

QUONOHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

MARGARET ZABEL SR.

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Interviewed by Anne Schaefer Doyle

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A: ...there were eleven pieces of [inaudible 00:17]. This we got at the Christmas Tree Shop.

A: We had to stand in line for that.

Q: You went into Westerly?

A: Yes. We went into Westerly. We would round the kids up and [inaudible 00:40].

Q: Was there a regular [inaudible 00:46]?

A: It was a [inaudible 00:48] store and chicken.

A: Chicken. Yes. [inaudible 00:51]. They opened up the one in Westerly. They still have the one in Newport.

A: They have on in Springfield too. The same name.

A: The same brand name.

A: They have a big [inaudible 01:03].

A: [inaudible 01:05].

A: But we had to stand in line for that. I don't know how we got coupons for gas, but we did.

A: That's where you have to [inaudible 01:19]. He delivered newspapers to the street corners. But they gave him gas for his car. My father didn't use as much gas as they said. He had enough gas to come down here on the weekend.

Q: I was going to ask that.

A: That's where we got our gas.

A: And that's how we could go to Westerly.

A: Yes. We'd go into Westerly to get our shopping done.

A: If you wanted to go to the beach, you had a wagon and you pulled everything. One kid got in the wagon. We turned around and used Blue Shutters.

A: We used to go to Blue Shutters. We'd go down there.

A: You could walk down. We used that beach before we belonged to the association.

A: The association wasn't formed when we first moved here.

Q: Can you tell me about that? I don't know anything about the East Beach Association.

A: That was formed. First of all, they wanted low-income to buy Blue Shutters. They could have bought the whole Blue Shutters for \$5,000. Someone [inaudible 02:29] donations for it, but they didn't get enough. So, they got their donations back.

A: Actually, they're still getting their donations back, I think.

A: They probably still are.

[overlapping conversation]

A: Two years ago, we went to the beach picnic. James was president then. They were giving prizes. Were you there at that time? They were giving prizes for the person who had been here the longest, the person with the most children, the person with—there were four different things, and I was all four. I was the oldest person. James said, "I don't know nothing about this, Mother." We got my prizes. I think I took one bottle of wine.

Q: So, the East Beach Association was formed several years after you first moved here?

A: I don't know when they formed it. [inaudible 03:42] the beach picnics for a couple of years, then we [inaudible 03:47] just hamburgers and hotdogs on the beach during the day.

Q: Did you have traditional, events during the summer?

A: Yes. There were beach picnics at 6:00.

A: It was too late.

[overlapping conversation]

A: All the older people [inaudible 04:10]. But when we had picnics during the day, then the kids were in and out of the water and eating all day long. It was an all-day thing. It was wonderful. Then one night we had a beach [inaudible 04:28]. Some parent over on Central Beach said, “You kids should come back really early in the morning before the sun gets up, and you should cook breakfast on the beach and watch the sunrise.” Here we were, sixteen and seventeen years old.

[overlapping conversation]

A: They cooked oysters on the rocks down there.

A: Yes. With kerosine on a stick. But we never did that again. When you’re that age, it was terrible.

A: We’ve got great memories from here. Great memories.

Q: You also talked about the dances.

A: Every Friday night there was square dancing at the Grange Hall.

Q: I remember them at Seabreeze. But that was after.

A: Up on the highway, the Grange.

A: And before the Grange, there was a farm on West—what is that road?

Q: East West Farm.

A: Yes.

Q: I have spoken with Dick Hutchins, who grew up on the farm.

A: When I was little, I remember Jean going to square dances.

A: That’s right. That was before the Grange.

A: Before the Grange. And then we had Sunday church in the Grange. All they did was set up folding chairs, and we had to kneel down on the floor after they had the square dances the night before. But also, before that—

A: The bowling alley.

Q: Is that where it is now?

A: Yes.

Q: Because I know they moved that from another part of Route 1.

A: That might be. But before we went to church in the Grange, we went down to the bowling alley for Catholic church.

[overlapping conversation]

A: You had to get your paper first.

A: The Schwarzes used to go the bowling alley, and then they went to the Grange. I had a big romance with—

[overlapping conversation]

A: We went together for two or three years. I went up to his prep school for a weekend.

A: You went to his house too.

A: It didn't work out.

A: They have lots of money—the Schwarzes. Lots of money. They had lots and lots of money.

A: When you go out on the beach, you can see Block Island. [inaudible 07:34]. I don't know. Well, you mother says you've got a lot of money.

Q: Who are you married to?

A: I married a guy from Springfield. I met him in Misquamicut at the Andrea. I had some girlfriends down. It was a Sunday afternoon, and they wanted to go to Misquamicut.

A: She was on the market for a man at that time.

[overlapping conversation]

A: You wanted children, but you were too old to have children.

A: I met him in Misquamicut. I was in Hartford in an apartment working at Harford Hospital. He lived in Springfield, and he used to call me up. I got out of work at 11:15. He used to call me up every single night—every night, every night. And then I said, "I'm going away for the weekend," and I didn't drive, so I had to take a bus to New London and my mother picked me up.

A: I took Tracy to the train about that time [inaudible 08:53].

[overlapping conversation]

A: My husband's name is Danny Roy. We went together about a year, and then we got married.

Q: Do you have children?

A: We had four children in five years. [inaudible 09:20].

A: There are so many babies that live here on this beach next to us. It's not funny. All boys.

A: No girls.

A: [inaudible 09:38].

[overlapping conversation]

A: She's got four babies. [inaudible 09:44] has got just the one baby, right?

A: Yes.

A: And you had three babies. [inaudible 09:52] has two or three babies. Liz just had two or three babies. They all live [inaudible 09:57] of each other—these kids. And so, we have a beach of babies.

Q: How old are your children now?

A: Their birthdays are coming up. We'll pretend it's August. Catherine is 24. Jennifer is 26. Danny is 27. He'll be 28 in November. And July is 28. She just turned 28.

A: Jennifer's birthday was yesterday.

A: Yes. If we went back to before yesterday, it would be 23, 25, 27 and 28. That's easier.

Q: Do they all love it here too?

A: No. My oldest one, she has two little boys, and she married a guy from California. They've come back three times, and they just don't like going to the beach. They don't like it. She's so afraid of the sun with the children that the sunblock screen is not going to work. She goes to the beach for ten or fifteen minutes, and comes running back home. They're moving back to California. They decided that they don't like New England. It's not as friendly as California is. They both miss it. They're going back in a couple of months. They live right behind us. Their property touches our property. They bought a house. My son bought a house. He lives three blocks from us.

Q: So, your families have stayed—

[overlapping conversation]

A: She just turned 25. She lives with us still. My youngest graduated from the Air Force—

A: Two years ago.

A: A year ago.

A: We went to Colorado for the graduation.

Q: We lived in Denver for a while.

A: It's a mistake to go to those graduations. Were there eight people?

A: We had nineteen.

A: We sat out in a field on bleachers. You don't see the individual from a mile away. You have to go through [inaudible 12:39]. I had a wheelchair.

A: Why? Was West Point your brother?

A: No. [inaudible 12:46].

[overlapping conversation]

A: Our brothers.

A: Our two brothers graduated from West Point.

Q: What was your maiden name?

A: Brown. The two boys went to West Point, and the other two brothers got their degrees through West Point. Jeffrey's not a lawyer. He's a liver specialist. He just came back from Beirut. He tried out for the university, but he worked for three or four years. So, he went back to [inaudible 13:20]. There was a lot of stuff blown up over there. It wasn't blown up when he lived there. My problem is my feet don't work right. I'm tied up with my feet.

Q: You've got some stockings to help with your circulation.

A: They never go down to normal.

Q: Were you just in the hospital?

A: Yes. I just came out [inaudible 13:52] a convalescent home down in Wethersfield at the Mediplex. It's like a country club.

A: She loved it.

A: Did you do the cooking for them?

A: No. I didn't do the cooking.

[overlapping conversation]

A: The meals were excellent. When [inaudible 14:12] got married, we had my television [inaudible 14:14].

[overlapping conversation]

A: We had the same dinners they had at the wedding reception, except that they had [inaudible 14:31]. But everything else was the same. The nurses were hiding behind my curtain [inaudible 14:42] 10:30 to 11:00 they had it on. They had it in a small living room. It wasn't small, but it was very, very interesting.

Q: Was that on a Saturday?

A: Yes. A little old lady [inaudible 14:58] 97 years old. Sharp as a tack. Her hearing was a little poor. So is mine, so we got along very well together. I'm trying to find out where she is. I want to send her some cards. I think they probably moved her somewhere. The room was small. She lived in Main Street in Hartford down hear the Park Street area. I tried to find her in the phone book. They didn't know what they were going to do with her, because they couldn't do any more for her. She was having problems. But you should see that place. They have got the most wonderful therapy room. They have three of them. Every kind of equipment you can imagine. I was taken down there for an hour.

Q: Can you walk at all?

A: Yes. [inaudible 15:52]. But I had a shot. Did I have the shot on Thursday?

A: Friday.

A: Smooth thing. "I'm going to give you one a week for three weeks."

Q: What happened?

A: She was bone rubbing on bone. What they're putting in there is going to separate—some kind of insulation.

Q: Is it like synovial fluid?

A: No. [inaudible 16:19] my knees, but can't do it. They can't give it to me because of my osteoporosis [inaudible 16:28].

Q: I've been taking glucosamine chondroitin sulfate. Have you ever heard of that?

A: Yes.

Q: It has helped.

A: You have no pain?

Q: I don't have any joint space left. I got so much pain that I couldn't use my arm. It was so painful.

A: I had two boots on for seven weeks.

A: So, that's really helped you? I was down there with my husband helping him [inaudible 17:09] this tape that's this wide. The gray tape.

Q: The duct tape?

A: Yes. I hurt both of my joints here. This was four years ago. It was so bad. But I also had a disc repair, which was unsuccessful. I was wondering if I should—

Q: If you have the diagnosis correct, it's for osteoarthritis; not rheumatoid arthritis.

A: I've got more equipment from Kaiser. Kaiser [inaudible 17:45] test your sugar. They gave me two pair of boots—not one, but two pair. And I've got a whole big box of bandages and stuff.

A: She's on prednisone, and her skin tears.

A: Yes. It tears right off. I was laying like this sleeping, and I couldn't get my arm out, so I reached down and pulled my arm out and it took the skin off, which is this bump here. It took the skin off. [inaudible 18:18].

A: Then last winter she fell, and the storm door hit the back of her leg.

[overlapping conversation]

A: Her wounds were this deep.

A: You can see where the scar is.

A: They wanted to take her legs. I sent my little nurse down there, because an LPN. She is working right there in the hospital, and I just [inaudible 18:52]. And so, I sent her down, and she gave everybody a book about skin tearing and how to take care of it. It was not right, but they did get the message that we did not want to lose any limbs. They were to do whatever they could to save her legs.

Q: Everybody needs an advocate.

A: Jennifer, my daughter, is really mouthy.

A: Oh, yeah. That's for sure. And she talked the nurses into letting her go into their supply closet. "Take whatever you need." We've got supplies for the next ten years.

A: So, they wrapped her leg in—

A: With the gauze.

A: They put nothing on the wound. Just wrapped the whole leg with [inaudible 19:49], and put the gauze, and then put an ACE Bandage around that. They wrapped it tight enough so that she didn't have any swelling, and therefore her body could heal itself without having all this [inaudible 20:07] in the tissue.

A: That stayed on for seven days.

A: Every time they took it off, it was half the size.

A: It was a little bit more closed. But they were afraid if they do the knee, it's such a large wound, that it would never heal. That's what I need. I need a new knee.

A: She has a Baker's cyst, and the fluid runs down into her ankle. They're getting her straightened out.

A: What else can happen [inaudible 20:46].

Q: You have a lot of support here.

A: Yes.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: My Kaiser doctor is excellent.

A: And Kaiser said when she left Mediplex that they would supply her with a home health aide. And I'll be here.

A: Mediplex is all paid for. I have no expense whatsoever. Even if I wanted a telephone, it would cost me \$2 a day. I had the telephone, and I didn't get charged for it. They gave me a walker with the wheels on it, and they gave me a cane.

A: And a pick-up stick.

A: You can pick things up off the floor. [inaudible 21:42] more equipment.

A: But she's able to do her own personal care.

Q: Do you have a shower?

A: I've got two showers. The one upstairs is the one that I can sit on a seat and do it. The one down here is big enough so that—

Q: Can you get up and down stairs?

A: Yes. I go up and down stairs. It's a little difficult, but I do it.

Q: We built a little house, and it's all handicap accessible on the first floor for whenever we get old.

A: And I think that's good that you're even [inaudible 22:27]. I have to hang on tight to go up and down stairs, but I do it. My therapist at Mediplex insists that I do it. She and I went up and down stairs a few times. She gave me exercises to take, which I do on occasion. I should do them more often. She said I could walk. As long as I kept walking, I was fine. Just standing still is not good.

Q: Do you want to stop and stretch a little bit?

A: I'm fine. See when I get up? My leg is pretty swollen. I want to make spaghetti sauce for tonight.

A: She's showing off her spaghetti sauce.

A: She's not too fond of spaghetti sauce, but she's—

A: I have reflux.

A: She has reflux, but she's going to get it tonight. We have sauerbraten soaking right now for Wednesday. That I'm looking forward to.

Q: I think I could use a few lessons from you. You're such a good cook.

A: That's what she's teaching me.

A: I'm teaching the kids—

[overlapping conversation]

A: And I'm left-handed. I have trouble cutting vegetables. I want to teach them the easy way to do vegetables [inaudible 23:41]. Instead of doing it this way—Caitlin is left-handed, and it's kind of difficult for her.

A: I am too, and I still can't peel a potato.

A: No. She peels it [inaudible 23:53].

A: She says what we're going to have for dinner, and then I usually make most of it, and then she sits down.

[overlapping conversation]

A: I was picking along doing fine last night, and the next thing I know, she gets—she's supposed to be resting before dinner—in the kitchen looking in the pot. I knew how much longer things had to be cooked, so I went and sat down. She got up and went to [inaudible 24:33].

Q: You just can't stop.

A: She was looking at the corn, and she's—

A: We had fresh beets last night, which is a luxury, because beets have been hard to get. She cuts hers in half. I slice mine thin. So, I said four for you and four for me. She has with butter and salt and pepper. I have mine with butter, sugar, salt and pepper. [inaudible 24:58]. We have different [inaudible 25:03]. But we got some good corn. [inaudible 25:05].

Q: Is it butter and sugar corn yet?

A: We got it across from the Post Office in Charlestown. Just before you get to the Post Office there's a little stand.

Q: Is that near Pat's Power?

A: [inaudible 25:29]. The vegetables were good, except the—

A: There's no sign out on the road.

A: No. So, you've got to look for it. The driveway is very close to the Post Office.

Q: I belong to Casey Farm. It's a community-supported agriculture program up in Saunderstown.

[overlapping conversation]

Q: I like organic stuff.

[overlapping conversation]

Q: But I'm pretty basic. I'm a basic cook. I don't do fancy stuff.

A: [inaudible 26:03], and they said they were beautiful. [inaudible 26:05]. We had those last night. [inaudible 26:09].

A: We had beef stew.

A: Beef stew with rolls.

A: Left-over beef stew.

A: We have enough left for another meal.

Q: If you have any more stories that you can think of, you can give me a call. I'm going to give you my name and number. This has been wonderful.

A: The young lady that had the stand at the Blue Shutters—she let the boys come down the other night to go down and sit around. They were reading books—some family books.

Q: What is her name?

A: Craig. [inaudible 27:00]. The young guys will go down there every night and sit there and talk to her. I guess she closed up about 9:00 at night and went home. But she's very good to the kids. I was amazed.

A: All the funny books?

A: They didn't go and buy them. They just read them.

Q: Was it safe to just go up the road?

A: Yes.

A: No lights.

A: No street lights.

A: Pitch black.

A: When I was [inaudible 27:32], I was fifteen or sixteen. He and I walked the roads all the time at night. I remember one night his parents went to the drive-in with his brother and a girl. So, he came over here, and he was supposed to be home at 10:00. The drive-in doesn't start till late, because it was [inaudible 27:58], and so he thought he got it made. He'd leave around 11:00. Well, we were out on the porch there, and we saw his parents drive by. The girl was from Buddington Farmhouse. He hid, so when they went by him to get to Central Beach, he ran the beach, because it was shorter. He just got on the bed, pulled the covers up to his mouth. When his dad and mom came in, "Oh, you're in bed?" "Yes. Don't turn the light on."

A: [inaudible 28:46].

A: On Central Beach?

A: Yes.

A: The man who was [inaudible 29:03]?

A: Yes.

[overlapping conversation]

A: No. This was an elderly man, like Collins or Morgan or something like that. He was always out talking to the kids.

[overlapping conversation]

A: Near Debbie Brown's house?

A: No. Debbie Brown's father wasn't that friendly.

A: I didn't say that he was—

Q: Were you friends with Debbie as well?

A: Yes.

A: Yes.

[overlapping conversation]

A: But I remember [inaudible 29:38] had not gotten together for years and years and years. And I went over to visit Ruth two years ago, and I talked with her. "Why didn't you [inaudible 29:51]?" "Oh, I don't know."

A: [inaudible 29:56].

[overlapping conversation]

Q: ...people separating. Vicky Skippo and I were very, very good friends, and now we're just reconnecting after many, many years.

A: I had a girlfriend who's in as bad condition as I am, so we're telephone friends now. We talk to each other once a week, and that's it. We don't see each other. Sometimes they'll pick me up for church. I go to St. Mark's Church in West Hartford, because that's a lot easier to get to than St. Thomas'. St. Thomas, I have to cross Farmington Avenue to get to church, and there is no policeman there. So, I drive to church, which is only three roads from my house, but to cross Farmington Avenue, it's a lot easier in the car.

A: We don't know what's going to happen this fall. That's why I'm trying to get her knee better.

[overlapping conversation]

A: ...back to my work, which I don't want to work much anymore anyway. So, I don't know how—

Q: So, you've taken the summer off?

A: No; I was [inaudible 31:05], and whenever she has doctor's appointments, we make them on Friday. Whenever I had doctor's appointments, we make them on Friday. We stay in West Hartford. When she has an appointment, she stays over night. I work from 6:30 to 10:30 at night. I stay over night so I can get to see my husband.

[overlapping conversation]

A: So far, that's been working out well. The people that I work for, "This week I know you've got an appointment on Thursday, so how about if I work for on Thursday night instead of Friday night?" "That's fine." She has a child that's legally blind who does quite well on his own. But he's got two detached retinas in one eye. They didn't take it out, because they feel that—

[overlapping conversation]

A: No. They want to keep it in, in case we invent something, or maybe they might be able to build that eye back up again. He's got two detached retinas. He has four sisters.

[overlapping conversation]

A: He and his older sister are seven months apart, because he was born at 23 weeks. All geniuses. They're all so intelligent. [inaudible 32:32]. They're just very easy to take care of.

A: If you ask her what movies they buy it for me.

A: [inaudible 32:50].

A: [inaudible 32:55].

A: [inaudible 32:56] as he walks out the room. They've got a brand-new TV, and I don't know [inaudible 33:04]. "Get up here."

A: I say, "Peg, I'm going to bed now. Good night." That's when she closes the door.

A: He used to go to bed at 6:30. And then sometimes I'd go up and look and see that he's down at [inaudible 33:18].

A: [inaudible 33:22]. That's another story. Their other daughter is eleven, and is now in Australia on a trip with a group of kids. I don't think I'd let my eleven-year-old daughter do that.

Q: It's happening more often now. The kids are traveling more than we have.

A: The first time that she's gone away from home. They're gone fourteen days. That's a long trip.

A: [inaudible 34:02].

A: Her mother works for Kaiser.

A: Not anymore.

A: She did.

A: They have their law office right in the house.

A: He's going to buy up Kaiser. [inaudible 34:23].

A: Connecticut?

A: Connecticut—

A: Insurance?

A: They say it's in the works. But my doctor told me not to worry. [inaudible 34:39]. Some buildings and doctors. And they've been awfully good to me.

A: On Friday we saw four doctors.

A: Four doctors. Local appointments, so we could see them all on the same day, which is really—they've been so good to me. They really have.

A: A week from today we'll—

A: Got for my last shot in my knee.

A: A week from today we will see two doctors.

A: Yes. The skin doctor.

A: No. The toe doctor.

[overlapping conversation]

A: [inaudible 3:50]. But he's the one that cuts my toenails. Mediplex gives you a manicure for \$8. He gives [inaudible 35:32] for \$32 both at the convalescent home. We see these little old ladies waiting to get their hair done.

Q: My last job was with the Visiting Nurses. I've also worked at a nursing home.

A: [inaudible 35:51]?

Q: I loved it. It was favorite job. I didn't like the hospital. I had to do it, because—

[overlapping conversation]

Q: I was under pressure to do so many units, and I sometimes—listening and talking is very important in the healing process.

A: That's the trouble with Meals on Wheels. People hang on to them when they deliver them, and they [inaudible 36:19]. The only charity work I did was the Easter Seals [inaudible 36:27]. I made their bunny costumes that they wore out in the streets. Now they don't do that, because insurance doesn't protect them. They can't stand on the corner and sell [inaudible 36:40].

A: Up until a year ago, Janet and I were working 60 and 70 hours a week in all different homes, and going to school [inaudible 36:58]. I'm too old for that. I can't do the lifting anymore.

Q: With your back?

A: Yes.

Q: Janet, 28 people?

A: My driver wasn't strong enough, so Mrs. Kennedy would get my call, and hang up and call me and say someone was on the line [inaudible 37:28]. But we heard everybody's ring. She was [inaudible 37:36] on one line. We were four on one line. They were five short. Any time you wanted to listen to any of those conversations, you just picked up the phone. It was a two-piece phone. It was an earpiece—

A: Mrs. Kennedy said, "At 2:15 in the morning, pick up the phone, because Mrs. Ritchie's talking to her boyfriend." [inaudible 38:01]. Then my husband ordered a motor from [inaudible 38:08], and we had a Scotsman move down here, and when they called him to say the motor was here, they couldn't get strong enough down here, so they called the Scotsman and he called here. I picked up the phone, and he said, "Mrs. Zabel?" I said, "Yes," "Tell you husband his [inaudible 38:26] is here." I said, "What?" "Tell your husband his [inaudible 38:30] is here." [inaudible 38:33] is here.

A: The motor he had for the boat was—

A: Half horse and half motor. [inaudible 38:42]. Mrs. Kennedy was right over here on Alton.

Q: Mrs. Kennedy?

A: [inaudible 39:00]. That was Kennedy's house.

[overlapping conversation]

A: [inaudible 39:06]. That's the biggest one.

A: She was an old timer.

Q: This was a summer person?

A: No.

Q: Year-round?

A: And she had a [inaudible 39:18] and a strong accent. She said, "[inaudible 39:24]." We had a few characters around here. [inaudible 39:37].