TYE: About two and half years ago, at the start of the pandemic, just before Jim Gould left town, Phil and I met with him in his backyard. It was the early days and everybody was being very cautious, and we weren’t infected with Covid, but we were infected with his obsession for Cotuit history, which Phil already knew a lot about and I knew nothing about, and in the last two and a half years, we’ve probably interviewed maybe 50 people who have roots of different kinds in this community, with the defining questions being—we all start with the same presumption that Cotuit is the most special place on the planet, and the question is: what makes it that way, and what memories did people have of what the early history was all about? And what we’re doing with these interviews is, for now, we’re posting the tapes and hopefully some transcripts online at the Historical Society site. And someday, if we both find the bandwidth and interested editor, we may write it up for the *Globe* magazine, or the *Times* magazine, or maybe take the great voices, minus our voices, and just do some sort of show on National Public Radio with them. But I also believe, and this is self-serving given what we might write some day, that Cotuit is a lens into Americans here. This is a village that happens to be here in Cape Cod, but it has elements that define what community is everywhere. So if you wouldn’t mind holding that so that—whether or not our questions are on tape don’t much matter, but picking up clearly your voice is what matters, and just saying your name and the date would be great.

BABCOCK: Okay, this is August 25, I am Bill Babcock, I live on Little River Road on the Little River section of Cotuit. It’s important to know that ‘cause, although a small village, Cotuit is also sectioned, and one section doesn’t necessarily know much about another section.

TYE: Great, so before we actually get into our questions we normally begin with, if you could explain that further by defining “What is your section defined by? What makes that…”

ODENCE: Your ‘hood.

TYE: And how your ‘hood differs from…?

BABCOCK: Let me give an example. For a long time I was on the board of the Cahoon Museum, and one of the board members for a long time at the same time that I was on was Gretchen Riley, who lives on Oregon Way. And she would complain that the people on Vineyard Road had never heard of the Cahoon, nothing about it. And that was sort of in some ways kind of typical. I happened to discover recently that Lally[?] Lewis family had actually had connections with the sort of Little River, Old Post Road neighborhood. She was connected with the Wadsworth House and with Perkins House, but I didn’t know that. I mean I’d been living on Little River Road since the mid-1970s. And I had no idea that there was any connection between…

ODENCE: Well her parents crossed the boundaries.

BABCOCK: They crossed the big divide on Vineyard Road.

TYE: And today, is there still distinction between various parts of the village?

BABCOCK: Oh sure, I think so. I mean I suspect that I could find portions of the village that you probably know very little about. You know the history of the development of Geraldine Way, for instance?

ODENCE: Nope.

BABCOCK: Nope, see there you go! And yep, out there off of 28 is part of the village. So, you know, it’s still very sectioned off into neighborhoods that… Each neighborhood knows itself, but the connections between neighborhoods are often very tenuous.

TYE: So you’re a scholar and understand sociological forces and why these things happen. Are the sections of the village and these distinct neighborhoods defined by just geography, or socioeconomics, or something else? Just history?

BABCOCK: I don’t really know the answer to that question. I suspect, I mean, they’re certainly defined by geography; they’re probably defined by the sequence of development; the history of the inhabitants, whether they were summer or year-round; how they fit into the history of the village’s development; where the people came from. Little River neighborhood, the section where the Goulds’ old house was, where the Cummings’ house is, was, as far as I know its history, it originally belonged to a lawyer from Dallas, Texas. And then it was, that property was, bought by Jerry Fullum, who was a fish dealer from Boston.

ODENCE: It was Lowell’s before all that.

BABCOCK: Yeah, I have no doubt it was…

ODENCE: Guy Lowell actually owned that part.

BABCOCK: Probably went all the way over to Little River itself. But on the other side of Little River, there was a St. Louis contingent, the Hitchcocks. So on the one side you have Texas, on the other side you have St. Louis. As far as I know, there was never a whole lot of connection between the St. Louis contingent and the Texas contingent. The Texas contingent was over and done by the time I got here, so I don’t…

ODENCE: But even going back a couple hundred years, Little River was shipbuilding and oysters, you know, what’s now Santuit was then called Cotuit, was farming, and then you had the, you know, the fishermen and the seacaptains in Cotuitport. And even some Cotuitport versus Highground distinction.

BABCOCK: Right, so that’s an interesting correlation of points of division between history, socioeconomic history, the way the relations developed. I mean the whole Lowell thing was a summering thing, and only lately has it become year-round.

ODENCE: Yeah, we’re sitting in what was the Madison House and, you know, Henderson. And we talked to Edie before she died, and she was talking about the fact that when she was, I don’t know, we’re probably talking eight or nine years old, she was not allowed to ride her bike past, I don’t know, up towards where my grandparents live. A couple of hundred yards down and a little bit down towards Oregon, but she was very constrained. And I think, you know, you hear a lot about kids sort of being in their own, particularly kids, confined to their own Cotuit neighborhoods. Today there’s a little more flexibility, and some of that might be transportation.

BABCOCK: Yeah, even we were unhappy about having our kids, when they were growing up, ride their bikes as far as Putnam Avenue, because there was too much traffic on Putnam Avenue. So we wouldn’t allow them to bike to the Yacht Club. We drove them because we didn’t want them riding on Putnam Avenue.

ODENCE: And you know there used to be a walking bridge across Little River…

BABCOCK: Yes, there did. In fact, I never walked across the bridge, but I walked across the concrete blocks that were floating for the bridge. They were still there, we could walk from our house across Little River, over towards the Goulds’, and really all the way into where the columns are now, and then back up to… Yeah, I don’t know, I did that with the Goulds a couple of times. Must have been 20 years ago…

ODENCE: I’ve done it in the off-season, it’s there.

BABCOCK: Is the path still open?

ODENCE: Yep

BABCOCK: Yep, okay good.

TYE: So, without getting too philosophical about it, the last interview we did, last weekend, was with a couple named Gittelman, and they’ve been coming here for 50 years, they have Tufts connection. They explained that one of the things that they love about Cotuit is that there isn’t a sense of having to belong to a community. Some people go to vacation places or wherever they are and they’re looking for community. They said they came here looking not to have the responsibility of having to belong to a community. They had plenty of community at the university and where they were living in the winter, and one of the things they loved about being here was that they’ve lived for thirty years on Popponesset, and have neighbors across the street with a sign out saying their name, but they’ve never met those neighbors. And they like the idea that they can just be here and do their own thing. Is that part of… We wanted to hear how you came here, but is maybe, rather than looking for community, the lack of community or just finding it in your ‘hood something nice about this place?

BABCOCK: Well I think, yeah, momentary sidebar about Sol Gittelman, who was provost at Tufts, and for a while I was provost at SMU and Scott Murphy was provost at WPI.

TYE: Dennis Murphy.

BABCOCK: Yeah, I knew… Yeah, so we had a little provost thing going on.

TYE: I love it. That also speaks to one of the things that Jim Gould told us, it’s: I’ve always thought about… that we lived on the “I’m cool, and I’m literary, and I’m academic” part of the Cape, and it was Truro, Provincetown, Wellfleet that had academics and artists and other things. And Gould said, “No, you’ve got it all wrong,” that 100 years ago, that Lowell came here and brought his academic and arts friends, but you’re all quieter… In Osterville they wear their whale pants, and in Wellfleet they wear their arts credentials on their belt. In Cotuit people can come and do it quietly, you can be provosts of major universities. Is that a difference of this place, or is it…?

BABCOCK: Oh, yeah, I don’t think of Cotuit as having the same kind of social signature that Osterville does. Wellfleet I don’t know well enough to know, although it’s had some great galleries. But what did you ask me, who was…? You mentioned the Gittelmans and that got me off on it.

TYE: I’m sorry… so he said the lack of community gave him the chance to come here and just be…

BABCOCK: Yeah, for me, it may have been similar for you, but for me my parents had come here, had bought property, built a house. It made it natural for me and my wife and our kids to come here in the summer to visit them. Living in Dallas, where it was unbearably hot all summer long, we decided after spending one summer there, that we were never gonna do that again if we could possibly help it. And I think it’s true that we never did. So we came here, and for the kind of work that I was doing I could put it in a box and bring it here, and work on it here.

TYE: Can you just say for the record… You were the provost at SMU, but were also a professor of religious studies?

BABCOCK: I was a professor of the history of Christianity at the school of theology at SMU. And also, for a long time, for 15 years, the director of the PhD program in religious studies at SMU. And, briefly, in an interim period in the 90s, I served as provost at SMU. And that was my brief interim period of about 18 months, I think, that qualified me to count as one of the provosts.

TYE: Can you take us back to what drew your family here in the first place? When and why?

BABCOCK: I can give you a timeline, Larry, but I’m not sure I can give you the reason. My mother’s family came from Vermont, and while I was growing up in the 40s, all the vacations that I can remember, we went to Vermont.

ODENCE: Where was that in Vermont?

BABCOCK: We rented various cottages on Lake Champlain, pretty far north. North of Vergennes. And then at some point, in the early 50s, my parents did a u-turn, and they started coming here instead of going there. And they came here to the Pines, for the Pines.

ODENCE: And you were living in Wellesley?

BABCOCK: We were living in Wellesley Hills. And I think for the first time we were here—can’t remember how long we stayed—we rented rooms in Evergreen. And then after that, we were in cottages for each. And then, of course, the Pines closed. But my parents…

ODENCE: Evergreen was the big mansion?

BABCOCK: Yeah, it was a huge, almost dormitory-like, hotel thing, which subsequently became—whose house…?

ODENCE: Fred Crawford.

BABCOCK: Right, thank you, the Crawfords.

ODENCE: The chairman of DRW.

BABCOCK: Anyway, my parents, after the Pines closed, did not decide to leave. They decided to stay, and they continued to rent places, including where Wally and Kathy Grove live, the cottages behind their house moving down towards the bay. One of those houses. And eventually found a piece of property on Old Post Road that they could purchase, and did. And eventually put a house on that. The “eventually” between the Pines closing and finding that property was very long. Eight or so years probably. But the time between buying the property and building the house was not so long. They bought the property, built the house. First summer they were in the house was 1964. When did the Pines close, ‘56, ‘57?

ODENCE: Yeah, I think ‘57.

BABCOCK: So took them a while to find the property, but once they built the property, they built the house. And then my mother died the following March. My father subsequently remarried, kept the property, and he and his second wife kept it and came there regularly for the rest of their respective lives.

ODENCE: But you have no idea what brought them to Cotuit?

BABCOCK: What led them suddenly to change their mind, giving up on Vermont and coming to Cotuit, I don’t know.

ODENCE: Great, cause that’s my signature question for everybody, is what brought them here. So that’s too bad…

BABCOCK: I really don’t know, I know what brought everybody else here: *they* were here. So we can’t do…

ODENCE: And would your sister—your sister’s still alive right?—would she have a clue?

BABCOCK: I don’t know, she’s three, almost four, years younger than I am.

ODENCE: So you think you’d be more likely?

BABCOCK: Yeah, I really don’t know what it was. But when they came they liked it and they stayed.

TYE: Is your sister still coming here?

BABCOCK: She comes down to visit me, say, once or every other month, and we have lunch. She stops at The Coop for sandwiches and we have lunch.

TYE: You were describing coming from Dallas and the relief from the weather and, presumably, loving Cotuit. Were you staying at your father’s place, were you renting, were you buying…?

BABCOCK: We, when we came, stayed at wherever my parents were staying. So we came, and maybe stayed the week, at one of the Groves cottages, because my parents were there. And by that time, I was at Yale. We had one kid, and it wasn’t too hard a drive from New Haven here. But when my family bought and built, by that time, I had been hired at SMU. And in 1973-’74 was my first year of leave from SMU. And I had gotten some sort of grant that gave me… study at Harvard in classics or medieval studies or something. Something I needed sort of to fill in around the area of my own specialization, but didn’t know enough about these other areas. And so we came and we lived in my family’s house for ‘73-’74, which was fun. And we could look out at the bay in the fall, or in the Spring, and we could see a flock of gulls coming down the bay. And underneath the gulls, there would be schools of menhaden. And underneath the schools of menhaden, there would be striped bass. So I could run down to the beach, get in the dinghy, take my rod, go out and cast into the menhaden, and come back with a striped bass. Anyways, so we did that and our kids, two kids, went to the Cotuit School. So Michael was here in third grade and Hillary was here in first grade, and, needless to say, they acquired friends during the time they were here. And in the summer of ‘74, when my parents came back, all of the sudden the house seemed much smaller, because the kids would bring their friends over, and all of the sudden my parents, who seemed old at the time—they both lived to be much older than that, but they seemed old at the time—sort of had a kind of sanctuary. They had a place that was invaded by youngsters all the time. So that was when we decided that we needed to have a place of our own. Fulham at that time was selling off some of the property that he had. I think that it had been subdivided already; filled by [?]. I’m not sure whether that’s true or not, but I think it had been subdivided, anyway, and the real-estate agent who was handling the sale of these lots for Fulham was Helen McClellan, who was one of the all-time great characters of Cotuit. And she was being careful to try and maintain the Cotuit character.

ODENCE: Yeah we’ve heard that.

BABCOCK: Yeah, and so those that had not qualified… and after the Goulds—Goulds were the first that bought one of the lots that Fulham was selling off—but after the Goulds, I think, we were the first ones to get a lot. And then Terry and Pugh[?] got the house that’s now Scott Worthley’s house…

TYE: When would that have been?

BABCOCK: We bought our lot in ‘74. The house was built by ‘75. Terry and Pugh came just in after we did, so it would have been late 70’s, I think, that they came in.

TYE: So your house was built when you were back after your sabbatical?

BABCOCK: Yes.

…

TYE: So, you have a wonderful house there, but now you’ve got to be back in Texas. Did you ever get to spend, in any of these subsequent years, year-round there?

BABCOCK: Yes, one of the points of separation in Cotuit back then was the distinction between summer people and winter people. And we became able to bridge that divide because occasionally, we were winter people as well as summer people. We were winter people in ‘73-’74. I was a winter person in ‘80-’81. Rosa by that time was teaching in the community college system and she wasn’t on leave, but I was on leave so I stayed here. And again in ‘87-’88, I was on leave and didn’t quite stay for the whole year round, but was here late in the fall and then early in the spring. So it was not quite year-round but close. And then in ‘88-’89, my wife was on leave and studying for a degree and teaching English as a second language at St. Michael’s College in Vermont. And she came regularly. Every third or fourth weekend she came back down to Cotuit from Burlington, so she was the overwinter person, the winter person, that year.

TYE: Can I ask how it changed your take on what Cotuit was like, to bridge that gap?

BABCOCK: Oh yes. I think for many people, Cotuit was a summer community, and then much more recently it’s sort of become a retirement community, with still a heavy emphasis on summer, when more people are here. But for us, we suddenly established connections with people in that, ordinarily, I think we would have had no connections with. The current head of the water department is Chris Weissman. He and our daughter were in first grade together. Our plumber, who works for Spencer Howlett and comes at least once a year, once to turn the outside shower on, once to turn it off, and other times if needed. He also went to first grade with our daughter. So we have all suddenly these sort of connections that you wouldn’t see otherwise. So yeah, and one of our son’s best friends while we were here overwintering and then subsequently in the summers was Billy Reed, Roger and Betsy Reed’s oldest son.

ODENCE: We interviewed them early on…

BABCOCK: Oh good, because I was thinking about this, you should. Because they give and they have a very long history in Cotuit. Go back, I mean, their families, especially Betsy’s, goes back a very long way to the, easily, into the early 19th century. She was a Dottridge.

ODENCE: Well the Burlingames go back a long way…

BABCOCK: Yes, the Burlingames go back a long way too.

TYE: And the Dottridges: we interviewed a couple Dottridges who were very interesting and who told me things I didn’t know about the town temporarily. For instance, I thought one of the things that made Cotuit special was that it wasn’t on its way anywhere and you had to be coming here, and he explained that at one point when they were building 28, main road through, came down School St. and turned left on Main, and it was like 128.

ODENCE: So just shifting gears a little and rewinding a little, we’ve talked to people who worked at the Pines, Rita in particular, people who got ice cream cones at the Pines, but I don’t think we’ve ever talked to anybody who’s stayed there, especially as a kid, so maybe…

BABCOCK: Chalk me up as an original!

ODENCE: Yeah, well it’d be great to get your memories of what it was like staying at the Pines.

BABCOCK: Yeah, I don’t think I was ever there, Phil, for longer than two weeks. But it was fun. The Pines had its own set of skiffs. First time I ever sailed a skiff I sailed it from the Pines. I had a terrible moment when… I want to remember what the circumstances were, I mean I don’t know why I was out on the boat. I don’t remember what the weather conditions were, but the mast snapped. Went right just over like that. And my father went, “Oh my God, I’m gonna have to pay for a mast.”

ODENCE: How old were you, early teens at that point?

BABCOCK: Yeah, this would have been… I was born in ‘39 and it would have been ‘52-’4, something like that, so early to mid teens. Mast snapped. My father was all set to pay for a new mast, but it turned out the mast was rotted halfway through, so [?] Crawford said, “I don’t think you have to pay for the mast.”

ODENCE: Yeah, but it was, I mean, the drill was you kinda ate community, you all went to the dining room and then you had organized activities…?

BABCOCK: The cottages did have means of cooking, so you could stay in the cottages and not eat in the central dining room if you didn’t want to. But if you were in Evergreen, you went to the central dining room, there wasn’t any cooking facilities there, so you went to the central dining room. I remember from the Historical Society that one of the buildings there was the laundry, but I don’t have any memory of the laundry. I probably had no interaction with…

ODENCE: Well the homestead itself was the laundry.

BABCOCK: Oh, the homestead was… Oh I thought that it was… Oh it was moved here from somewhere and became the laundry, and then became the homestead?

ODENCE: I mean, it was the Dottridges moved it here in 1808 from Harwich, but eventually it was on the Pines property and was used as laundry and then sort of rebuilt back in its original state.

BABCOCK: Right, okay.

TYE: It sounds like a down home and not super elegant and that it was a fun place for a kid to be and didn’t seem too fancy.

BABCOCK: Its fanciness sort of varied with the people.

ODENCE: Did gentlemen wear a tie to dinner?

BABCOCK: I think they may have done. I don’t have a vivid memory of that. I do remember Tim Meyer—did you ever encounter any of the Meyers? They were…

ODENCE: The Meyers who lived above Luke? There was a Meyer family who lived in a house right above Luke.

BABCOCK: Oh yes, possibly.

ODENCE: Anyway, I don’t know…

BABCOCK: I’m not sure. Anyway, Tim Meyer was roughly my age, and he knew Gilbert Sullivan backwards and forwards, and I remember Tim Meyer and Gilbert Sullivan, oh wow. And I do remember being there. I came late, I think my parents had been here maybe for a month in one of the cottages, but I came late. Probably would have been summer of 1954, and got here just after there was a hurricane that year, just after the hurricane. And I remember still wandering around, looking at the damage from the hurricane.

TYE: Did you then… There was a lot more going on in the center of the village. Was that a focus or was it just… was it self-contained at the Pines?

BABCOCK: For me pretty much self-contained at the Pines. It was only later… By the time I really got to know the center of the village, it was radically reduced. There was the gas station and the Kettle Ho, and there was the library and the church and the post office. Except the gas station isn’t there anymore, now it’s just a parking lot. And the Kettle Ho was, again, to sort of show you the difference in the history of Cotuit: Kettle Ho at that time was run by Jimmy—can’t remember his name—and his wife, whose name I also can’t remember. But at that time it was strictly breakfast and lunch. No dinner, no bar, and the carpenters and the fishermen would get up early, go into the Kettle Ho, get coffee and/or breakfast depending on what they wanted, and then go to work. So that was the life of the Kettle Ho. And then they sort of dragged on over to lunch, and that was it. The evening, the Kettle Ho was not an evening factor. And the Procopios had the gas station. I don’t know who had it before the Procopios.

ODENCE: Scudder.

BABCOCK: Oh yeah, that’s right. And there was still the Scudder storage tank for oil, wasn’t there.

TYE: And was the bar there?

BABCOCK: The Hack’s Bar? Yeah. I didn’t know anything about Hack’s Bar. I just heard the story about Teddy Kennedy and Hack’s Bar, but I didn’t know anything about Hack’s Bar.

TYE: So I’ve not heard anybody we’ve interviewed mention Hacks Bar without mentioning Ted Kennedy. And I presume the stories were true, but they’re great stories. Are you now still seasonal or are you full-time?

BABCOCK: I’ve been full-time year-round since 2005.

TYE: Oh you have. Totally retired from SMU?

BABCOCK: Yes.

TYE: And your wife is retired from her teaching?

BABCOCK: Yes, we were retired at the end of the same month in the same year. We both retired May 31, 2005, and left our house and never looked back.

TYE: And love being here year-round?

BABCOCK: Yes. And again it sort of made a difference. I don’t know about your parents, Phil, how it worked for them. But it made a difference for us that we had previously been here year-round, so it wasn’t as if we only knew summer people or only knew people who were retired. We knew some of the…

ODENCE: Well my dad lived here as a kid, and wintered, so I think, for him, moving back here there were a lot of people who he knew from those days.

BABCOCK: Yeah. That was, I often think it was a fairly big divide between winter and summer people, and it’s largely been overcome, I think, now. You could tell me more than I can, sure. But I think it’s largely been overcome because the winter people have changed. Instead of being people like Roger and Betsy Reed, they’re now people like the Odences and Tyes and the Babcocks, and it’s largely that kind of community. So the division between winter people and summer people…

ODENCE: Just the economics of living are shifting. So over time you probably end up with formerly, you know, upper-middle class retirees who can afford and…

BABCOCK: Exactly, and the people that, the old-time winter people, who are still living here are people who got their properties and their houses long ago when it was still good. They’re not people who bought in recently.

TYE: You’re describing, in a way, I think the change in demographics Cape-wide.

BABCOCK: Yes.

TYE: Lots of people, partly from the reasons Phil just mentioned, the economics. The Cape is… A friend who was at the *Cape Cod Times* says that Cape Cod has the oldest demographic in America. That it is older than Florida or Arizona because a lot of the younger mix is gone and because so many people that came here as kids, when they had a choice for retirement, when people were living longer in retirement, wanted to be back here.

BABCOCK: Right.

TYE: You’re defining that…

BABCOCK: I exemplify that.

TYE: You do. You’re also exemplifying in having experience, I would imagine. It’s less intimidating to come back here in retirement, year-round, if you experienced it at different times during your life like you have. That you knew what a winter here was gonna be like, and liked that I presume.

BABCOCK: Oh yes. We weren’t put off by the idea of a New England winter. And of course Cape Cod isn’t really exemplary of New England winters. It’s way too mild.

TYE: Are your kids still drawn back here, are they back here…?

BABCOCK: Yes, and it’s sort of like… And it’s a story that you can hear from a great many people. Our kids were here for the summer and my son never had any kids of his own but my daughter did and her kids are here for the summer or were here for the summer. And I had no doubt that with my granddaughter marrying into the Barzun family, there’ll be another generation coming back here too.

ODENCE: Just a little bit about your father would be great, cause I just remember him as being just the most gentlemanly gentleman I ever met. Such a great guy.

BABCOCK: Yeah, and he and Larry were… they were great friends.

ODENCE: Larry my father, for people who are listening.

BABCOCK: It’s not easy, for me anyway, to try to encapsulate my father. But I can give you an example that may sort of help. His name was Sumner Babcock; he was lawyer, he worked for Bingham, Dana & Gould, major Boston law firm. He had worked there almost all his life. After he graduated from Harvard Law School he did a short stint. I think maybe it was at Ropes & Gray, but then he joined Bingham, Dana & Gould, and he worked there the rest of his life. His working life. And retired several times, and retire… And then they’d need him back for something or other so he’d go back and then retire… But in the 70s, I think, 80s? When did the Wampanoags file the lawsuit against Mashpee?

ODENCE: Early 70s, I think.

BABCOCK: Yeah, they filed a lawsuit against Mashpee that put every property in Mashpee up for grabs. If the Wampanoag suit had been victorious, they would have held the title to all the Mashpee property and none of the current property owners would have had… Well, Leonard and Betty Peck lived in Mashpee. So their title to the property was thrown into question too. And Dad…

ODENCE: And they didn’t just have the house lot, they had—let me guess—six or eight acres?

BABCOCK: Yeah. Anyway, Dad represented Leonard and Betty in that. I don’t know whether it was that formal. He advised them pro bono all that time. And he and Leonard actually… They did a lot together, they were good friends. And when Leonard’s book came out, my father may have been one of the very few who wasn’t really irritated with what Leonard had to say about him, for what Leonard had to say about him was all good.

ODENCE: Yeah, I just remembered, as I say, I can’t think of a better word than gentleman as an adjective to describe him, he’s such a great guy.

BABCOCK: Yeah, he advised the library board, the yacht club he served on the council, yeah. So he was a figure who made a lot of contributions in a quiet sort of way to life in Cotuit.

ODENCE: I don’t know if you know about his getting John Solomon a job at Gould’s…[?]. John’s forever in his debt for starting his career.

BABCOCK: I did know that and…

TYE: I worked for 15 years at the *Globe* and Bingham was our law firm and got the paper out of a lot of trouble.

BABCOCK: Dad was—I think what would now be called a litigator—he was a generalist, but he took a lot of cases to trial or settled them before they went to trial. He was more of a generalist than a specialist, though, but I just think that if he had now to be categorized he would probably be categorized as a litigator. But he was always, I don’t know… Another aspect of his person and personality: he was always more eager to get a settlement than to go to trial. ‘Cause the trial was, I mean, that was kind of in some ways kind of the definitive break in whatever the opposing parties were. And if you can get a settlement earlier, you didn’t necessarily have the definitive break.

TYE: You’ve just defined wonderfully differences between what law was like in those glory days versus today.

ODENCE: I was thinking of the guys on TV, my brain went right to the guys on TV.

TYE: And the guy said, I mean, the idea of having generalists is gone, law firms that were defined by being in Boston rather than international operations is gone, and the idea of pushing for settlements rather than costly trials… So I want to thank you for coming out on a really miserable day and having to negotiate your way around here and say that it is… So I think that, since I never had the Cotuit of 50 years to compare it, but I think the demographics of today’s Cotuit are pretty wonderful. I’m sorry that people are priced out of being here, but I think having more year-round people and more older people bringing their experience and wisdom to the village has got to be a good thing for it, I think in the end.

BABCOCK: Yeah, I mean I don’t strongly disagree with that, Larry. I do think that the village has lost a little something since the… If you think of social stratification now, it’s sort of all up here and that connection with other levels is kind of lost. But when I came, the connections with the other levels were strong. People knew the masons who made the bricks as well as the people who owned the big properties, and…

TYE: So that’s a huge loss, but let me ask you about that. Is it though… One of the things that we keep hearing over and over again was on the one hand, that there was more variety economically. Poor people could afford to live here. And the other is that it was an incredibly white and maybe not so receptive to people of other… to Jews, to others. Have you seen it get any diversity as it’s gotten… as it’s lost its economic diversity, has it got any more racially or religiously or in other ways tolerant, or was it ever intolerant?

BABCOCK: My way of thinking about that, Larry, is thinking about the history of the Cotuit Church. When we first started coming to Cotuit, the minister was a white male whose name I’ve now forgotten.

ODENCE: Kraft.

BABCOCK: No, it was after Kraft.

ODENCE: After Kraft, okay. Then I’m not gonna know.

BABCOCK: I just can’t remember his name. I still remember Helen Dottridge making an exceedingly unpleasant comment about him, but I can’t remember what his name was. And he was followed by… The pattern was the sort of: there’s a federation of churches between Congregationalist and Methodist churches, they were supposed to go back and forth between Congregationalist and Methodist ministers. So he was followed by a Methodist minister, Father John, who—John Smith—who was minister for a long time. Right through the ‘60s into the early ‘70s, I would guess. And he was followed by a Black male.

ODENCE: Joe [?], I think?

BABCOCK: Gambian.

ODENCE: Oh Gambian, okay.

BABCOCK: Ron Wilson. And the church, as far as I could tell, and I was probably by that time I might have been a member of that church. As far as I could tell the church had no problem with having a Black male as… And he was followed by a white male who was then followed by a white woman. And as far as I know, the church had no problem with the white woman.

ODENCE: Not to get salacious, but if I’m thinking of the right woman, a former Miss California.

BABCOCK: That may be right, I think that’s probably perhaps right.

ODENCE: I don’t remember her name, she was only there for a few years. But that was the talk of the village.

BABCOCK: She was… Her first name was Elizabeth and now I’ve forgotten about her. She performed—here’s a little bit of Cotuit Federated Church—she performed the… Well, when my son married his current wife, they were both living in England, but they couldn’t get married in England because he was divorced. And the Church, C of E, would not marry a divorced person. So they came here and got married here and then went back to England and had a blessing. Some sort of service, a blessing, there. But Elizabeth was the one who performed the wedding service for my son and his current wife here. And she made some singularly inappropriate comments in her remarks during the wedding and got some members of the congregation really upset, including Jayne Uyenoyama for one. And that was… Her departure was one of the offshoots from that event. Took a while before she went, but then she went. And some people stopped, I mean Jayne, I think just stopped going to the church, and didn’t come back until Elizabeth had gone.

TYE: Jayne, by the way, was one of the most fun interviews we did because it was half about Cotuit history and half about… I was involved with a book project on jazz and she’s an old jazzhead. And whatever the topic was she was engaged and animated.

BABCOCK: Yes, oh well she’s great and she was a very good friend. We didn’t see each other frequently but when we did it was like old home week.

TYE: So one of the strange things about the interviews we’d done is, as happens in any group that you’re interviewing and especially in an older demographic, several people have died since we interviewed them, but the tape has been played at their memorial. There was just a memorial service at the Center for the Arts for Sue Hamilton, and they played part of the tape. And at Jayne’s service, which was during Covid at Lowell Park, they had some of the tape. And I think that the, one of the things we offered to do and we’ll do for you, is if anyone in your family would like a copy of the tape as well as a transcript… It’s just fun to have…

ODENCE: Well let’s hold off on the memorial service.

TYE: Memorial service we’ll hold off for 40 or 50 years. But I promised you an hour and we’ve just come to an hour. If you think of anything that you wished you had said, we can either turn on the tape recorder again, or just shoot us an email and we’ll add it to the transcript.

ODENCE: Okay.