



# Karen Jenkins

Karen:

The wharf, as we called it back then, was all of the pylons that go into the water to keep the boats from bumping up against other things, were just soaked in this stuff, and you could smell it even from my neighborhood. I'm probably... Well, Acushnet Avenue, what is it, three or four blocks away from this before they put the highway in, this was all waterfront. There were homes there, as well. But the wharf, as we called it back then, was just bustling. And I know that this is a working waterfront now, but it's so different than when I grew up in the fifties and, well, I was born in the fifties. So by the sixties, I was down there watching the fish peddlers and the rag mongers, well, the fishmongers and the rag peddlers, the pot peddlers, just people from the neighborhood buying fish off the boats, and things like that.

It was always fascinating to me. So when things declined in the nineties, I felt really sad for New Bedford, but I'm glad to see that it's picked up. The fishing fleet has always been there, always. I know that they have contributed a great deal to this country and to the economy. Just this little tiny fishing fleet from this little tiny city, number one in the country for the past 15 or 17 years, I can't remember exactly how long it is, and that makes me very proud. It really does.

I come from this exact neighborhood, so these are my stomping grounds as a child. The ice place over there. I remember the bridge, the run-up to the Fairhaven/New Bedford Bridge, and you could see the ice company. I can't think of the name of it. Sorry, senior moment.

Interviewer:

I walk by it every day, and I can't remember it. It's on the side.

Karen:

Yeah, yeah. It's there. And you can still go there and buy 50-pound bags of ice.

Interviewer:

Yeah, it's a good deal.

Karen:

Absolutely.

Interviewer:

You go to the beach.

Karen:

Absolutely. Yeah. As I said, I'm not sure what I have to contribute other than little snippets. Excuse me.

Interviewer:

Tell me more about it. Were you allowed to walk down on your own when you were a kid and go see it?



Karen:

Yes. As a child, you got up early in the morning in the summertime, and you had your chores. You knew what you had to do. There was no arguing, there was no... You had to do it; otherwise, you're not going outdoors. So you'd get that taken care of, and you'd be gone until lunchtime. You'd come home and have lunch, and then you'd be gone again until like 4:30, because we ate supper at 4:30, 5:00, and you had to be there, and you also had to be home at night when the street lights came on. You had to be in the house, not on your way.

Interviewer:

You shouldn't see them turn on.

Karen:

Right. You knew when they start to flicker, it's time for you to [inaudible 00:03:09]. I have a memory of being stuck on Palmer's Island. Are you familiar with Palmer's Island?

Interviewer:

A little bit.

Karen:

Right down there.

Interviewer:

Yeah. The brown tide, right?

Karen:

Yes. And I'd gone out looking for horseshoe crabs just because they were just so fascinating to me. I thought of them as the dinosaur age. Dinosaurs and whales were always my passion as a child. Whaling, probably. But yeah, the dinosaurs also came in with that. So they were just a dinosaur-looking kind of invertebrate. I had gone down there, and there's an old lighthouse down there, or there was. I'm not sure if it's still there or not. All the kids in the neighborhood, we just went there, and we'd go across when it was low tide, because you could walk across or whatever, but I was out there probably for hours and didn't realize the time. And of course, as I mentioned, you have to be home for 4:30 to have supper. And I realized, okay, I could see that the sun was going down, I didn't wear a watch at that time, and the tide was high, but it was enough for me to be able to... but it was up to here.

My swimming skills were not that great at that time. I'm trying to think, maybe 9, 10 years old, something like that. That's something that you just went down. I mean that's further down, but it was still your neighborhood. And I remember coming home, I was soaking wet, and they're like, "You've been at Palmer's Island again." "I'm sorry, but I did make it home in time for supper." "Yeah. Go upstairs and change, and come back down."

Interviewer:

And you survived.

Karen:

And I survived, yeah. I think about it now. We didn't wear helmets and other stuff for bicycle riding and things like that, none of those safety factors came into mind for anyone. No seat belts. When did seat belts really become incorporated into the American... ? The eighties, nineties? I'm not exactly sure when that was.



Interviewer:

After my mom's time, but right around mine. I don't remember. Yeah, probably the eighties.

Karen:

I think it was the eighties, mid to late eighties, perhaps, something like that. Times are very, very different. Even the fishing boats, I think some of the fishing boats back then were more wood. I think the metal ones were coming into vogue and that kind of thing. But just the smells and the sights and the seagulls and the pigeons. I ask people all the time, "Where have all the pigeons gone?" And I know probably people of your generation or younger have no idea how many pigeons there were in the city. And now they're all under the overpasses of the highways and stuff like that. But they were a big part of living in this city, pigeons and seagulls.

Interviewer:

Does it look too quiet now, then?

Karen:

It does. It does. I know that there's a lot of tourism that happens there. My friend and my neighbor's father worked on the Nantucket. He was a cook on the Nantucket, which was one of the boats that left here to go to Nantucket. I remember kids diving off the wharf when you got to Nantucket, diving for quarters. They would throw the quarters out, so I could go for free, because I went with my friend whose father worked on the boat, ship, boat, whatever, and then we'd come back at the end of the day. So as long as I went and told my parents, actually my aunt and uncle, because my mother died when I was four years old, and I was being raised by my father's sister and her husband and their four children. I'd just go and let them know, "I'm going to go on the Nantucket for the day."

"Oh yeah, fine. Okay." And they knew when I'd be back, and I would. I don't think there was any such thing as disobeying what you were told to do, because you knew. I know nowadays that you're not going to advocate someone beating their kids, but there was certainly a punishment to be paid if you didn't follow those instructions. So most of us were just terrified, and not just terrified of our parents, but terrified of the neighborhood, because there would be people that say, "I'm going to tell your mother you're doing this," and by the time you got home, you're shaking in your boots because you know that it's gone... And there were no such things as cell phones. Even the phones were connected to the walls. You couldn't unplug them, but somehow they got word that this is what you did, or they saw you down at such-and-such a place when you were supposed to be at another such a place, and you'd be terrified.

Like, "Oh, I'm sorry," and you just kind of went with the kids. There was always a group of kids that traveled around together. Not gangs. Today they're considered to be gangs, but just kids being innocent and exploring. It's very different. I was appalled to find out that kids don't go out anymore, they don't spend any time outdoors. They don't know about hopscotch and playing tag and hide-and-go-seek and other things like that. I just thought that wouldn't just be a part of all children's lives. Now that I'm at this age, I go, "Okay, well, I guess that's different now." Again, I'm giving you tidbits here and there.

Interviewer:

Can you walk me through who some of the people were that looked out for you in your neighborhood?

Karen:

Well, when I was a child, the area, the community that I live in now was strictly Cape Verdean, and that's the Bay Village that was the first project here, built in New Bedford in the forties for the men coming home from World War II. My parents, not sure how long they lived there, but now my father died there in 1988, still having lived





there for a good 40 years, I suppose. And I had three older brothers. But as I said, my mother passed away in 1958 when I was four right after my fourth birthday. He was just very withdrawn most of our lives. But, yeah, just your nextdoor neighbors, because we knew our nextdoor neighbors, we knew the family. I could point out, "Okay, so-and-so lives over here, that one lives over there," whatever. I try to think back now, and I can't remember, for instance, the home that I live in now used to be the Cape Verdean bomb shelter.

It was initially a bomb shelter, I suppose in the late thirties, early forties, a legitimate bomb shelter for people to go for safety because of World War II, having the United States joined in 1941 after Pearl Harbor. But then after the war ended, it became a bar and a club. Well, very, very tiny club. To this day, and I've been living there since 2010, so it's gone on 12 years, it'll be 12 years in May, to this day when there's a Cape Verdean parade, and everybody from that neighborhood parades by, even though they may not live there any longer, "When you going to open up the bomb shelter?" "When you going to open up the bomb shelter?" I'm like, "Oh, no. Oh, no, I'm not doing that." "Well, why not?"

I said, "Because I live there now." "What does that mean?" "Because I live there," and I realize just the noise from the neighborhood is enough to irritate me at times; nevermind the fact that there was a bar until 2:00 in the morning, sometimes after hours, that was making all kinds of ruckus and music and noise all day long probably from 11:00 in the morning until... I said "I couldn't tolerate that. I really couldn't tolerate that."

I suppose if I were 20 years younger when I bought the property, I would think differently. But I've been thinking about perhaps trying to get some sort of a reunion started there. Now it's just a basement, and people want a tour of my basement. The club is gone, the bar is gone, whatever else, but I can point out where things were and whatever, and I did frequent that quite often. But with COVID, things have changed all of that. But I really would like to try to incorporate that, some of the photographs that people have of their family members or themselves there over the, I'd say, 50 years, I guess, that it was a bar, because I think it was abandoned sometime in the late nineties because of a fire from an illegal apartment that they made.

Interviewer:

So it was always a bar on the bottom after it was a bomb shelter.

Karen:

In the basement, mm-hm.

Interviewer:

Was it called the Bomb Shelter?

Karen:

It was called the Bomb Shelter, yeah. Or the Bomb, as everyone knew it. And I tell people that, this used to be the Bomb. "Really? It doesn't look the same." I said, "I know." It was a pink aluminum siding was the thing back then. Pink aluminum siding. And it had a big chain-link fence and hedges, so you really couldn't see the backyard. Now that's been changed, and there's a driveway and things like that. So it took me a while. When I first went to go look at the house, I came inside, I stepped back outside and I went, "Okay, the Bomb was over here somewhere." I went back in, I came back out, and the third time I went in, I said, "Was this the Bomb?" And the realtor and the bank person that was there said, "Yeah, are you familiar with that?"

I said, "This is my neighborhood. Of course, I'm familiar with that." And I won the opportunity in a lottery sponsored by the City of New Bedford First Time Homebuyers, to buy that property. The day that I went in there, I said, "Oh, no, no. This is my house. I've always wanted a home of at least a hundred years old." I said, "This is mine."

They were like, "Well, you know, we usually have 30 to 40 people that apply," or whatever. I said, "It doesn't matter. This is mine." That was in January, and in February, they had no one else but me that qualified. And I said,



"See?" I said, "I already spoke to the universe. I've been writing it down every day: I live at 243 Acushnet Avenue," so on and so forth. "My son lives on the first floor," which he does. "I have a new car in my driveway," which I did because, ironically, I end up having a car accident the week prior to moving into the home. And I ended up with not a brand new car, but another car, a more up-to-date car. So all of those things came true. So was really amazing for me. But yeah, I think I've lost my train of thought.

Interviewer:

When it was a bar, did it always have people living above it?

Karen:

Yes. The people that owned, and there were several owners, people that owned the building itself lived on the first floor, and the second floor, which is where my apartment is now, was... I'm trying to think, there's technically three bedrooms in there, but I believe they had four, because they had the original sliding doors that would cut off the living room area or the parlor area, so that was a bedroom. And then the three bedrooms themselves were with the other. So there probably were four people living on the second floor, separately, but sharing the kitchen and the bathroom, which were add-ons, because in 1870 when the house was built, there were no bathrooms. And there was the cooking area down in the basement, which there's still a little bit of remnants of that. And I think originally there were probably at least three chimneys, but I only have one right now, so a lot of that was foolishly demolished.

Back in the days of urban renewal in the sixties when the whole country was thinking about adding highways from everywhere, and they built what we used to call the highway to nowhere. I do sometimes say that, and I go, "I'm really, really sorry," but I just found it foolish, because I'm like, "What? So what's the difference between getting there and Coggeshall Street? Is it really that big a deal?" And they demolished a whole neighborhood, a whole neighborhood. And that's when a lot of the people moved away, moved to the West End, or whatever. I think people from the West End and the "back then South End" of New Bedford were of similar ilk, they separated because of the fact that with urban renewal and the forties and putting in the Bay Village and stuff like that, a lot of the buildings were just demolished.

I remember when I bought my home, someone interviewed me, I can't remember who it was, but the person said, "Oh, I have photographs of what that looked like, because that's right directly across the street from me. I can see that all the time. And I have photographs of what that looked like in the forties before they came and demolished that first area to put in the projects." Now, I do understand that those were a necessity for low-income people and things like that, so I get that. But I wish a lot of that had been preserved. What we have left is what we have left, and I hope that we continue to maintain that. I'm not sure how long the Whaling Heritage Park in that area will remain. You know what I'm saying? I hope that somewhere in the future, I hope that it does not become like, "Oh, that's old, let's just get rid of it," because there's a lot of history and in there, there's a lot of stories, and some people say a lot of ghosts.

Interviewer:

How's that feel in your house? Do you feel some [inaudible 00:17:57]?

Karen:

My cats do. My cats are always looking around and whatever. And sometimes I feel like I can hear the music. I have a picture... I may have, I'm not even sure if I still have, of my father there after he came back from World War II in 1945, sitting there smoking his, what did he smoke? Pall Malls. Pall Malls. No filter. Really tough guy. There were a lot of tough guys back then, and with just a bunch of people from his generation that were hanging out there. Same thing with Montes Park, which I'm not even really sure if Montes Park would, and that's like a half block down from me, people sitting on the wall and things like that. That was a tradition.



Montes Park is on Acushnet Avenue and okay, is that Russell Street? I should know that. It's right there down the street from me. But anyway, [inaudible 00:18:57] Way, Russell Street, and Montes Park was there in that corner. So there are people from the forties, and then you get people from the sixties and seventies of my generation, and then the eighties and nineties. So everybody has some sort of memory with Montes Park.

That continues. It's almost a hundred years, 80 years ago. Wow. Yeah. I didn't realize. I don't think I realized how old I was until, I mean, yeah, you get your 60th birthday then you're 65, and until I stop and go, wow, that was so many years ago? Really? I'm grateful for having lived that long, most definitely. I'm grateful for all the memories that I have of New Bedford, and I'm a lifelong resident. I have moved away and come back. I spent some time in Spain, about a year-and-a-half, and visited other parts of the world that I never thought I would ever visit. But I always come back here. This is home, this just feels right. And I think it's just a comfort level. My daughter lives in Boston, she lives in Dorchester, and I often wonder, why do you want to be [laughter]?

But she thinks that New Bedford is, I don't know, too quiet, doesn't offer enough, that kind of thing. And of course me at this age look at it as, thank God it's quiet. Although my neighborhood is a bit more noisy, but it still feels like home. It's a wonderful thing. It really is. I used to be a member of Gallery X's members as an artist, and the people that founded the Gallery X, which is now on William Street, in the old church. Oh, what was the name of that church? It's across the street from PACE. Are you familiar with that?

Interviewer:

Mm-Hm.

Karen:

Yeah, I went to school with them. They're all fellow Swainiacs, is what we called ourselves, Swain School of Design with Swainiacs. Instead of maniacs, we were Swainiacs. Like Chuck Hawk, who has always been involved in restoring New Bedford and trying to preserve what's left of it. But that wasn't a Bethel AME, no. Bethel AME is further down the street. Anyway, I've gone off on a tangent again and I've forgotten what I actually had to say about that.

Interviewer:

I'll bring us back to the beginning. What is Korea salt, and what does it do?

Karen:

Korea salt. So the pylons, I believe that's the term, were these pieces of wood. I would say that they would've been similar to telephone poles when, if you remember telephone poles, when the telephone poles were there, and they were, I believe, soaked in this to keep them, because they went into the water, and to keep them from disintegrating and getting waterlogged and all that other stuff. So that smell was so prevalent, so prevalent, along with the smell of fish, and what was happening on the wharf where you could see people, the lumpers, as they call them, bring the fish out. I'm not really sure if this was legal or not, but they would bring out some fish, and there were people from the neighborhood that were go and buy their fish for the day from them separately. So they're scaling and de-boning and whatever else for you right there on the spot.

Myself, having been allergic to all that fish, it was not a great sight for me. I think that probably contributed to the fact that I, as well as my grandfather, I remember him eating fish, a whole fish, and he used to eat the eyeballs and suck them, and that completely turned me off. He passed away in 1962, I think it was. I was probably about eight years old, somewhere around there, but I do remember that. He sat there and just devoured that fish, the eyeballs, the head, the cheeks, whatever. The only thing that was left was the skeleton of the fish and the tail. I've been allergic to seafood, in particular, like shrimp and lobster and all that other stuff. And people have always said to me, "Wow, you're from New Bedford."





Interviewer:

I know. Ironic.

Karen:

"How could you not eat seafood?" And I said, "I can't, because I'd become asphyxiated by it," and my throat would close up. And then of course, being of Cape Verdean heritage, although I've never lived on the Cape Verde Islands, and I've spoken to many Cape Verdeans who said, "Well, you're Cape Verdean, you must eat fish." And I said, "No, I don't. I don't eat shrimp, I don't eat crab, I don't eat lobster." "Well, what a shame." I'm like, "No, I'm sorry that you feel that way, but what's a shame is that the last time I decided that I was going to prove to someone that I was allergic to the seafood that turns red," let me just put it that way, the ones that can contain iodine in it. And I took a small tiny bite of someone's piece of shrimp, and my throat immediately started to close up and I said, "Well, that's the last time that I'm going to prove this to anybody. I don't have to prove anything to anybody. You don't want to believe me, that's fine, that's fine."

Interviewer:

So what did you do at the 4:30 suppers when everybody was eating fish?

Karen:

I had a hard time, I did. Because I was raised Catholic, and on Friday you didn't eat meat, so you had to have some sort of fish. So I would cut it up. Sometimes I would be at the table for two hours trying to get that down. The parents of my generation didn't take kindly to the fact that you have to eat what's put before you. This is it. This is all you get, and we expect you to at least eat a little bit of it, if not all of it, because that was also that generation, you eat everything that's put in front of you. So I would have a hard time.

I learned how to, and I remember kitchen tables, dining tables, had drawers in them for silverware. And I would always sit next to the drawer so that I could kind of scrape a little bit off, put it in a napkin and stick it in there, and they'd come and look at my dish, and then they would decide when I had eaten enough. But it was a gag fest, to say the least. And I suppose that would be considered cruel and unusual treatment nowadays. But that's how things were back then. You just had to do what your parents said and, if not, you'd face the consequences, and that included eating.

Interviewer:

It sounds like you had a lot of freedom as a kid and then a lot of rules, too. That could be a good balance for children.

Karen:

Absolutely. Yeah. I think that it was a good balance, most definitely. The street lights thing, when you are due to eat, because if you didn't arrive on time, you didn't eat. So you learned that rather quickly. If you've been out since, let's say, 8:00 AM, and you need to come home for lunch for 12:00, 12:30, and you haven't made it, and lunch was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or some fruit and a glass of milk, something like that, but you're not getting it. So you learn to appreciate the food that was put before you, because now you're going to go until 4:30 without having eaten since 7:00 or something like that in the morning. And we ate cereal.

I'm trying to think. Weekends we had big breakfasts at the grandparents' house, that kind of stuff, pancakes and other things like that. But the rest of the time was like, okay, this is what you get. But it wasn't a lot of this foreign-colored Fruit Loops and processed stuff that you see now. And I have a tendency to steer away from that, because I'm just allergic to life. I tell people I should have been born in a bubble. I think I was originally in a bubble, and they let me out and then everything hit me. So that's why I'm asthmatic these days.



Interviewer:

If you can get back from Palmer's Island on your own, you're okay. That's not a bubble person.

Karen:

I know. When I tell people that, they go, "You were on Palmer's Island?" Yeah, we could walk across. The tides were very different than they are now. Getting back, maybe it had risen four to five feet. So you could kind of bob along, bounce along, but I was soaked, and I ran my butt off from down there. I'm not exactly sure of how far away it is, perhaps a mile or something like that, but I ran like the wind. Part of me was dry, but there was no getting away from the fact that I was soaked. And I was more terrified of being late than having to explain why I was so wet. They kind of knew. I was a tomboy and I climbed trees and did whatever the other kids did. We played hopscotch, we did all those things. I played two-hand tag with the boys until I became too old, and they were like, "Uh-uh, you should not be doing that with boys right now."

I couldn't understand it. Why? Why not? And of course no one ever explained. They didn't explain anything. Nowadays, I think there's an over explanation of a lot of things. I think the idea of you're just respecting what your parents tell you as opposed to arguing with them, or having an intellectual conversation with your parents, that was not allowed. You're meant to do what I tell you to do, and I don't have to explain it to you. Okay. I get it. And you got it at a very early age, you really did.

Same thing with school, all of that. And that other adults in the neighborhood have the right to punish you just as much as we do. If they see you doing something, they're going to punish you, and then they're going to tell your parents what it was that you did, and you're going to get a double punishment, because when you come home, oh boy, are you going to get it. And I think I got one strap kind of thing once in my life. Okay, that taught me right then and there, nope, I'm not going to do that. Definitely not going to do it. Nowadays, and I don't want to deride this generation, but I think there's an overabundance of freedom, and there needs to be that balance with respect for your elders, for the senior people, even your older brothers and sisters.

There was a hierarchy in every group. My oldest brother now is, let's see, is he 74? I had three brothers, and I was the baby of the family, so I'll be 68, and we're all two years apart: 68, 70, 72. Yeah, he's 74 years old. And so he could tell the two below him, and I live separately from them because my father sent me to live with his sister because he didn't know how to raise a girl. That was another thing. [inaudible 00:31:10] don't know how to raise a girl, that's the woman's job. So even that part of it was very different. But my middle brother could be the elder for the younger brother, and then the younger brother was the elder for me. So it's all this hierarchy that just continued. You have to learn who to respect. So I just learned to respect everybody. I may have had my own opinions, I kept them to myself, always kept them to myself until I got older.

Cathy:

I don't want to stop this if you want to keep going, but I just wanted to do a [inaudible 00:31:48] we've got about 25 more minutes. Mark is introducing some of the collections items in the library, and you can keep going as long as you want, but I just wanted to make sure you knew the time and you make choices.

Karen:

Okay. Well, thank you, Cathy.

Cathy:

Yeah. And when you wrap up, can you direct Karen to the library?

Interviewer:

Definitely.





Cathy:

Yeah. Send her down to the elevator. I'll be near the door, so I can keep an eye out.

Interviewer:

Yeah, I'll be respectful of your time, but I'll go as long as you want to keep telling me.

Karen:

I know. I told her I have nothing to talk about, and I've done nothing but talk.

Cathy:

And I ordered a cab for 11:45.

Karen:

Right. Thank you so much, Kathy.

Interviewer:

I live here, but I'm new here. And so that sort of deep knowledge of a place and that kind of deep family connection, that's something I miss. I moved away from that a little bit. So I appreciate learning a new place through your eyes, because you have that here.

Karen:

Yeah. Families didn't move away from one another. They lived down the street, they lived next door. And if you're separated by a few miles, that was a long way. I remember I had an aunt, an uncle that lived in Middleborough. As a kid, I spent summers there. I used to think it was such a long ride to get to Middleborough. "Are we there yet? How long is this going to take?" or whatever. And it was probably 20 minutes, maybe because cars weren't as fast and the speed limits weren't as fast, but maybe a half-an-hour. But for a child my age, I think I started there when I was six or seven, and I spent several summers in Middleborough, which was nice. My aunt and uncle had a farm on, is it 128 or 28 in Middleborough?

Interviewer:

28 [inaudible 00:33:43].

Karen:

28. It was called Tucker-Lou's. Lou was my aunt, paternal aunt, and her husband was Tucker. And so it was Tucker-Lou's farmstead, and we the kids. And they had seven children. They actually had 12, but seven survived. Big families. Big families. My father was one of 11 and so was my mother. So umpteen cousins and whatnot, some that passed away before I even knew of them, that kind of thing. But I spent summers there and sold corn on the cob and fresh fruits and vegetables, whatever, and I really, really loved it. It was a different thing from being in the city. And I'm saying the summers, but maybe not the entire summer, but maybe three to four weeks or something like that. Out of the seven children, there are four surviving. Out of the seven children that lived out of the 12, there are four surviving.

Interviewer:

And they're your cousins?



Karen:

They're my cousins, yeah. My cousin Bruce, who goes by the name John now, which I always said, "Listen, I'm always going to call you Bruce, after we called you Brucey." I think he didn't think it was sophisticated enough. Bruce was his middle name, but his mother called him Bruce. So that's what we grew up calling him. And he lives in DC now. He's a private investigator. When I talk to him on the phone, I go, "Brucey, this is your cousin Karen." "Will you stop calling me Brucey?" I said, "I'm sorry." He said, "Well, I gave that up when I was like 15 years." I said, "I don't care. I don't care. You'll always be Brucey to me." Okay, I lost the train of thought again.

Interviewer:

Well, he's one of those seven.

Karen:

Seven, yeah. The oldest aunt, her name was Olga. Now my father was born in the twenties. He was a middle child.

Interviewer:

He was born here in New Bedford?

Karen:

Yes. All of my grandparents' children were born here in New Bedford. They came during the turn of the 20th century. I think the last one to arrive might have been in 1910, and they married here and had children here and whatever. But my Aunt Olga, she had 13. My greatest memory was the fact... And she lived in Hyannis. That was another place we would visit on Route; 25 and all that didn't exist at the time. Again, that was this long painstaking trip for the kids in the car, keep them quiet, and whatever. We didn't have iPads or anything like that. "Just look out the window." Fairhaven was nothing compared to what it is today. It was mostly farmland. All of these strip malls and things like that didn't exist.

I remember, my memory was my Aunt Olga had a parrot, and she also had a monkey. What kind of monkey it was, I have no idea, but I foolishly stuck my finger into the cage. This finger still has a little bump right here, has the memory of those teeth going [inaudible 00:37:20] and, of course, there was no hospitalization, there was no emergency room. There was just like [inaudible 00:37:26] upside the head, "What's wrong with you? You stupid or something? Don't you know that monkeys can bite?" "Well, I do now." Really. I don't think I ever went to an emergency room. You just had your local doctor that was on Purchase Street, I can't think of his name, Dr. Nachimo. Wow, that was a memory that came back, that you could go to, or he would come make house visits, just wrapped it up and put Mercurochrome. Do you know what that is?

Interviewer:

I don't think so.

Karen:

It's a reddish...

Interviewer:

Like Vaseline? Not Vaseline.



Karen:

No, no, it's a liquid. It was a reddish color, I guess a disinfectant of some sort of thing.

Interviewer:

Hydrogen peroxide kind of thing?

Karen:

Some sort of thing. Yeah. I don't think it was hydrogen peroxide, but it was there, that era. That's the thing that you went by. Just like paregoric. Paregoric was what we used on toothaches.

Interviewer:

Numbs it?

Karen:

Yeah. Oh yeah, because I'm not sure if it's an opiate, but you'd use that, and your parents would put you to bed. They'd give you a hot toddy if you had the flu, which was tea-

Interviewer:

Good night's sleep.

Karen:

Tea with a little shot in it, whatever, "Shut up and go to sleep and you'll be fine," and you were. I don't know if that's mind over matter, the actual thinking that this is how it's going to be.

Interviewer:

Was the monkey a pet, though?

Karen:

Yes.

Interviewer:

So friendly-ish, but not...

Karen:

Not that friendly. And I remember I'd cry, it was just men, "Just be quiet, go over there and sit down." I had it wrapped, and it was just bleeding and bleeding and bleeding. And I had to wait until it was time to leave so that I could go home and have it re-banded and whatever. So riding bicycles without helmets and all that other stuff was just normal, par for the course.

Interviewer:

The monkey bite is special, I think.

Karen:

Monkey bite. Yeah. I don't know why I chose the monkey first, just because I was fascinated with him. I'm like,





"Hey." [biting sound]. So I didn't go anywhere near the parrot after that, but I don't even know if that would've been worse. I don't think it could have been any worse than that monkey bite, because it did. I have this little knot, I don't know if you can see it on the...

Interviewer:

Oh, yeah.

Karen:

That's where it went. It was one of those long, not molars, what are they called? The incisors or whatever?

Interviewer:

Yeah. Canines?

Karen:

Exactly. Yep.

Interviewer:

I think mine went away, but pet rat in my science class in fifth grade,

Karen:

Much smaller teeth.

Interviewer:

And I wasn't supposed to touch it. I hid it under my desk and I had blood all over the floor. And then when I left, the teacher was like, "What happened here?"

Karen:

"Why didn't you speak up?"

Interviewer:

Kids hide stuff like that when they think they're going to get in trouble.

Karen:

Get whooped. Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I know. I did that with just a few houses from where we were living on Pleasant Street. I used to catch grasshoppers, which there are very few of them now, too, and praying mantis. And there was a spike, a piece of wood with a spike. You're running, [inaudible 00:40:51] right through my foot, right through my foot, through my sneaker, through my foot. Came up to the top of my foot and I was like, "Oh." I was more about, you're going to be in big trouble. I didn't tell anybody until the end of the night when I could barely walk. "What's wrong with you?" Okay. And that was a hospital visit, which they weren't happy about.

I don't know what healthcare was like at that time or the cost of healthcare at that time, but coming from a poor family, they're barely making it by with just the basics, nevermind an added expense. And even if it was \$5, what did they make back then? I remember doing food shopping when I was 12 years old. And a family of, well, I made five, because the two older children had already moved on, was about \$20 a week. And they thought that that was very, very expensive. I remember paying the mortgage because I was downtown all the time. And I was entrusted with this money to bring to New Bedford Five Cents Savings Bank, which is now BankFive, and it's no longer located here in the city. I'm trying to think, what is the name of that? What used to be next to the Dollar



Store, which was Salt Marsh's, and god, what is that? It's a restaurant on Purchase Street right after the Dollar Store. I can't think of the name of it. Good god.

Interviewer:

The Greasy Luck?

Karen:

Greasy Luck. Thank you.

Interviewer:

That's huge.

Karen:

Yes. Yeah, that was the bank.

Interviewer:

Right, that makes sense. Yeah.

Karen:

That was a bank. I remember paying the mortgage, and I think it was \$129 at the time.

Interviewer:

And they sent you down with it?

Karen:

They sent me down with it, yeah.

Interviewer:

They must have trusted you.

Karen:

I was a very trustworthy child. Because like I said, I learned from the first lesson. You're not going to steal, you're not going to lie, you're going to do as you're told, and return back home. So I would do that. But I asked, I remember asking them, "Is that a lot of money?" Like, "Oh yeah, that's a lot of money." I didn't know what their income was at the time. I'm trying to think. Sometime in the sixties, I may have been 10, 12 years old.

Interviewer:

Did anything ever happen? Did you ever drop anything?

Karen:

Never. Never. You were warned. "This is what we put together and had to save, and this pays for the roof over your head," so on and so forth. So you knew the responsibility that you had, even as a young child. I watch YouTube sometimes because I'm just bored, some of the kids that are complaining because they didn't get the Apple, the iPhone 13, or whatever. Oh, my goodness. I used to tell my kids, "This is what you want. This is what I can afford, and if you want to reach some kind of consensus because you really want this item, then we are going



to have to negotiate, because you're going to have to contribute some of that if you want."

Then of course it was just like, "I know, I know, we'll just accept it for what it is." And as they got older, they would. I definitely taught my kids the value of a dollar, and for them to understand. My daughter is very, very much like me now, can put money aside and not touch it. Whereas my son, it's like, "Ooh, it's money." And he's in his mid forties. My daughter is going to be 49 in April. It's amazing. I tell them, "How the hell did you become middle aged and I'm still 35?" They go, "Aw, Ma."

Interviewer:

[inaudible 00:44:46] here.

Karen:

But anyway.

Interviewer:

You have one boy and one girl?

Karen:

That's it. Yep.

Interviewer:

And you were usually the only girl, sounds like, in your crowd.

Karen:

Yeah. Were your cousins mostly boys, too?

No. There were, my cousin Terry, she passed away. My cousin Jackie, she lives in North Carolina right now. Robin, I saw her. She's Terry's sister, Terry's oldest sister. No, wait a minute. Is she older or younger? I can't remember. Yeah, she was older. So Terry passed away in 2010, and it was her idea, this was the year that I bought my house, was her idea to have a family reunion. So I met members of my family that I'd never met before. There were over a hundred people in my yard that brought food. We had music, and we had dancing, and we met and we got to know one another, which I'm so grateful for, because many of them have passed on. So it was a really nice thing because of the fact that we had such large families that it was very difficult to get everybody there at one time, anywhere.

Usually we say ironically that the only time the family ever got together was for funerals and weddings, but was very, very true. Absolutely true. So especially when you get to be this age and you go and I see people my age just falling away like, wow, they're gone, they're gone. You get to appreciate the time that you spend with the people that are still with you.

Interviewer:

I'm hoping this summer brings some of that back.

Karen:

I do, too. I do, too. Although, as much as the doctors like to put me in the category of you are at risk. You have asthma, you've had AFib, you now have PAD, and you have an aneurysm.





Interviewer:

God bless.

Karen:

Quit trying to frighten me. I don't frighten that easily. I like to do things naturally. So all these medications that I'm on right now are really infuriating to me. They really are. I know some of them are absolutely necessary, but I'm always seeking alternatives. I've always been a believer that this earth is so full of so much, much of which we know nothing about. We have no idea what is here that we can use, especially back in the fifties, and the sixties, and the seventies, and so on and so forth.

I was trying to explain that to my daughter the other day. And then she was like, "Oh, you used to use asthma medication." I said, "Yes, matter of life and death." Absolutely. Her brother was born in 1977 and we had the blizzard of '78. And during that time he was hospitalized in an oxygen tent because of asthma. He's very asthmatic, as am I. I remember making concoctions of homemade cough syrups and things like that, which wasn't enough. So you had to resort to the medications. But the side effects of those medications, probably what I'm paying for right now, but it's kept me alive. I think I've had at least a dozen near-death experiences with severe asthma attacks and the ambulance to get me there in a hurry please.

Fortunately now because of technology, there are new things that have helped me to bounce back. And I've always bounced back. So when I didn't bounce back in 2020 from what was going on with me, I was very, very depressed. And that's when ARAW came through, and many other organizations came through for me. I was a case manager. I worked with people with HIV and AIDS, and I wasn't aware of that. Of course, there is a, "We're looking for the elderly woman, Karen." Like "Elderly? I don't know who you're talking about." That's why they couldn't find you. You don't seem elderly. They thought I was the daughter. And I'm like, "That's me. I'm Karen." Anyway, I'm going to shut up.

Interviewer:

I so enjoy talking with you.

Karen:

Oh, thank you so much. It's been a pleasure talking with you, too.

Interviewer:

Thank you.

Karen:

It's a bit of enlightenment, I guess, for you and for all the younger generations, that we're a fount of knowledge and memories and experiences that will never be seen again. That's unfortunate, but it's true. I think back on it and I go, "Now I realize what my parents were saying," their generation and they were used to certain things that I didn't experience, and so on and so forth. It's a continuum. It really is. So I'm glad that I have children, grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. It's incredible.

Interviewer:

Are they babies?

Karen:

My oldest great-grandson is, he'll be eight this year.



Interviewer:

Oh, that's so beautiful.

Karen:

My great-granddaughter is a year old. She turned a year old in October. And my granddaughter is 30, my grandson will be 20. And like I said, my children, I'm middle-aged. Wow. How did that happen?

Interviewer:

That stuff keeps you young, though, having that much family to look after and to look after you.

Karen:

It does. It does. It's been a great life. It really has been. Particularly here in New Bedford. I really like this city a lot, and I'd hate to see any more of it disappear. So it's good to know that some of this will be passed on through archives and other things like that. And I've always loved the Whaling Museum. I love museums, period. But I've always loved the Whaling Museum, and being an artist, there's a connection with all of this with the history and all that other stuff. And it's good inspiration, because I need it. I really do. I have not been able to paint, I won't say I haven't been able to, I haven't been inspired to paint, whereas, before it just happened. I'd put some music on. Before you know it, it's 4:00 in the morning. I'm like, "Oh, I guess I need to go to bed." But the time just passes so quickly, that you are unaware of it and you're in the zone. A lot of people say that about music and art. I've done photography, do poetry, a number of other things, ceramics.

Interviewer:

Did you paint this waterfront?

Karen:

I've taken photographs of this waterfront, yeah. Haven't painted the waterfront, because now it's different to be able to go down in there and not be in the way of something. So if you just come with a camera and you're clicking or whatever, but it's always fascinating. It's always been fascinating to me.