

# QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Oral History

# ROSS EUGENE ZABEL

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Interviewed by Anne S. Doyle

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**DOYLE:** OK, Gene, if you're [ready], just give your full name and your birth date.

**ZABEL:** My name is Ross Eugene Zabel ; I've always been known as Gene, by the family and by my friends. We've been coming to Quonochontaug since about 1943 or '44. My parents purchased this property in 1944.

**DOYLE:** Can you describe the property to me?

**ZABEL:** Well, it was seven acres when we purchased it. My father subdivided it into plots for my sister, my brother; and now myself and my other sister-in-law own the other two plots. So the seven acres is taken up now by family. There are one, two, three, four, five, six houses on the land.

**DOYLE:** But it's still intact with your whole family on it.

**ZABEL:** It's all family; all family.

**DOYLE:** Why don't you describe where the property is located.

**ZABEL:** Well, it's at 250 East Beach Road. And we're 236A East Beach Road, and my sister is B, and my other sister-in-law is C. And the land goes down from East Beach Road to the Pond. And we're bordered on one side by Moultons and on the other side by Moulton Place.

**DOYLE:** You say Moulton Place; what's that?

**ZABEL:** That's the road that's right next door.

**DOYLE:** Oh, oh, I see.

**ZABEL:** Well, it's a road, I guess.

**DOYLE:** Are they marking the streets now?

**ZABEL:** Yes. [to wife Nancy, listening] Is Moulton Place marked? Yes.

**DOYLE:** Did you say your birth date?

**ZABEL:** January 6, 1936..

**DOYLE:** 1936. Did your mother talk much about the beginning in terms of when they first came here?

**ZABEL:** Oh, she would love to talk about it.

**DOYLE:** Do know what she said, do you remember what she said about it?

**ZABEL:** Well, I know when we got started coming down here; we came down—the first time we came down was to visit with Amelia—Amelia Mogielnicki. Her mother, who lived in Hartford and was our neighbor, wanted to come to the beach and didn't have a car, to see the daughter. And my father volunteered to take her down. So we came down, as a family and visited, And that was our introduction to Quonochontaug.

**DOYLE:** So you grew up in the Hartford area.

**ZABEL:** The Hartford area, yes.

**DOYLE:** I had no idea of that—

**ZABEL:** Yes, I was a teacher in Hartford, principal in South Windsor, and a principal in Ellington. Retired from Ellington.

**DOYLE:** So how old were you when your first memories —

**ZABEL:** Mmm—about a year old.

**DOYLE:** Are you the oldest in the family?

**ZABEL:** I'm the oldest.

**DOYLE:** If you could just tell me what you might have done in a day, when you were younger, when you were first here at Quonnie.

**ZABEL:** The truth? [LAUGHTER]

**DOYLE:** The truth! Nothing but the truth.

**ZABEL:** The truth; yes! Of course the Pond – the Pond was our—we were at the Pond all day, crabbing and clamming and oystering.

**DOYLE:** This is the big pond.

**ZABEL:** Oh yeah. Ninigret.

**DOYLE:** The property backed up right to the pond.

**ZABEL:** Yeah; you walked down to the dock, down in a boat. And we got clams and scallops and oysters. And we fished there:-- we got flatfish, blackfish, eels, blowfish—

**DOYLE:** Did you eat all those things?

**ZABEL:** We ate them all.

**DOYLE:** Eels, too?

**ZABEL:** Eels too.

**DOYLE:** Wow—eels are good, though.

**ZABEL:** They're very tasty. My mother fried 'em up. We always said they wiggled in the frying pan. Even after they were dead. That's true, too. They did. And blowfish were delicious.

**DOYLE:** Do they still have them in the pond?

**ZABEL:** I haven't seen one in twenty years. But they were a byproduct of our fishing. We always caught blowfish then.

**DOYLE:** Have you seen eels in the pond?

**ZABEL:** There are some eels in the pond. But now that we have so many striped bass in the pond, they are eating the eels.

**DOYLE:** What are the striped bass doing in the pond? I thought they were an ocean [fish]--

**ZABEL:** Well, they're both; they come in and out --

**DOYLE:** Are they hatched in the pond?

**ZABEL:** No; they don't hatch in the pond. They come in and out of the pond. And blackfish—we used to catch a lot of blackfish over by the rocks – but I don't think they're there any more.

**DOYLE:** Now when you say you caught – how did you actually catch these fish? With a line?

**ZABEL:** Yeah; fishhook and line. Or a hand line. Went out in the boat, rowed over, and caught fish; boated home with the fish!

**DOYLE:** Now, just to back up – you said you came down and got familiar with Quonnie because of the Mogielnickis. Now how long after your father made that first trip with her did you decide to—

**ZABEL:** About a year.

**DOYLE:** That's all!

**ZABEL:** Well, my grandfather passed away that year. And my grandfather was a custodian in the New York City school system. And he left the inheritance to my dad. So they decided they wanted a cottage at the beach. And they came down, and they visited down here and looked around. And found this place.

**DOYLE:** Do you know anything about the house? You know; when it was built, or anything about the history of it--

**ZABEL:** No; I have to make some guesses, just based on what I've heard people say. Ellis owned it before we did. Some of the other owners were Moultons, the Ben Moulton family who also owned a house up the street where – who lives there now, Nance? – Dr. Stahl and his wife live there now. That was the Ben Moulton house. But they lost it in the depression. Before that, there was a Burdick that owned it, and before that, a Peabody.

**DOYLE:** Well, you do know a lot about it then!

**ZABEL:** Well, I know some of it because of books that were in our library.

**DOYLE:** Do you know about when it was built? Approximately? Just a--

**ZABEL:** I would guess in the late 1800's.

**DOYLE:** That old!

**ZABEL:** Yeah.

**DOYLE:** Do you think it was used just as a summer place at that time or was it a farm?

**ZABEL:** No; I think it was originally a farmhouse. At that time, the land across the street belonged to this property. Where Briggs live now, and Sweenys lived there before that. And they had a barn over there; in fact they still have the barn, and it was part of this house. And we still have water pipes that go under the road over to that barn.

**DOYLE:** Oh my goodness!

**ZABEL:** Yeah; the windmill pumped the water. For this whole area here.

**DOYLE:** Oh I see! Now, can you tell me about the windmill? I mean I was --

**ZABEL:** Well, it was a big steel structure, and it had a wooden tank. It was, I would guess, between three and four stories high-- at least; maybe five stories high. And we pumped water up into wooden the tank from the well, which was just below the windmill. And when the tank filled, we'd shut the windmill off, and then we'd use the water pressure from the water traveling from that height down for the house.

**DOYLE:** Oh, I see! Now there were others around, other windmills, around here too. Was that for the same purpose?

**ZABEL:** I would assume so but I never saw another one. I know Moultons had one.

**DOYLE:** Yes.

**ZABEL:** It went down in the '38 Hurricane. Other than that, I don't know anything about that.

**DOYLE:** Yeah; but theirs was for the same purpose, pumping of the water. Now as a young boy, did you have control over how it worked and did you—

**ZABEL:** Oh yes, and I had to go up and grease it; had to climb up to the top, and my dad would shut it off and I'd get a grease gun and grease it. Otherwise it would squeak like the devil and bother everybody in the whole neighborhood! And you could shut it off; there was a shut-off.

Of course we only used it in the summer time, so our problem was that the wood would shrink over the winter. And then when we started the water, it would leak for about the first month, until the wood swelled up. It was a cedar tank. I think it was white cedar.

**DOYLE:** It seems like a lot of things are made out of cedar –I hear that cedar is being used for different things— xxxx -- --there must have been a lot of cedar trees at the time.

**ZABEL:** Well, the flagpole that we have was here when we moved here and is still up. And from the pictures, I would guess that it was here another fifty years before we were. It's the same flagpole; it's white cedar.

**DOYLE:** Oh goodness; [all those years] it stood up.

**ZABEL:** It's a durable wood.

I guess the days were-- we spent a lot of days at the beach, swimming and riding the surf just like the kids do today. In the evenings, the big entertainment was to go to the bowling alley, which was down in West Beach.

**DOYLE:** The casino.

**ZABEL:** The casino; yeah. And bowled; and it was also a hang-out for the kids.

**DOYLE:** Oh yeah. Do you remember setting up your own pins and doing all that?

**ZABEL:** Oh sure; we had to set our own pins.

**DOYLE:** Do you know anything about the casino other than the bowling alley? I heard that there was this – that there were people living upstairs and I don't know—did you know the stories about –

**ZABEL:** I didn't, no; no. I could make one up for you if you --

**DOYLE:** [Laughing] Oh no, no!

**ZABEL:** Of course the breachways still were a great place to play.

**DOYLE:** Did you go to the breachway?

**ZABEL:** Oh yeah; we went to the breachway.

**DOYLE:** When you were older.

**ZABEL:** Yeah.

**DOYLE:** Now this was before it was – [before] they put the new one in?

**ZABEL:** Oh yeah; you could walk across the old one. At low tide you could walk across it.

**DOYLE:** So did you do that?

**ZABEL:** Yeah; we used to go onto the Coast Guard beach, which was the beach right across from the breachway.

**DOYLE:** Did you ever run into difficulty with the tide, with the strong tide, going over-that way-

**ZABEL:** Oh, I'm sure we did, but I don't have a recollection of it. I remember riding with--having a boat—a friend of mine, Mac Beaton, had a boat; and we used to ride the waves in the breachway in his little boat—ride them in over the rocks. That was great fun.

**DOYLE:** Mmhmm.

**ZABEL:** Of course Dan MacLeod had his sailboat; and we sailed in and out of the breachway. Usually backwards out, backwards in – depending on the way the tide was going.

**DOYLE:** So you were very good friends with Danny—

**ZABEL:** Oh, Dan and I were very close. Dan, myself, Herman Osterhus,---I don't know if you know the Osterhuses—right across from—I guess the Crawford's live there now. Across from Ganz' big field—

**DOYLE:** Oh I know where that is.

**ZABEL:** That was Herman Osterhus. He lived there. And Mac Beaton, who lived over on Sunset. The Duryeas, the Sweenys, Beverly Tuthill –

**DOYLE:** Oh, Beverly! She was right down the street—

**ZABEL:** Yeah, in the Farmhouse --

**DOYLE:** So you had kind of a gang—

**ZABEL:** No; it was a group of us that palled around together, that were close to an age. And --oh square dances at the Grange; has anybody talked about that?

**DOYLE:** Not a lot, no. Tell me about that.

**ZABEL:** That was great fun.

**DOYLE:** At the Grange--

**ZABEL:** At the Grange.

**DOYLE:** Not at the Sea Breeze [Inn]?

**ZABEL:** Well, we danced at the Sea Breeze, too, but the square dances were always at the Grange. Or – once a year, we’d have one in the barn—[East and] West Farms.

**DOYLE:** Yeah.

**ZABEL:** When Mr. Hutchins had the hay all out –just before he started putting it in, in the Spring, we’d have a square dance up there.

**DOYLE:** Oh, I see.

**ZABEL:** That was great fun. Square dance and then go for a swim afterwards.

**DOYLE:** When was this held?

**ZABEL:** Friday nights, in the Summer.

**DOYLE:** But in the barn?

**ZABEL:** Well, the barn --just before he put the hay in would have been June. So --

**DOYLE:** So you were down here that early then –

**ZABEL:** Oh yeah; school was out 15<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> of June, and we came down right after that.

**DOYLE:** So when you came down, you were here for the whole summer.

**ZABEL:** For the whole summer; yeah.

**DOYLE:** So the dances at the Grange, were they just for your age group?

**ZABEL:** No; they were for everybody. Oh, yeah; there were older people there as well, adults and kids. Had a good time. Had a three or four-piece band: banjo, piano, violin, and the drums. And a caller for the square dances.

**DOYLE:** Don’t you think they should do that again?

**ZABEL:** I don’t know if kids would do it now.



**DOYLE:** I don't know --They're [the dances?] such a part of you, and they don't know.

**ZABEL:** We used to have them at the old Grange, and the old Grange was up behind Megrew's.

**DOYLE:** Oh, Oh I see --This was the old Grange.

**ZABEL:** The old Grange was where we had them first, and then the old Grange closed. And then of course they had them up there at the corner -- corner of East Beach Road.

**DOYLE:** And was it the same crowd there?

**ZABEL:** Pretty much so.

**DOYLE:** Did you know the Hutchins family [owners of East/West Farms]?

**ZABEL:** Very well.

**DOYLE:** Next week hopefully I'm going to be talking to Dick.

**ZABEL:** His brother just passed away; I don't know if you saw it in the paper but--.

**DOYLE:** Oh-- I didn't!

**ZABEL:** He had the same disease [as I do.]

**DOYLE:** I just sent him [Dick] an e-mail --

**ZABEL:** He [Dick's brother] had ALS too.

**DOYLE:** Oh, I didn't know that. Oh, I'm sorry.

**ZABEL:** Yeah; December 31<sup>st</sup>.

**DOYLE:** Oh I'll have to -- write him again --  
So you knew that whole family?

**ZABEL:** Oh yeah, we square danced with them. And of course going over to the barn, we used to work on the farm with them once in a while, pulling weeds.

**DOYLE:** Oh you did?

**ZABEL:** When haying time came, everybody in the neighborhood went over and helped. Helped them get the hay in.

**DOYLE:** So the dance he--opening it up for a dance then was kind of like a thank you for the help?

**ZABEL:** A bit of payment to the kids?

**DOYLE:** Yeah; yeah.

**ZABEL:** Yeah, they were a great family.

On Sundays when we'd go to church, church services were held in the Casino, or the bowling alley. And they closed it up from bowling and selling groceries until church was over.

**DOYLE:** Now where would they have the [service]? Where the alleys are?

**ZABEL:** Where the alleys are, right where the alleys are. And they did that for a few years, and finally when the new Grange was built, they had services up at the new Grange, on Sunday.

**DOYLE:** Was it the Catholic service?

**ZABEL:** Catholic, yeah.

**DOYLE:** They didn't use it for any other --

**ZABEL:** Not that I know of.

**DOYLE:** That's interesting. [PAUSE]

We were just talking about Phil Jones.

**ZABEL:** Yeah; Phil Jones is a good friend. And Phil also grew up with us down here. Phil actually came here before I did. I think they were here --in the early '30's they started coming down.

**DOYLE:** Are they right near you on East Beach?

**ZABEL:** They're on Sea Breeze, just after you go around the corner. What's the [town] manager's name? Just before [George] Hibbard's house. And they rented from -- I'm trying to think -- I think it was the Jewett family, but I don't know what her maiden name was: Mrs. [Lillian] Jewett.

**DOYLE:** I know the house that she had.

**ZABEL:** They rented there.

**DOYLE:** Thomson and Jewett--

**ZABEL:** [Ann] Thomson was her daughter; Mrs. Jewett's daughter. And Bob Thomson and ---[Gordon Thomson, Ann's sons.]

**WIFE NANCY:** Mrs. Jewett was a Burdick.

**ZABEL:** Yeah--Jewett was a Burdick; that's right. She was a Burdick. She married Jewett.

**DOYLE:** Did you have something special about those people?

**ZABEL:** Well, we just grew up together. We were good friends.

**DOYLE:** These were summer friends.

**ZABEL:** Yeah; summer residents. He was from Worcester, Massachusetts. In fact I have a tape from him I'll show you, if you want. It's only a few minutes long. Of the beach, back in the early '40's.

**DOYLE:** What kind of a tape?

**ZABEL:** It's a videotape.

**DOYLE:** A videotape. Oh, I'd like to see that, yes.

Now, when you were -- do you remember -- the vegetable people coming --how did you get your food? I noticed that there was a garden in your pictures--

**ZABEL:** We had a garden; we always had a big garden. But there was a man named Tony that used to come around in a vegetable cart. And we bought a lot from the farm, up on the corner of West Beach Road. We bought our milk there and eggs, and their vegetables in season--corn. And we took a trip to town once a week --

**DOYLE:** Westerly?

**ZABEL:** Yeah; Westerly.

**DOYLE:** I know that where we were over in Central [Beach] ,we relied on all these people [vendors] coming to all the [cottagers] who didn't have a car.

**ZABEL:** When we first came here, there was gas rationing, so we didn't do much driving.

**DOYLE:** Yeah, because of the War [World War II]

**ZABEL:** And then there was food rationing, too.

**DOYLE:** Now, do you remember any kind of activities related to the War? That were going on around here?

**ZABEL:** Well, the guns: I can remember hearing guns. And the blackout windows at night.

**DOYLE:** You do? This was '44--

**ZABEL:** Yes, '44—

**DOYLE:** What did you do—to black out the windows? have dark curtains?

**ZABEL:** Dark shades.

**DOYLE:** Dark shades. Some people have talked about the soldiers coming back in the beaches —

**ZABEL:** I don't remember it. I know they were here, but I don't remember it. I know we rented—the first year in '44, we rented to some aviators who lived in our house.

**DOYLE:** Now what about that building down at the very end of East Beach Road, that 's now got a mural on it. Was it some kind of a bunker, for the War? Do you know anything about that place?

**ZABEL:** All I can tell you is hearsay; I understood that it was a communications bunker of some kind.

**DOYLE:** MmmHmm.

**ZABEL:** --Whether there was a cable there or not. She's a very friendly lady, from Warwick.

**DOYLE:** Does she live there all the time?

**ZABEL:** No; they're only summer residents.

**DOYLE:** OK. I was thinking maybe I should contact her too and just ask her xxx-

**ZABEL:** I'm sure she'd be glad to talk to you.

**DOYLE:** Do you remember the planes [low, flying] in this neighborhood?

**ZABEL:** Oh, constant. Day and night. When we first moved here, they went day and night, and right over our house. Very low. I remember Blue Shutters—we spent a lot of time at Blue Shutters, with Mrs. Craig, I think her name was. And she was a delightful lady—always let us read all the comic books for free. And we'd help her collect the money for the parking. And Blue Shutters at that time was a much bigger building than it is now. The old Blue Shutters went in the '54 hurricane. And she ran it for quite a few years. Then it was bought by the Duhamels, the same Duhamels that owned the Blue Moon Tea Room for a while, in the '50's.

**DOYLE:** The Blue Moon Tea Room --?

**ZABEL:** Which was on the corner of Dunn's Corners Road—

**DOYLE:** Oh yes—

**ZABEL:** Right where the bank is now—they cut it in—used to be the Blue Moon Tea Room.

**DOYLE:** MmmHmm.

**ZABEL:** It was a very elegant dining place.

**DOYLE:** What about the Duhamel that owned the Willows?

**ZABEL:** They're cousins.

**DOYLE:** Cousins.

**ZABEL:** Yeah.

**DOYLE:** So they owned it after--?-

**ZABEL:** After Mrs. Craig. Mrs. Craig also had a shop in Watch Hill. But I don't know the details of that. All I know is she was a delightful old lady, when I was a little boy.

**DOYLE:** But I mean she was much older than--

**ZABEL:** Oh she was elderly then. An elderly woman.

**DOYLE:** So that was obviously a gathering place.

**ZABEL:** Well – we were pretty little then, about eight or nine years old when we did that.

**DOYLE:** Did you have freedom to walk anywhere you wanted to, when you were young? Or did you have to –

**ZABEL:** The farthest we went was to the Bowling Alley.

**DOYLE:** Could you go to the beach by yourself?

**ZABEL:** Sure. We could go to the Bowling Alley at night and never see a car. Between here and the Casino, we'd never see a car.

**DOYLE:** Yeah.

**ZABEL:** And of course we stopped at the Crossroads frequently, after the dances, for grinders. Was it George --?

**DOYLE:** Oh yes!

**ZABEL:** And I forgot the other guy, his brother's name -- Two brothers ran it—

**DOYLE:** I remember the Crossroads!

**ZABEL:** Oh, they made the best grinders –just the best—

**DOYLE:** I was xxx the Crossroads –xxx [Both laughing]  
Now at the time, was Danny MacLeod living over--

**ZABEL:** Central Beach.

**DOYLE:** Central Beach. Because I know that his father—

**ZABEL:** Grandfather—had a place down East Beach Road.

**DOYLE:** Yeah, and I've located that--

**ZABEL:** But that was before '38.

**DOYLE:** Yeah; so that was before you started coming [here]--

**ZABEL:** Butch. That's right! Butch and George ran the Crossroads.

**DOYLE:** [Whispering] Butch and George.

**ZABEL:** Oh those good grinders! I could taste one now! [Laughter]

**DOYLE:** Were you into picking berries and things like that?

**ZABEL:** Yes, we picked blackberries every year; my mother would make blackberry jam. We picked blueberries—I guess that was it; I don't think we picked any other—grapes: oh yes, grapes in the fall, for grape jam—

**DOYLE:** What happened to all the grapes, because there are grape vines but I don't see very many grapes?

**ZABEL:** No, because they're being choked out by the Japanese bittersweet.

**DOYLE:** Oh, the bittersweet!

**ZABEL:** And that's not native; that's the Japanese bittersweet.

**DOYLE:** Oh. Oh. Our plants are really changing. I remember Tiger Lillies.

**ZABEL:** Oh wow! Growing all around --

**DOYLE:** Yes --All over the place.

**ZABEL:** Remember cattails?

**DOYLE:** Yes, I do!

**ZABEL:** Where there were cattails, now Pampas Grass has taken over.

**DOYLE:** I have strong memories of those two plants.

**ZABEL:** The Pampas Grass—that's another import, from Asia. It's taken off.

**DOYLE:** The Phragmites?—That tall -- Yeah—

**ZABEL:** Somebody thought it looked pretty along the road --

**DOYLE:** I know. Now they're trying to figure out biological ways of getting rid of those things!

**ZABEL:** The big thing is our Pond; how our Pond has changed.

**DOYLE:** You're talking about all of them? Or Ninigret?

**ZABEL:** Ninigret; I'm talking about Ninigret because I know it.

**DOYLE:** You spent ---obviously -- you spent a lot of time -- you were saying-- on the Pond and um tell me how you feel it's changed –

**ZABEL:** Well, it's changed—number one, it's filling with sand. The eel grass is dying. And as the eel grass dies, then you don't get the scallops and the oysters because the young ones depend on the eel grass. And of course the flounder – they let 'em drag for flounder in the ponds, and they've dragged them clean. There's nothing left.

**DOYLE:** Will they come back? Is there hope?

**ZABEL:** Probably they could – but not in my lifetime. Not as long as they're dragging them out. In the ocean; they can still drag; [and] they can still drag in the pond – but there's none there. So they don't go.

**DOYLE:** They don't have scallops, either.

**ZABEL:** Not many. And what we had was not a natural setting, too. It was ones that were put in by the State. When I grew up, there was a natural set.

**DOYLE:** This year—I don't know if it's because we hear around now, but this fall, there were so many fishermen down the beach. And they were pulling in all these fish. I mean it was a good year for fishing! Now I don't know if that's a change – I don't know about last year.

**ZABEL:** Well, we go through cycles. We've had some bad years for striped bass; the last 20 years have been very very bad. But now they're back, and they're back in force.

**DOYLE:** Now, when you would go out the breachway, on the boat, was it just for sailing or was it for –did you go fishing or--?

**ZABEL:** Boat fished out there in the ocean.

**DOYLE:** But it was a sailboat, wasn't it?

**ZABEL:** We had both sailboat and a rowboat.

**DOYLE:** Did you ever capsize going out? 'Cause that's what I hear --

**ZABEL:** Oh yeah, sure; that's part of the fun! Or it was then. Now I don't think I'd like to do that!

**DOYLE:** No. We walk sometimes down to the eastern point of the breach, from our beach. And it's quite a strong –



**ZABEL:** Current?

**DOYLE:** Yeah; the current is bad.

**ZABEL:** It's even worse on this beach – Ninigret's beach; it's been worse than that because it's a so much bigger pond. A lot of water rushes in and out of there when the tide's changing.

**DOYLE:** Now, did you ever take a boat and go across Ninigret? And did you travel—

**ZABEL:** It's a long way to row.

**DOYLE:** Oh row; it was a rowboat. Did you have a motor?

**ZABEL:** My father got a motor in 1947 or '46. It was a horse and a quarter motor, and it would take us about two hours to get across the Pond. But we did go over there. We used to go over there and get the soft-shell clams, with the little neck sticking out—steamers?

**DOYLE:** Oh yeah.

**ZABEL:** And we got those on the other side of the Pond.

**DOYLE:** Do you remember any of the families who had a business on the Pond? Like a fish store or any --

**ZABEL:** Well, Chris Crandall had a fish store down on the breachway.

**DOYLE:** Yeah, do you know anything about that --on the breachway? Was it right on the breachway?

**ZABEL:** Right on the breachway. Before the '54 hurricane, he had a little fish shanty there, and he sold fish and lobsters, clams.

**DOYLE:** Was this for his store, the market?

**ZABEL:** There wasn't a market up there then. The market was down on the breachway.

**DOYLE:** Oh, OK.

**ZABEL:** And of course the store, when he moved to it, was owned by Mr. Brightman. Charlie Brightman.

**DOYLE:** OK; tell me all about Mr. Brightman.

**ZABEL:** Well, Charlie Brightman was a very interesting character. They say he chopped his leg off cutting down trees at his farm in the '38 Hurricane. So he had a wooden leg. And he had a son Henry, and Henry was a builder down here and built a lot of the houses right after the war. And then *his* son Henry was a builder and continued to build.

**DOYLE:** There's still a Brightman--

**ZABEL:** And there's another Henry, that is the great-grandson of Charlie. Would it be great-grandson, Nancy? [Speaking to his wife]

**ZABEL:** Charlie, Henry, Henry, Henry –

**DOYLE:** That's still doing the same business –

**ZABEL:** Still contracting – yeah.

**DOYLE:** Do you remember what he was like?

**ZABEL:** Charlie?

**DOYLE:** Yeah.

**ZABEL:** Uh, he was kind of a gruff old character. I didn't—I was quite young at the time, and I don't remember. Danny could tell you. Ask Danny to tell you the story about his father's Cadillac and Charlie Brightman. That's an interesting story.

**DOYLE:** OK; Maybe I'll try and get the family together. I'm sure they'd come up with some really good stories.

[PAUSE]

We're talking about the Brightmans and then Cromptons and then – what was the name?

**ZABEL:** Babcocks, and then it was Katie and her husband ran the farm. And I could – well, when Babcock owned the – is it Babcock? [Addressing Nancy] What was Fred's last name? It was right after Brightman—

**NANCY:** Crompton.

**ZABEL:** Crompton--the new owner; then Susie opened a little luncheonette in there.

**DOYLE:** Susie --?

**ZABEL:** Four Seasons. Remember the Four Seasons Restaurant?

**DOYLE:** Yeah, yeah.

**ZABEL:** Well, Four Seasons started as an annex to Crompton's.

**DOYLE:** Oh, I didn't know that.

**ZABEL:** From the lunch counter in there.

**DOYLE:** What was her last name?

**ZABEL:** Susie – she's still around. I can't remember xxxxx [Some confusion about name and ?]

**DOYLE:** Yeah, I'm coming! Like it or not. [Laughter]

**ZABEL:** And all the fishermen would stop in there, for coffee. And it was a great place for breakfast. Like the Four Seasons, except it was just a lunch counter.

**DOYLE:** Yeah.

**ZABEL:** Another good friend of mine was the Hatch family – Bill Hatch, who lived over on West Beach. We were good friends, too

**DOYLE:** Oh yes. Is that Priscilla?

**ZABEL:** Priscilla's brother, yeah. They came down from Springfield. I think his dad was a –worked for the newspaper in Springfield. I think he was an editor. [Addressing Nancy] Pardon? Yeah – *Springfield Union*.

**DOYLE:** You don't have any wild stories to tell me about this friend of yours? [Laughing] What you might have done on a Saturday night?

[PAUSE}

**DOYLE:** Um, we're talking about having get-togethers down at Quonnie--

**ZABEL:** My family always had one once a year, in the spring, late spring or early summer, when we'd invite all the neighbors from back in Connecticut to come down. And we'd have fifty or sixty people, families,

**DOYLE:** For the day?

**ZABEL:** For the day, yeah. And we'd picnic and swim for the day.

**DOYLE:** Mm-hmm.

**ZABEL:** And as I grew up and went to work, I always had --my teachers would always come down with their families. For a spring picnic.

**DOYLE:** Now you were the principal of what school?

**ZABEL:** I was principal in South Windsor, and I was principal in Ellington; I retired from Ellington.

**DOYLE:** And you taught before you were principal?

**ZABEL:** I taught in Hartford.

**DOYLE:** What did you teach?

**ZABEL:** Elementary school. And I was principal of a junior high. And principal of an elementary. And now, we have Nancy's family, my wife, her family comes down; we have a big picnic here every year, with all of her family.

**DOYLE:** And where was it Nancy came from?

**ZABEL:** Oh, Wallingford; down in that area -- Connecticut.

**DOYLE:** Now when were you married?

**ZABEL:** '58; 1958.

Then, I retired in '92, and we stay here now. We stayed here then an extended --we'd come down probably late April, early May and stay through the end of October, the beginning of November. And last year, when we renovated the house and put heat in, we stayed in an apartment down on the beach while they renovated the house.

**DOYLE:** Which—down on East Beach or where?

**ZABEL:** East Beach --Shirley Mott's apartment, downstairs apartment.

**DOYLE:** I don't know where that is.

**ZABEL:** It's right in back of our parking lot -- that little pond; just the other side of of that little pond.

**DOYLE:** Oh yes. Going into the um—

**ZABEL:** Dingle. Part way down the Dingle. And of course now, this year, we're here. Full time.

**DOYLE:** Full time!

**ZABEL:** Full time—Sold our house in Glastonbury and moved down here.

**DOYLE:** How has it been for you?

**ZABEL:** Good! Good— it's a cozy little house.

**DOYLE:** Had a lot of company and --do you enjoy the quiet?

**ZABEL:** Oh, they're welcome! Oh yeah, we have a lot of company. There's quite a large retired group down here—

**DOYLE:** Oh, sure; I know it. I just love—I do like the quiet during fall to spring; I mean -- there's enough people out there if you want to see somebody, but I don't know—it's just not --

**ZABEL:** It really isn't quiet any more!

**DOYLE:** [Laughing] Not like it used to be – no, not like it used to!

[PAUSE]

**ZABEL:** Well, we have three children, and my daughter is down here most of the summer with her family; she has four children. And they live up in Exeter/West Greenwich. She and her husband are both teachers. And her husband is a Quonnie person---it was a summer romance.

**DOYLE:** What's his name?

**ZABEL:** John Livsey. The Livseys live across from Whalen's old house, next to xxx. And my other son is a fireman in Narragansett; and he's married and has a child and lives in West Kingston—what's the name of that little – Usquepaugh. And my youngest son is married and spent two years in the Peace Corps, and now he's a teacher in Narragansett High School. And they live in Greene, which is a part of Coventry. And they spend a lot of time down here in the summer, too.

**DOYLE:** So your family [are all close] Yeah, yeah; that's wonderful.

END OF RECORDING

