to be careful. Times have changed.
- Q: This has been terrific. You've given us a good picture of the Depaties at Quonnie. Thank you for being so open and sharing information. This will go into our collection of oral histories. People are interested in Quonochontaug history.
- A: We applaud you for doing it. I think it's marvelous to have on record people that have enjoyed Quonochontaug. Everybody thinks it's the most special place in the world.
- M: The Historical Society does a great job. We think their programs are very good.
- Q: Good. Keep coming to them. We're going to have some good ones this coming summer. I'll be able to send you this Zoom video. I can flip it to you on YouTube. It might be a week or so. But it will be a nice thing to keep in your family.
- A: Okay. Well, thank you.
- M: When will we see you at Quonnie?
- Q: Marlene and I are on a track where we are spending the month of May and the month of October in Quonnie. We own the house with my sister. She uses it June and July, and then we rent it out from the third week of July through the first week of September.
- A: That's good. That works well for all of you.
- Q: I love May, and I love October.
- A: That's true. Those are the good months down there.
- Q: We agree with you that Quonnie is a special place. Thank you.
- A: Thank you for doing it. We thank you very much.
- Q: Bye-bye, Molly. Thanks for your help.