

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

ANNE SCHAFER DOYLE

September 9 & 11, 2009

Interviewed by Leah Bradshaw

This is an unedited transcript of an oral history that is available in the QHS Archive Center. The policy for the use of this copywritten material can be obtained by contacting the Quonochontaug Historical Society (archivist@quonniehistory.org).

Q: Today is September 9th, 2009. Leah Bradshaw is the interviewer, and Anne Doyle is the interviewee. Anne, could you please state your full name for the record?

A: My name is Anne Schafer Doyle.

Q: Where were you born, and when?

A: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts on July 10th, 1943.

Q: When did your family originally arrive in Quonochontaug?

A: It goes way back to my great-grandfather. On my mother's side of the family, they lived in Providence, and they knew several people in that area of Providence that they lived that came down to Quonnie. I'm not sure who specifically, but people like the McLeods, Elaine's family—the Walcotts and the Parrotts. My great-grandfather knew these people. He started coming down and got to know the area. Then they started renting little cottages on East Beach at the time. This was back in about 1900.

Q: So, this was your maternal great grandmother?

A: Great grandfather and great grandmother.

Q: What were their names?

A: Their names were Fisher. His name was Henry Fisher.

Q: Were you related to Brad Fisher?

OH2015.010.023

OH2015.010.024

A: Yes. Brad is my mom's cousin.

Q: So, they came here at approximately the turn of the century?

A: Yes.

Q: Was Central Beach developed at that time?

A: Not at all. That was 1924 when Howard Thorpe bought the Sheffield farm. Central Beach wasn't developed until 1924.

Q: So, the cottages that were available were in East Beach?

A: They were on East Beach. I have some great photos of my mom, when she was really little, on one of the shorefront cottages, right near where Central Beach is now. There is a line there. Part of it's East Beach, and part of it's Central Beach. This was the East Beach side. There were these little cottages, and literally they came out the front door and they walked right onto the sand.

Q: Almost where the Van O's house was?

A: It was much closer. It was like where our parking lot is, except a little bit farther east.

Q: So, your roots go back three generations.

A: Henry and Sawyer are actually the sixth-generation.

Q: Then your children would be the fifth, you would be the fourth, your parents would be the third, your grandparents were second and your great grandparents were first.

A: Right. I have a nice picture of my great grandfather with a big striped bass that he had caught. I don't know if it's the fishing part that first brought him down. I have no idea.

Q: How did they get from Providence to Quonochontaug? Did they drive?

A: I think what they did was they took the train to Bradford, which was Niantic at the time. Now they call it Bradford. There was a depot there. Then they would get off the train, and there would be a horse and buggy waiting for them to bring them down here. I think that was the route that they took.

Q: What would the chronology have been. Would Mother Brimley's have been open then?

A: No. That was in the later '20s, early '30s.

Q: They stayed at a cottage that was at East Beach that was almost adjacent to the ocean so that they could walk out?

A: My grandparents—I don't know how they developed their relationship—they were friends with the Buddingtons who had what they called the farm house over in East Beach. It's now owned by the Marrons. It's been renovated and built up. At the time, the community well was there and everybody had access to the drinking water at their well. My grandparents and my mom, when she was little, they used to stay at the farm house off and on until the early fall.

Q: Did they rent it?

A: I don't know whether they rented it or not. I'm not sure.

Q: Did they stay as friends?

A: I think so.

Q: This would be the summertime, and your great grandparents traveled by train and stagecoach or horse and buggy from Providence to Bradford, or Niantic, and then from Niantic to Quonochontaug. How did they get their groceries?

A: When we were younger, the people used to come down with the groceries in their trucks from the farms. Once they were here, they really didn't have to go anywhere. I don't know how far back that goes. I don't know whether they had people also coming to them, or when somebody came down from Providence on a weekend—usually the mothers were here during the week, and the fathers would go back, and then on weekends maybe they brought a whole bunch of food too. I don't know. That's a good question.

Q: I wonder if they ate the fish they caught and picked berries.

A: They did all that. But they did have access to other foods. There were a lot of farms around here. They would go to East West Farm. But that was later on. I'm kind of mixing up time frames. There were farms around that they had access to.

Q: So, your great grandparents stayed in a cottage very close to the ocean on East Beach. At that time was West Beach developed?

A: Yes. West Beach was the first community that was developed as a vacation place in Quonnie. In the evenings, they used to walk over to West Beach. There was more going on over there, because they had the little hotels and the boarding houses. They had music going.

Q: In your great grandparents' generation?

A: This is where I'm not really sure exactly.

Q: Even if there was a Mother Brimley's, and even if there were these resort hotels, there must have been predecessors of those that gave people those ideas.

A: The change in the lifestyle of the larger community when people worked in the mills and everything, then they started having leisure time. They didn't have to be on the farm all the time, so people started coming down here. I would say in the late '70s—this was the 1800s, at the very beginning, in some of these little fishing places, it's like Mr. King, who lived across the street from us, his grandparents—I might be getting the generations all mixed up. He was a fisherman and had this little tiny place on the old breach. They decided they would take in boarders, because people started wanting to be down there. It just developed over time.

Q: So, that would be the early 1900s for Mr. King?

A: In the early 1900s, probably his grandfather was here. He came down and fished and that type of thing. In terms of the boarding house, I'd have to check into when that started.

Q: The picture that you have of multi generations on Picnic Rock—

A: Are you thinking of the whole family at the shore line?

Q: Yes.

A: In the background, you see a cottage that was owned by a woman with the last name of Juwich. She was a Burdick. That family ended up moving that house before the '38 Hurricane on to Highland Road. But at the time that picture was taken, that house was right there on the shore. That particular summer, I have a feeling my grandfather probably rented the house next door to that. That's what we think.

Q: And that's how that picture got cited at that location?

A: Yes.

Q: That would have been your maternal grandparents. So, now we're on generation number two in Quonnie. Did they also come from Providence?

A: Yes. They lived in a home where my great grandfather lived on Academy Avenue in Providence. She met my grandfather, who lived not that far away—Fruit Hill. They lived in Providence.

Q: How did they travel down here?

A: Maybe for a while they took the train too. I don't know. My mother was born in 1914. As soon as there were cars, they started coming down with the cars.

Q: And prior to that they used the train and horse and buggy?

A: Yes.

Q: Did your family own property here before your mother's generation?

A: In 1924, once Mr. Thorpe bought the Sheffield farm, my mother bought a piece of property on Surfside. It is now owned by the Pomeroy's. Her brother had bought a piece of property up on Surfside right near there, so the whole family was starting to get connected with Quonnie and buying up land. She bought that piece of land. At the point of the Depression, in the late 1920s, she had to sell the property. She sold it to the Browns, which I believe was Corney's grandparents. It was in the Pomeroy family—the wife's family. So, she sold that. I looked it up in the records at the town hall—the land evidence records. So, she did purchase that. Her brother built a cottage on Surfside at that time. It's still there. It's the one that the Millers own now across the street from Little Women. It's the second one in.

Q: Carol Miller and her husband owned it, and now their son, Scott Miller, owns it with his wife Veronica.

A: That was there. I spent a lot of time in that cottage, because my cousins were over there. This is kind of jumping a little bit, but we rented, because there was nobody in the family, when we were little, that actually owned a piece of land for a while. We rented Sea Biscuit, which is where the Schwarzes are now. It was just a little cottage at the time. We would come down. Most everybody that was at Quonnie was right around in that area. We used to get out, take off and head for the beach.

Q: So, your great grandparents traveled from Providence and did not own a property here. They stayed in a cottage adjacent to the ocean, and sometimes they stayed at the farm in East Beach. Your grandparents stayed where?

A: When we were young, my grandmother used to come and stay with my mother to help take care of us.

Q: Was that next door?

A: That was after she had to sell the Surfside property.

Q: So, you would have been in Sea Biscuit?

A: Yes.

Q: So, your early memories would have been the pond next to Sea Biscuit and the ocean. That house is about as close as you could get at that time.

A: Right. We used to rent for all of August. I think one of my strongest memories is when we would first come down, get out of the car—it was the smell of the garage, first of all.

OH2015.010.023

OH2015.010.024

I can smell it. The smell of inside the house. We used to run down the path by the Burcks now, and that smell of the ocean. The combination of the sand and the ocean, that is such a strong memory for me.

Q: With the cement staircase that was there?

A: Yes.

Q: That would have been your sister Ruth and your brother Bill?

A: Right. This was in the '40s.

Q: At that time, your parents were renting Sea Biscuit?

A: Yes.

Q: How did they come to build the house on Neptune Avenue?

A: I don't remember them talking in terms of the process of trying to decide what to do, but obviously they thought that it would be a good idea to have their own piece of land and build a little cottage instead of renting. Through Thorpe they ended up buying the little piece on Neptune. What my grandparents did at that time—that was very early 1950s—is they bought the lot next door. We're now on 32 Neptune. This was formerly my grandparents' lot.

Q: But there was no house here before you built a house?

A: No. The Farrells had started building. Mr. King was the first house around this section of Neptune.

Q: Who would be on the property now?

A: D'Mayo.

Q: With a brand-new house this year?

A: Right. The Waterman house, down at the end of Neptune—the corner of Neptune and Ninigret—and the one next door to that on Neptune, that was from the Waterman family. I think those houses were there, because during the '38 Hurricane, a lot of people ended up in Dr. Waterman's house.

Q: At that point, was there a paved road on Neptune?

A: No. It was not paved. I don't know when that was. I'm not good with specific dates.

Q: Did your parents have their house built?

A: My mother's cousin, Brad Fisher, was a builder here. He built several cottages in our area. Brad was the one that was hired to build the cottage next door. My grandfather did the design.

Q: Was he an architect?

A: He wasn't an architect per se, but he was in that business somehow. It's amazing how much I don't know. I can remember him standing over blue prints and that kind of thing.

Q: Maybe he was an engineer or a draftsman. Was he a builder himself?

A: No.

Q: But he understood the design aspect?

A: Yes.

Q: So, your grandfather designed the house. Your cousin, Brad Fisher, built it. You took occupancy in the early '50s?

A: It was about 1952.

Q: How long did that house remain in the Schafer family?

A: After my dad died in 1993, my sister and my brother and I used it for a while for summers. Then we ended up selling the house to the Romneys.

Q: Was it winterized at that time?

A: Yes. My parents eventually decided to retire down here in the '70s.

Q: They retired from Providence?

A: No. My father at that time worked in Hartford—Travelers Insurance Company.

Q: Where were you living with your family at that time?

A: In the '70s I think we were in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Q: Did you still come here summers and bring your children here?

A: We did somewhat. Not as often as I would have liked the kids to have had the experience of being here at Quonnie. My mother died in '75. That changed the whole dynamics of the family. My dad just wanted to have quiet. We started having vacations in Maine and the Cape. But to me, Quonnie was absolutely wonderful. I don't know what I would

have done without it, as far as the impact on my life. But we didn't do anything else. We weren't a family to explore and say, "Let's go here," or, "Let's go there," because we always had Quonnie, and that was it. It was kind of nice to start exploring other parts of New England. It got us out of just going to Quonnie for every single vacation. We got to know other places. That was a good thing.

Q: As your father aged, did he need more help and you spent more time here?

A: He definitely needed more help. I would have to come down and check on him a lot more, especially at the very end of his life. We had to take the keys away from him so he couldn't drive, because he wasn't capable of that any more. Once that happened, he was pretty much home bound.

Q: Was he able to live out his life in Quonnie?

A: Until the last six months. It was hard for him to accept help. Once he couldn't drive, we said, "Dad, we'll find somebody to take you to the hospital so that you can volunteer." He went there every morning and helped with delivering newspapers or whatever. He loved it. He wouldn't go along with that, so that really isolated him. He didn't want people to be driving him places. But we did get help for him. We had somebody in to do housekeeping, cooking and more services as he got older.

Q: Was there much of a winter community here? I can see it being easy in the summer, but maybe more remote and isolated in the winter.

A: It was, but Neptune Avenue was a hopping street in Quonnie. It was the first street coming up from the ocean that was well population in the winter. Mrs. Leaky, the Skippers, the O'Briens, the Watermans.

Q: What year did you lose your father?

A: 1993.

Q: And then you had a decision whether or not you would retire here, or plan for ultimate retirement?

A: We thought for a while we would use the cottage with my sister and my brother. For the first three years, that what we did.

Q: You maintained it and used it summers?

A: Right. We each used it a different part of the summer. But then my brother came to my sister and I and said that he didn't want to pay taxes and that type of thing. It was just too much for him. He wanted to sell his piece. He wanted to get out of it. So, that got us going in terms of what we were going to do. I knew right away what I wanted to do. I've always wanted to be here all year round. People thought I was crazy. They said,

“Isn’t it too isolated? There’s nothing going on.” I said, “It’s exactly what I want.” Tom had to think about it more, but it was one of those decisions that was made very quickly, now that I think about it. He was working in Boston at the time. For the first year, he got a little apartment up there, and came down on Thursday night.

Q: Did you sell your house in Springfield?

A: No. From Springfield, then we moved to Chelmsford, Massachusetts. The kids think of that as their growing-up years in Chelmsford. Once we made the decision, we put our house on the market up there. It just kind of rolled along. I didn’t look back.

Q: Your children were grown?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you empty nesters at that point?

A: Yes. Back in ’96 we moved here.

Q: Did you move to the house next door first?

A: Yes. We lived in my dad’s house for a year. At that time, my brother was still alive. I was the main caretaker for my dad. I was doing a lot of the foot work with him, that they allowed Tom and I to stay in the house. We ended up paying the taxes that year.

Q: Did you move in with your dad?

A: No. He was at The Elms for six months. This was after he died. And then we started using the house. Then the decision for my brother not to want any part of that, and then the decisions that we had to make. My sister was going to take that house, and I was going to take the lot and give my brother his piece of that. That was originally what we thought was going to happen.

Q: You sister would take the older house?

A: Right.

Q: And you would take the lot and put the house that you planned to retire in here?

A: Right. Then about two weeks before we were to start building, my sister called and said they decided that they couldn’t afford to keep the house and maintain it from a distance. They lived in Virginia. We spent a week trying to decide whether we should just buy the house and this lot so that this lot wouldn’t have to be built on. It just ended up that we decided that it was too much. So, we put the house on the market, and then the Rooneys bought it.

OH2015.010.023

OH2015.010.024

Q: What year was that?

A: I think they bought it in 1997.

Q: What year did you build here?

A: That was the year that we moved in here, the fall of '97.

Q: So, you lived there for a year, got it ready for sale, lived here when this house was being built?

A: We lived next door while this was being built that whole year. And then we moved in, in the fall. That's when we finally put it up for sale, because we couldn't move out of that as long as we were living in my dad's house.

Q: So, then you moved out completely, put it up for sale and the Rooneys bought it and became your next-door neighbors?

A: Right.

Q: You moved in here in 1997, so you've been here now twelve years. How do you feel about that?

A: I feel very good. Just as good as I thought I would.

Q: Were you working for part of that time?

A: Yes. At first, I thought I would continue my physical therapy. I did a couple of things, but I was getting to the point where I was able to make other decisions. There were other things that I wanted to do in my life. I decided to not work, in terms of physical therapy. I got tired of telling people what to do with their lives. I really did. I needed to take care of myself. I didn't want to have to take care of other people for a while. I stopped, and eventually gave up my license. I didn't renew it. When I decided that I wanted to contribute financially, I worked for a home care agency. I had this one main client—a man that was ninety years old. He was wonderful. I had a great time—two-and-a-half years.

Q: In between that time, you wrote a book about Quonnie.

A: Right.

Q: What can you tell me about the process of that?

A: That was really interesting. This is where you never know where your life is going. Once I got here, and my mother and my grandmother were good—our family always took photographs, but the photographs always ended up in this big box. I spent that first

summer that we were here in my dad's house starting to sift out the photographs and trying to figure out what they were all about.

Q: Were they dated/

A: A lot of them were. I got a hold of Barbara Adams, because I knew she was trying to establish some kind of a historical record. I spent the summer over with her a lot going through all the things that she had collected. Barbara was ill at the time. She had cancer. I didn't realize how ill she was when I first started working with her on my photos. She ended up in Westerly Hospital, and she called me to the hospital. She was dying. She wanted me to have everything that she had collected.

Q: Was this in 1997?

A: It would have to have been '96.

Q: At that time, did she tell you that she wanted you to be the next Quonnie historian?

A: No. She didn't say that specifically, but she knew that I was really interested, so she wanted to give all the things that she had done to somebody that would carry them on.

Q: How did that dovetail with you writing the book?

A: It's not that I didn't like what I was doing before with physical therapy, but it was like this was really what I wanted to do. I loved history, in general. Barbara died that fall.

Q: Of '96?

A: Yes. It all happened very fast. It started out with a personal thing for a while, and then it developed into something greater than that. But the older people in Quonnie were dying. The stories weren't being told. That's when I said, "I've got to do some more histories." The word spread. It was a process. It didn't happen all of a sudden. People knew that I was interested. They started giving me photographs. I decided one winter—I think it was the first winter that we were in this house, 32 Neptune, I spent the whole winter—maybe it was the second winter—collecting all these old photos from people. I thought what good is it for me to have them. They should be available for the community. That's when I said, "I've got to do some kind of a book."

Q: When did you start collecting oral histories?

A: I'll have to look at the dates. Barbara did a couple of the histories before she died.

Q: That were recorded?

A: Yes. It must have been '96 that we got going on that.

Q: So, you began with photographs—Barbara’s collection. You had some old personal photographs of your family here. You began to look at the larger picture. You began to be concerned that the older generation would be passing on, so the time was now to interview them. So, you interviewed them and collected their oral histories and began to put the first printing together.

A: Right. But the oral histories were kind of separate from the book. The oral histories—I had to start capturing the stories. What was going to be done with them I didn’t really know. Maybe in the foreseeable future they would publish parts of the stories. But I just felt the urgency to do that. The book—I thought we have all these old photographs now. We already have something to share with the community.

Q: The book is more true history; not interpretations. The book is more locations, who owned this house, who built this house, who lived here—what the history of the building is, what the history of West Beach and the boardwalk, Mother Brimley’s—locations that are supported by your research.

A: Right.

Q: And trips to town hall?

A: I spent a lot of time in town hall between land evidence records and that type of thing.

Q: So, your book was well supported historically.

A: And then I formed a board. I got some people that were interested in Quonnie’s history.

Q: That was your concept where you wanted to go with the Quonnie Historical Society. So, you basically developed it. What you got from Barbara Adams was not where you took it.

A: No.

Q: What form was it in, in 1996?

A: It was just a collection of things—photographs. Some of West Beach, but Barbara was most concerned about Central Beach.

Q: Then as you began collecting these things, people began to give you more and tell you about things that you might be interested in. Then where did that take you?

A: I felt that I needed to get other people in the community involved. I mentioned forming the board. We just got together and talked about what should we do. How else can we get this information out to the community?

OH2015.010.023

OH2015.010.024

Q: My understanding is you took the profits from the sales of your book and used that to establish the treasury for this organization.

A: Yes.

Q: And then you began collecting photographs and letters and personal histories of where people had been during the '38 Hurricane and what they had seen. And also, the '54 Hurricane. Collecting this information. Forming the board. Evolving the concept of a video for the 1900s. What other concepts have you evolved?

A: First of all, the concept of the documentary still exists, but we haven't been able to go very far with that.

Q: But you have done other things: the history nights.

A: Yes. We did history nights. We did lectures. We first started with lectures in our homes. We did walks.

Q: For example, to show children Money Rock.

A: Right. We did what we call our Rocks and Ruins Walk. It didn't go over terribly well, but it was an attempt to do something that wasn't just for people to read. We wanted them to experience the beach.

Q: So, you took them on a walk to Old Chimneys and—

A: With that particular one, we started down at the breachway. We met down there and walked the beach up to the nun's place. Holly Schroeder helped with that and talked about the importance of the rocks going way back to the glaciers and how they got here—Money Rock and the ruins along the way from the '38 Hurricane—the steps that are left standing in the sand and that kind of thing. Everybody named rocks. Postcards were a big thing. Everybody sent postcards home during their summer vacations. Some of the postcards that we have in the Historical Society—things like Profile Rock. Do you know where Profile Rock is? I've got to show you this. I spent days walking up and down the beach trying to find out where this Profile Rock was. It used to be a big deal. I guess it still is in some ways, but nobody knows about it. I finally found it. It's over near the Quonochontaug Inn, or the nun's retreat area. I took a picture of it. Tom took a picture of me. I was doing the profile of the rock. I found that. That was a big find. And Money Rock.

Q: And you also found the Bramble over in East Beach by field work.

A: Not the Bramble. Oh, the Dingle?

Q: The Dingle.

OH2015.010.023

OH2015.010.024

A: The Dingle had been there since the early 1900s. I knew about the Dingle, but hadn't ever walked it. I was amazed at how narrow my Quonnie experience really was—things like the Dingle, or Money Rock, or the breachway—this was expanding my horizon.

Q: Even though the physical place was the same, you were learning different aspects that you hadn't come in contact with.

A: I had no idea. We didn't spend a lot of time on the pond. The animals, the horseshoe crabs—

Q: The blue crabs.

A: I knew a little bit about the blue crabs. But there was a lot that I didn't know. I didn't have a sense of the change in the seasons here at all.

Q: You had one sliver of experience, and then the longer you stayed here, the wider your scope of experiences were.

A: Yes. It got me excited. It was fun for me. Totally fun.

Q: And interviewing folks like Walter Nugent.

A: Yes. Every person had a different experience. What was beginning to happen was it started all connecting. Somebody would talk about—like Ellie Prior would talk about her father bringing her on weekends to the breachway and going to one of the hotels. That would connect with somebody else's story. It was like candy. It was like, "Tell me more."

Q: There was a whole group of people whose Quonnie experience was the Seabreeze Inn. They had a very different experience.

A: Right. They did. They formed their own little community there that has stayed somewhat connected through the years.

Q: And they came back year after year.

A: Yes. I felt really privileged to have, and still to be meeting people that are wanting to talk about their life at Quonnie.

Q: You certainly have made wonderful contributions to the community at large. But in terms of personally, have you had any family weddings here? Have you had family reunions? How had this place kept your family in touch with one another?

A: This is definitely a family gathering place. For our immediately family now, it's kind of centered around 4th of July when everybody that can come is invited. Quonnie pulls people together. It's such a wonderful place to be with your family.

Q: What family activities or individual pursuits did you and your family enjoy here in Quonnie? You can start with what you remember about your grandparents and go on with what you share with Henry and Sawyer.

A: We could write a book about all this. Starting with my own experience, I already talked about some of the initial memories I had when I came down, but it's basically the beach. I don't think I owned or wore any real clothes. We had three bathing suits. We'd get up in the morning and put our bathing suits on and go to the beach. And rolling in the black sand. Getting wet and then rolling in the black sand. Going to sleep at night and hearing the planes practicing, because the Charlestown Air Base was still involved with practice for aircraft carrier landings. That was part of going to sleep—hearing the planes. That is a very strong memory. We thought it was a big occasion if we took a ride to Galilee, or maybe to Watch Hill once a year. Maybe once a year to Misquamicut. That was like going to a foreign country. We mostly just stayed right here.

Q: So, you traveled a bit, but your life was centered around the beach and swimming?

A: The women—the mother, my grandmother, who stayed with us at Sea Biscuit—we were here alone during the week a lot. We didn't have a car. I have to tell you this story about my grandmother. This is how pampered we are. Tom thinks in a past life that I was some queen or something, because I just love to be served. We would trot down to the beach in the morning, play, start feeling a little hungry. We used to go up on the dunes, check out the clothesline of Sea Biscuit. My grandmother would have a little white handkerchief that she used to pin to the clothesline when lunch was ready. So, we knew lunch was ready, and we'd zoom back and eat our lunch. That's being a little spoiled, I guess. I don't remember doing a whole lot of chores or anything. If it was my parents, I'd definitely be giving out chores to my kids once we moved up to Neptune Avenue. I don't remember doing too much, except having a good time.

Q: What did you do with your kids here? Did they learn to swim here? Did they learn to bike?

A: The kids didn't spend a whole lot of time here when they were little, because my dad wanted to more or less be by himself. And yet, they still had this connection. They spent very little time here. I was so connected. Maybe that just spilled over to them. Right now, Quonnie is where they want to be.

Q: How about Henry and Sawyer? What do they love about this place?

A: They're now four and eight. They're really starting to know what Quonnie is all about. Henry went in the water for the first time this summer. He had been afraid of the water. He loved building castles in the sand. He was completely happy doing those kinds of things. He would go crabbing a couple of times. Crabbing was another big thing, and using the carbs for Mr. King for his bait. That was another big thing for us. Lee remembers that.

Q: Your daughter?

A: Yes. This summer I had my two grand nieces—my brother’s granddaughters—with us. They love the beach. When Henry and Sawyer came down when they were here, they were all together. We went to the beach. The girls went right in the water, and they said, “Come on, Henry. Come on.” Well, they didn’t know that Henry didn’t like the water. All of a sudden, Henry decided—he went with his dad. He went through the waves. So, he’s had his first experience in the waves this year. It was quite a moment. Tom and I spent a lot of time with him on the pond this summer.

Q: Kayaking?

A: With the girls, yes. With Henry and Sawyer, we didn’t use the kayak, though they will kayak. Sawyer is really tiny. It’s just a very non-threatening place. They spent their whole afternoon trying to catch pipe fish and hermit crabs. They were very happy just to be there. That was a really good memory. And then, of course, the baseball games now—the boys. That’s a part of my life. I never used to go down. When we were younger, yes. We used to play baseball. But it’s been a long time. Now the boys want to play in the games on Saturdays or early Sunday mornings. They loved it. They’ve really enjoyed that.

Q: What are your favorite memories of Quonnie?

A: Freedom. The sense of just being able to play.

Q: How do you view your love for Quonnie as a generational phenomenon?

A: It’s a feeling. I don’t explain it. It’s like whatever you love—the people that you touch, then that’s what they get from you. I’m sure that’s happened to you with your children, and your grandson now. It’s something that you don’t even have to talk about.

Q: Is there anything else you want to touch on that I haven’t asked you?

A: We stayed here in Hurricane Carol, August of ’54. At the time, they did not evacuate our street. We were on Neptune Avenue. We got to stay in the house. We thought it was a big party. There was no television. I don’t even remember a telephone for a long time. In ’54, I even wonder if we had a telephone. It’s hard to know when all these things started coming in.

Q: There would have been radios.

A: Right. We had a radio. My parents were there. We got to stay in the house, and all of a sudden we saw all these chairs whipping by. The winds started picking up. I remember my mother putting all these chairs around the big glass window in the front of the house,

because she was afraid it was going to blow through. She didn't want us to get too close to it.

Q: Did you have a big plywood board that you put across your window?

A: No. This was inside the screened-in porch. The porch was in front. But we got permission to go upstairs once during the hurricane to see what was happening on the shore. I looked out the window and saw the waves crashing through the front houses. That's a big memory. Then when the winds started to subside, we were allowed to go down towards the ball field and get as close as we could. I remember that you had to fight in order to get yourself moving against that wind even when it had started to subside. The strength of it—

[beginning of second part of the interview]

Q: This is September 11th, 2009. Anne Doyle and Leah Bradshaw are present. We're concluding the September 9th, 2009 interview with Anne Doyle. Anne, we're not absolute sure what we've retained, so would you be willing to talk about your recollections of Hurricane Carol in August of '54?

A: We were not evacuated during that hurricane. At least Neptune Avenue was not evacuated, so we stayed in my father's house, next door, 28 Neptune. Our first realization that something was happening was when the furniture chairs were flying by on Neptune Avenue. We stayed in the house. I remember my mother was concerned about the big glass window in the front, even though it was protected. It was inside the porch area. It was kind of moving a little bit, so she put chairs all around it so that we couldn't go near that window. The other recollection that I have is that we were allowed once to go upstairs to see what was happening on the ocean front. We went upstairs, and I remember seeing the water going through the front houses. We thought it was kind of fun in a lot of ways, because we could just sit around and play cards. Then when the winds started to subside, our parents let us out. We were going to try to walk as far as we could near to the water. As we were walking down Neptune towards the ball field, the wind was so strong. I can remember fighting against the wind trying to get down Neptune Avenue. The force of that wind was memorable to me. I think those are the main recollections that I have.

Q: Did the wind penetrate your father's house at 28 Neptune? When you went upstairs, could you feel the wind?

A: I don't remember that. I certainly heard it. I don't have a recollection of other sensations.

Q: When you walked down towards the ball field, was the wind so strong that you had to walk with great force?

OH2015.010.023

OH2015.010.024

A: We walked around that little hill at Ninigret down to Ocean View. That's as far as we could get, because the water was all around that area at the end of Ninigret.

Q: Was it depositing sand?

A: We didn't know what was under the water. There must have been some sand. On Surfside there was some sand left. We couldn't get any further than that.

Q: Were the houses on Surfside in the front row demolished?

A: No, they weren't. I didn't explore the rest of Quonnie, but there were houses that were taken off their foundations in '54. There was one that apparently came across—do you know where that chimney is that stands over in the Ashaway group?

Q: Yes.

A: That house came off its foundation. I think it was that house that ended up in the middle of West Beach Road, and then moved somewhere on Sunset later.

Q: There was a story I heard about a man who had bought two lots. One was behind the other. He was going to build his wife a new house on the back lot. I think he told her, "Good news. You have a house. Bad news: it's your old house that got moved back one lot." That was '38.

A: Yes. I think that was '38. That was over on West Beach. I think Holly Schroeder told that story.

Q: Is there anything else that you can recollect? Did you swim in the water after the '54 Hurricane?

A: Not right after. No.

Q: Was there debris in the water?

A: The only things I remember are what I just told you. I can't remember that there was, but there must have been. I think we need to talk to some other people that were older that can remember more specifics about that.

Q: What do you most enjoy sharing with your grandchildren here in Quonnie?

A: We enjoy whatever they enjoy. We go to the beach. Henry has not been wanting to go into the water until this past year. He loves the beach. He loves to build sand castles. We go down there. They love the 4th of July parade. They love dressing up and going in the parade. Starting this year, they can't miss being in the young baseball games that start at 8:30 in the morning. They got to play in their very first baseball game. They've just been pretending. They have this little diamond at home where they think they were

playing baseball, but they weren't. They just had a ball doing that. And also on the pond. Tom and I spent a whole afternoon with them on the pond this summer. Henry was catching pipe fish and hermit crabs and whatever he could find with a net. Sawyer and I walked out to the launch area. We were down at the Central Beach launch area. It was low tide. We could walk towards Bill's Island. If we had wanted to, we probably could have gotten there. We didn't actually do that. We got to see a big horseshoe crab and learned how to pick it up. We brought the tubes over there. They had a great time. We enjoyed that day with them tremendously.

Q: It sounds like they're learning to love it as much as their grandparents and their great grandparents.

A: I certainly hope so. Definitely now the word Quonnie is part of them this year. They have a feeling for what Quonnie is. They look forward to coming whenever they can. Sometimes they bring their bikes. I've been starting to bike around with Henry a little bit so that he can remember how to get from here down to the beach, park his bike down there and go around all the roads so that he knows his way. Hopefully, as he gets a little older, he'll be able to say, "Grandma, meet me down at the beach," and I'll say, "Okay, Henry." I'm looking forward to that day when he can just roam around and I don't have to really worry about him. They're beginning to really enjoy Quonnie.

Q: Is there anything else you can think of that we should cover about your life here?

A: Just little smatterings of things that were really important to me. Things like spending hours collecting black sand with a magnet. Another thing was whenever we would come up from the beach, we would have to wash our feet in—I thought it was kerosene. Maybe it was some other chemical. We'd have to take off all the oil and the tar that we got on our feet or on our legs left over from the war. It would just settle on the rocks. If we sat on the rocks, then we'd get it on our bathing suits. That was part of the daily ritual down here. Blackberrying, blueberrying—a big-big part of our lives.

Q: Did you clam at the pond?

A: No. As a youngster, I didn't spend a lot of time on the pond. That's why now I love being there, because it's a new experience for me. When we go kayaking, that's really what started it. It was a whole new piece of Quonnie that I didn't know. I know your family used the pond a lot, but we didn't. The pond is a whole different environment. The kayaking kind of led to wanting to spend more time on the pond. Back to the blueberrying and the blackberrying, each of the families had their secret places. You didn't tell where you had found your big blueberry bush or a patch of blackberries. You didn't even tell your best friend. The Skippers had their area. My dad liked quiet. He would go out and pick berries. He would come back with huge bucketsful of blackberries. My mother would make blackberry jelly—no pectin or anything. Pure blackberry jelly. One year I think she counted 100 jars. She would heat them up, and then put the heated berries in a big cheesecloth bag and hang it from one of the cupboard handles up above. Then she had some kind of container below it. It would drip, and then

she would squeeze it and squeeze it and squeeze it. Her hands would turn purple. That was a very big part of our life doing that. We would go to certain places for blueberries. There was a place off of 216 that was kind of our place. It was a little road. We used to park way in. It felt like we were away from everybody, which we kind of were. These days, you couldn't do that, because it's all privately owned. But back then, that was okay. We had little spots over there that we would go blueberrying. Another thing that came into my head was—it started with my brother, but then the business went to me, and then my sister did it for a while—is selling gladiolas. Do you remember when we sold gladiolas?

Q: In a very vague way.

A: One of the builders of my dad's house at 28 Neptune back in the early '50s, he came from Wyoming, Rhode Island. He grew gladiolas. He approached my parents and my brother, would we want to sell some of his gladiolas. We charged like a \$1.25 for thirteen. There were always thirteen in the bunch. Even after he finished building our house, we would leave this bucket with water in it on the porch. Early in the morning when he would come to work—he worked for Brad Fisher—he would bring his gladiolas all bunched up, and he would put them in the porch. When we got up, there would be maybe three or four bunches to sell for \$1.25. We would get the quarter; he would get the dollar. We would leave the money for him in an envelope and put it under the bucket so that when he came to deliver the next day, he would take the money. I remember making little cards and advertising, putting them in people's mailboxes. We had quite a little business going there. When I was done with it, my sister did it for a little while.

Q: Do you remember shopping at the farm at the corner of West Beach Road and Route 1?

A: East West Farm.

Q: And how you could buy eggs or milk? You had to make your own change, because they were too busy to wait on you.

A: Right. There was nobody there. It was an honor system. I remember going there with my grandmother. There was a little house. That little house where they put all the products is still there. The barn is still there. Did you do that too?

Q: Yes. That was my first lesson in honesty. I remember saying to my mother, "If there's nobody here, why do we have to pay at all? Why don't we just take some of that money?" And she said, "No, because if we did, it wouldn't be there in the future, and what would we do when we needed eggs?" I almost remember buying bread there too. I remember infrequently getting an ice cream.

A: If you talk to somebody else, I'd be interested to know what my sister remembers. She has different memories. For Hurricane Carol she has different memories than I do. I don't know how I missed it, but it's not there. It's interesting to know what our minds keep and what we let go. Somebody else keeps something else.

Q: Sometimes it's a brief fleeting vision, and then you build up a memory around it. Is there anything else besides the gladiolas?

A: We had old bikes. We didn't do any distance biking at all. We had old, rusty bikes with the big tires. When we went to clean out my dad's house, underneath the house where we kept the bikes, we pulled all that old stuff out. We put in the trash. I notice that the kids nowadays, they're starting to go back to the old-looking bike. The beach bikes. The only other thing I can think of is the little gangs we used to have. Depending on how old you were, you went around with certain people. In my group, I wouldn't let my sister in, because she was younger than I was. She had to form her own group. We used to sit on the beach together. A big deal about who's going to put their blanket in front of yours, especially if it was a guy. We were like, "Who is he going to pick to sit with today?"

Q: Who were your close friends here?

A: Vicky Skipper definitely. Vicky and Linda Merckel. The Henrys—Rob Henry. There were some people that came for parts of the summer. Louise Murray. Louise graduated into the older, older group, so she kind of left our group and went into the more privileged older group.

Q: I remember the Lodges.

A: Sue Lodge. Sue was more a friend of my sisters. I wanted to talk about Burnham. Everybody's heart throb at the time. Burnham was older than we were. He used to be the guard at the beach. When I say guard, all we had down there was the umbrella stuck in the sand. He would be sitting there lounging around, checking people as they were going in. We would all gather around. He would talk to us. Then he would say, "I think I'd like a Coke." "Okay, Burnham." We'd run back to the house, get him a Coke, bring it back. We would do anything for him. Absolutely anything. He had us wrapped around his little finger. Also connected with Burnham was the tennis. He taught a lot of us how to play tennis. Then they started having tournaments down near the ball field. Those were the only courts that were there at the time. We all wore white.

Q: Would that be white shoes, white shorts and white blouse?

A: During the tournament. Yes. Definitely. Burnham asked me to play with him in the mixed doubles for a couple of years. I used to play against Margaret Fogarty.

Q: I remember Margaret in her tennis whites.

A: I always lost to Margaret. Tennis was a pretty big thing for us. Going down to the bowling alley when it was there. We used to set up our own pins down in West Beach.

OH2015.010.023

OH2015.010.024

Q: My brother was a pin boy for while there. People used to throw balls at him if he wasn't fast enough to set the pins back up. He had to dodge balls. He would be setting up the pins, and he had to zip out of the way.

A: It's true about the alleys themselves. They had been through a couple of hurricanes, or at least the '38. They were warped. They were literally wavy. We used to do that.

Q: Did you ever go to Blue Shutters?

A: Yes. Once in a while we used to go down to have an ice cream. That was such a long distance away. Isn't that something? Walk to Blue Shutters? My goodness. Not a lot, but we did do it. I remember the rubber rafts that all the boys had. I don't know if I ever had one. They were out there with the rubber rafts. They would also go spear fishing out on the rocks there. I remember that.

Q: They got blue fish and black fish.

A: Yes. Occasionally we went over to Block Island, but not often.

Q: Was it that all your needs were met here?

A: Yes. I think that's probably true. We were just happy being where we were.

Q: Does that ever come over you now with a basic feeling of happiness that you're here and that's enough?

A: Yes. When we moved here, said, "I will be the happiest I could be if I lived in Quonnie for a whole year." I thought that I want to be here at least a year of my life. Now it's been a lot longer than that. Maybe ten years from now it will be different. Who knows? But I never wanted to live anywhere else.

Q: And it's not stepping back in time to a simpler life, because life has moved on and changed in very dramatic ways, but you've made a place here.

A: Yes. I feel very connected and very much a part of the community. I think as we get older, we need that sense of community. It's like our little kayak group when we got together the other day. That was the sense I had.

Q: I'm glad that I belong to this group of people.

A: Yes.

Q: Even though I didn't kayak much this summer, I like that group of women, and I felt totally entitled to be there.

A: Good. I was hoping that you were.

Q: Is there anything else?

A: I can't think of anything.

Q: Roller skating?

A: We used to go to Misquamicut once a year. They had a roller-skating rink over there. Dodging cars. The skating and the merry-go-round. We only went on the merry-go-round when we were really little. We went over for the dodging cars and the roller skating. I think I talked about the fact that when we were first here, the roads weren't paved. I think they were oiled. They weren't paved. But we wouldn't wear shoes, so into the summer our feet were so tough that we could walk on all those sharp stones and didn't even feel it.

Q: Did you jump from rock to rock at the water's edge and crab?

A: Yes. We would do it purposely for Mr. King. We would bring the crabs back and give the crabs to Mr. King so that we'd have them for bait for fishing.

Q: Do you remember taking a mussel and smashing it with a rock, and then tying it on the string and raising a crab out and dropping it in a small pail?

A: Yes. That stands out in my mind. But there were a lot of big mussels then. I've been trying to find those big mussels. You can't find them. They're not growing.

Q: Maybe they're not living as long. Maybe they're being pulled off their rocks.

A: I have no idea. But in teaching the kids how to do it, it's hard to find the mussels for them to tie the string around. What we usually do is bring a piece of hotdog or something down and tie that around, because we don't have the mussels.

Q: I had forgotten those huge mussels. Every once in a while, you see a wreath that's made with large, medium and small mussels. You never see those large ones anymore.

A: Just remembering putting the mussel down on the rock, taking a smaller rock and cracking it, and then that orangey mussel that was within it and tying it with a string.

Q: Did you ever eat mussels?

A: No.

Q: We did very occasionally. It was just steamed mussels.

A: No. We never did.

OH2015.010.023

OH2015.010.024

Q: Did you ever have a clambake?

A: Our family had an annual clambake up at Aunt Edith's—Edith Fishers. She had a log cabin up there. They had a summer house down on Surfside, but then they lived up on the that little hill in Ninigret in the winter. She would organize a family clambake every year.

Q: Was it on the beach.

A: No. It was up at her house. The guys would go out and get the crabs from the pond and the clams. I didn't do that part. I just had a good time. I don't think I did any of the work. My aunt would make fritters.

Q: Did you have potatoes in your clambake?

A: I don't remember the potatoes. I just remember in the pit itself—I don't know exactly how they did it, but there was just the clams and corn. My Uncle Arthur, who was my grandmother's brother married to Edith Fisher—his name was Arthur—he had an ice cream maker. When I think of that part of my family, I definitely think of homemade ice cream. Peach, chocolate—those two stand out in my mind. We would take turns with the—it was hand cranked. And then the watermelon at the end and spitting the seeds. My grandmother tried to win the contest of spitting the seeds the farthest. I thought she was so cool doing that. My grandmother did that.

Q: Thank you so much.