Tye

Is this on? And what we would do with this is, one of these interns, remote interns, will transcribe it and we'll give the tape and the transcript to the Historical Society. The other thing that we will do with it, and this is a weird effect - I didn't realize when you are interviewing people who are 200 years old, they're not going to be around for that long. What we've done is given it to - I'm going to mispronounce her last name, but how do you say Jane's last name?

Odence

Wanoyama.

Tye

So, for instance, with Jane, we interviewed her. Actually, I interviewed her. Were you not there?

Odence

I wasn't there for that one.

Tye

She ended up being a brilliant interview partly because she knew a lot about Cotuit history and partly because she knew a lot, and I never envisioned this, about jazz history, and her dad had an incredible collection.

Odence

And he played the banjo?

Tye

Exactly, and he knew somehow Armstrong from wherever, but the bottom line is, we gave to her kids, when they were doing the memorial service, the tape of - most people don't have their parents on tape. I just gave the tape we did with Sue Hamilton to Dick Hamilton so she – (tape cuts out)

Tye

Just starting by, I'm going to put this here, by telling us your name and your early history in coming to Cotuit.

Churbuck

My name is David Chatfield Churbuck. It's February of 2023 and I'm 64 years old. I was born in 1958.

Odence

March 12?

Churbuck

May 13.

Odence

I knew it was an "M."

Churbuck

And I am the first in my family not to be born on Cape Cod.

Tye

They were born in Cotuit?

Churbuck

Well, they were born on the Cape. My father was born in Cape Cod Hospital and was delivered by Dr. Higgins – Donald Higgins. And his best friend growing up was Reed Higgins, Donald's son.

Odence

Whom we interviewed previously.

Churbuck

Gotcha. My grandparents were year-round residents of the Cape until the mid-50s. 1955 is when they moved up to Melrose and used the Cape as a summer place.

Tye

And when you say, they were year-round residences, they were here? In Cotuit?

Churbuck

Yep, yep.

Tye

Great. What had brought them and when did they come?

Churbuck

Well, my grandfather's grandfather was a whaling captain. Thomas Chatfield. And Thomas Chatfield came to Cotuit in 1847, ran away from home on the Hudson River, and ended up on a coastal schooner.

Odence

And he'd been born in England?

Churbuck

He was born in England and left as a two-year-old after his father got arrested for failing to pay the parish tax to the Church of England. His friends helped him escape on his way to jail, and he took a ship to New York and left his family behind. It was the church that took up the money to send my great-great-grandfather and his eight brothers and one sister afterwards, and they landed, I think, in about 1833 in New York, moved to Cornwall-on-Hudson.

Tye

Can you say that one more time? He was being arrested. He was going to jail for, what was it?

Churbuck

For failing to pay the parish tax to the Church of England, because he was a dissident Baptist, and he was like, “I don't have anything to do with your church,” so they came to - stole his pig. And he created a riot in the little village that he lived in and -

Tye

This is part of the proud history of religious rebels.

Churbuck

Right, but I don't think he was that spiritual or that nice of a guy.

Odence

He was just running from the law.

Churbuck

He was just running from the law. I think he was sort of a sad case. He was a tanner, which was a really bad profession, apparently. No one likes having a tanner around.

Odence

Certainly not next door.

Churbuck

But he put my great-great-grandfather to work. At the age of nine in the first textile mill in the state of New York and he got three months of education and then was sent off to child labor and then, when he was 15, he ran away.

Tye

This is your grandfather?

Churbuck

Great-great-great.

Odence

Thomas Chatfield?

Churbuck

Thomas Chatfield. And so, he came to Cotuit at the age of 15. He ran away from home and caught the first steamer, or whatever form of transportation he could find on the Hudson, just to get away from town, because he was convinced that, because he was breaking the contract that his father put him under at the mill, that he would get arrested, and he ended up in Albany and slept under a bridge.

Tye

So you have a great history of people running away from the law.

Churbuck

And he had his pocket picked as he was sleeping under this bridge, woke up, got into a fight with the pickpocket, beat the guy up, and these two guys from Cotuit, the Nickerson brothers, were sitting on their schooner going, "Damn kid" and said, "Come over here. What's going on?" And he lied and gave them a fake name. Said his name was John Thomas and that he was looking for his parents, that he had just come from England and heard his parents were in Albany. And they said, "well, any luck?" And he said, "No, I hear they might be in Boston." And they said, "Well, we're going to Boston, so why don't you come along?"

Odence

And was it Horace Nickerson?

Churbuck

Yeah, it was Horace and Aaron, sons of Seth Nickerson, who settled Oregon, the original settlement and then the high ground, and they had a schooner and brought him along, back to Cotuit. And their father Seth was pretty old at that time and needed a caretaker, someone to take care of the cow and chop the wood. So, John Thomas, aka Thomas Chatfield, spent one year in the school of Cotuit, which was, at that time, where the library is now, and in 1847, went as a cabin boy on the whaling ship *Massachusetts*, out of Edgartown, which was captained by Seth Nickerson Jr. They sailed around the Horn. Seth brought his wife and his three children, two toddlers and an infant, with him on that voyage, and they stopped in Peru to get fresh water. And there, they learned about the Gold Rush because a lot of prospectors went to the Isthmus of Panama, hoping to get a ship from Panama to San Francisco, but no ships were coming into Panama. They’d go to San Francisco and the entire crew would desert. A group of about 100 miners caught a ship down to Peru, hoping to find a ship, convinced Seth Nickerson Jr. to take them, and I think he charged them $100 a head, which was like the value of the entire voyage anyway. The whaling captains back then had the right, usually granted by the owner, to do whatever they wanted to with the ship. Like if someone offered to buy it during the voyage, sell it or whatever. So, they sailed to San Francisco with this new cargo of 100 prospectors and they brought aboard yellow fever and the infant died. The baby, Ella, who's buried in Mosswood and they pickled her in a cask of rum to bring her back and hung it over the stern. Didn't drag in the water, just tied it onto the rail and there she is in the high ground. My roots in Cotuit go back to 1800, 1805. The Nickersons came here from East Harwich in 1805, looking for a harbor because there's very little in the way of Anchorage past Hyannis up to Chatham, and the elder Nickerson, Seth Nickerson, was one of the first fishermen to go offshore and not be a day fisherman but to do overnight trips out to Georges Bank. And so, he came west and found Russian marsh, which at that time, I guess, was open to the sea and was a good refuge. And they settled there and it got blown out by a hurricane and wrecked the entire settlement. So they moved up to this part of the high ground.

Odence

Yeah, along Oceanview Avenue, what is today Oceanview Avenue.

Churbuck

Like Brownie's house was one of the Nickerson’s, but there was like eight Nickerson brothers and nephews all in that one stretch. Then the other direct descendants are the Handys, at Handys Point, which were three brothers who in 1805 left Potomac in the Pocasset area, where they had been shipbuilders with their grandfather and just needed a place to start their own business and came directly to Cotuit and settled up at Handys point and had a shipyard there from 1805 until 1850.

Tye

So I've lost this train of where your 15-year-old great-grandfather comes with the Nickersons here.

Churbuck

So he comes with one of the Nickerson brothers. Well, two Nickerson brothers bring him here. He spends one year at the Cotuit school living with Seth Nickerson, the old guy. His son takes him as cabin boy. He goes to San Francisco, does a year and a half in the gold fields up by Stockton. None of the crew made much money and they got bilched by the guy who - you know the gingerbread house?

Odence

Yeah Sturgis, Rhetire Sturgis.

Churbuck

Rhetire Sturgis stole all of the money of this little Cotuit company of prospectors and skedaddled came back here and built that house. But they resumed the voyage. They went back. The boat was just sort of -

Tye

They get out there. And they stay for a year and a half, not doing prospecting for gold but doing coal.

Churbuck

Well, they were doing gold. They're doing gold, but nothing happened. They didn't make any fortune or anything, and they resume the voyage. And was the only Nantucket or Cape Cod whaling ship to go into San Francisco in 1849 and then leave.

Odence

Evidently, there were hundreds of ships that just went to waste in San Francisco Harbor at the time, and the North Beach area of San Francisco was built over a pile of shell carcasses.

Churbuck

Yeah.

Tye

And this must have been - so your great-grandfather's adventure - he's sort of adopted by the Nickersons?

Churbuck

Adopted by the Nickersons and does four voyages, consecutive whaling voyage, each one three years in duration, and works his way up from cabin boy to boatsteerer or harpooner, and learns celestial navigation, which was, you know, really the ticket to success to become a whaling captain.

Tye

And he's in the heyday of whaling as well.

Churbuck

Pretty much the last gasp of the golden era. Nantucket had gone into decline and with it, Cotuit. Cotuit was very dependent as the supply port for Nantucket. The owner of the ship, Zenus Adams, he lived in Santuit, or Old Cotuit, and had a number of ships and only used Cotuit captains. Coleman, who lives in George Foy's house. He was one of Zenus Adams’s captains as well, and Adams basically would have these ships built over Mattapoisett, find the captain, and basically give it to the captain for the life of the vessel. So the Nickersons had the *Massachusetts*. They didn't sail it out of Cotuit but Edgartown because it couldn't get into Nantucket because the harbor had shawled over, and they always liked - whenever possible, captains took brothers and cousins as mates, because it was very much a balance between the riff-raff and the rigging and the officers in the stern. And it was the best way to sort of prevent any mutiny and mutinies were fairly common.

Tye

Run by trust. And the ones that you trust are family.

Churbuck

Exactly. You said it. Trust.

Tye

I'm intrigued. You know this all so well through oral histories? Or do people write this down? Or how do you know the story?

Churbuck

Well, he wrote it. He wrote his reminiscences in 1904 at the urging of Abbot Lawrence Lowell, the future president of Harvard, who had his secretary type up his manuscript, but he wrote it for his four daughters, so it's a very sketchy history.

Tye

The history you're describing - what it reminded me of is the monograph that Lowell did 100 years ago about the history of Cotuit, and I bet he used stuff from your great-grandfather, because of the whalings that he was describing, the close contact with Nantucket that - I would always assume that supplies went from Cotuit to Nantucket. Lowell said a lot of supplies at Nantucket was such a great - that a lot of supplies came here via there, but he had a relationship with all the interesting people in town. With Nickerson, with Lowell.

Odence

It's a small town.

Tye

Right, it’s a small town.

Odence

A lot of what Dave is talking about is the history of Thomas Chatfield, but it's also the history of Cotuit. A number of people have written about this period of time in Cotuit's history.

Tye

Does the Historical Society or somebody have his recollection?

Churbuck

They do. You can actually buy it. I re-typed his manuscript, digitized it, years ago. And lo and behold, somebody grabbed the text and even now, you can get a custom copy off Amazon for 20 bucks, but there’s copies of his memoir.

Tye

Can you just say it to the recorder, how would we know what that was?

Churbuck

It's called *The Reminiscences of Thomas Chatfield*.

Odence

You'll say more, but you mentioned the Handys, he married a Handy. So that's how you got into -

Churbuck

Right. So at the same time as the Nickerson is are sort of settling - the Nickersons and the Handys were two of the first families to be on the waterfront of Cotuit, because the original colonists were cattle and farmers and the like and it wasn't until -

Odence

Yeah, mostly Crockers up in Santuit. In fact, along where Route 28 is.

Churbuck

And yeah, the Handys had the first shipyard and the Nickersons were sort of the fishing family or the whaling family. But Chatfield, eventually, after his second voyage, he fell in love with Florentine Handy and her brother, Bethuel Gifford Handy, had sailed at the same time to San Francisco with the Cotuit Argonauts, which was a group of 22 Cotuit men who pooled their money and sailed in a schooner built by the Handy brothers, to San Francisco Bay, and never ran into Chatfield, never ran into anyone from the Nickerson family. And so Bethuel Handy's grandfathers were Seth Nickerson the elder and Bethuel Handy senior, whose wife Azuba, first wife, is the first person to be buried in Mosswood.

Odence

And he's the guy who spent the winter in Siberia.

Churbuck

We'll get to that. So when Chatfield gets back from voyage number two -

Tye

Can I interrupt for one second? Can you just occasionally look and see whether the light is still on?

Odence

The red light is on.

Tye

Great.

Churbuck

So Bethuel Jr. didn't like whaling. He knew that it was a really terrible life, especially for your love life. He liked being a schooner guy because he passed by Cotuit every so often on your way to and from New York and Boston. He actually succeeded, or took to prospecting and spent an additional year I think, until 1850 in California, and when he came back to Cotuit, he learned that this guy named John Thomas was courting his only sister, and he had heard out in California, from another member of the crew of the *Massachusetts*, that John Thomas, his real name wasn't John Thomas, but that his real name is Thomas Chatfield. And so when he heard that this John Thomas guy was after his sister, they had a fistfight on the beach, right by the Gould's beach house and he said, "Stay the hell away from my sister."

Tye

Because he thought he was an unsavory guy.

Churbuck

So he was like, "you're a criminal." And Thomas Chatfield, or John Thomas said, "No, you know, here's the deal. I haven't talked to anyone in my family for the last eight years or whatever, six years and I'm not a criminal."

Odence

So just a little aside, there was a bridge over a little river there and that would have been how Bethuel Handy met -

Churbuck

That's how they met.

Odence

Sort of to and between.

Churbuck

And so the two of them, Bethuel Handy, said, "We'll go to New York together." And they did. While they were there, Chatfield clears his name and is reunited with his mother and father and his only sister.

Tye

So we're going to New York together so you can redeem yourself. I'll find out if you're telling the truth.

Churbuck

If you're telling the truth or not. I need to see this firsthand if you're going to go any further with my sister.

Tye

Your great-grandfather sounds like a great adventurer. I mean, the idea of at age 15 breaking away from your bonds of servitude and going out on your own. That's a pretty gutsy thing.

Churbuck

Yeah.

Tye

And then taking your future brother-in-law up and reuniting with your family.

Churbuck

The weird thing is they're double brother-in-laws because Bethuel Handy falls in love with Mary Chatfield who lives on the Hudson and marries her.

Tye

When he meets her in New York when he goes up there?

Churbuck

Yep.

Tye

Wow, alright.

Churbuck

Now, none of this was known to me until five years ago. The family completely glossed over the fake name.

Tye

This wasn't part of the reminiscence or what?

Churbuck

Oh no, none of it was in there.

Tye

So he left out all the juicy stuff.

Churbuck

He did, when you read the manuscript, the reminiscence, you're always asking yourself, "Oh, if only he really told the truth." So he marries Bethuel's sister, and they ship out together on the *Massachusetts* on the third whaling voyage, and Chatfield saves Handy's life in sort of the prototypical Nantucket sleigh ride – pissed-off sperm whale bites the boat, and Bethuel almost drowns. Chatfield saves him. They come back to Cotuit and Chatfield at the age of 28 is given command of the *Massachusetts* and Bethuel's grandfather -

Tye

As an award for saving?

Churbuck

No, just in general, he's just a better sailor, and -

Odence

Like you said, he had celestial navigation, which was a huge role.

Churbuck

Yeah, he had 12, almost solid years, and in all those whaling voyages he spent a total of one year in Cotuit, three months at a time. He'd come home in April and leave in September and go right back out for three more years. And so, the last voyage in 1856. That fall, Chatfield is now captain of the *Massachusetts*. Bethuel, whose nose is way out of joint at this point, because he's the grandson - he's the scion of these two families - refuses to take an officer mate’s job on the *Massachusetts* under Chatfield so he goes to Nantucket and sails on another ship called *The Phoenix* as first mate. They pretty much simultaneously again head off to the Pacific on different boats but when Handy's captain gets to Honolulu, he takes ill. His name is Hinckley, lived in Centerville. Takes ill and says, "I can't continue." And Bethuel ends up being a captain too. And the one place that they knew where to whale was this very obscure portion of the Pacific, inside of the Kuril islands in Kamchatka Peninsula called the Sea of Okhotsk and off of the coast of Siberia and both ships, *The Phoenix* and *Massachusetts* are cruising. It was an incredible sort of boom time. I think there were 60 US ships in the sea that one year.

Odence

Because everywhere else is fished out?

Churbuck

Everything's fished out and the whaling fishery is going closer and closer to the Arctic Circle. And they would start in the north part of the sea inside of the Kamchatka Peninsula and work their way south as the ice receded over the spring.

Tye

And going here together?

Churbuck

But separate ships. They never even saw each other until late September of 1858. And Chatfield who had fished the sea three times previously warned his brother-in-law, “it's time to go, weather is great but we're out of here,” and he leaves, but Bethuel, being a little less experienced or unlucky, decided to linger and do what was called stinker foraging. And what they would do is wait and scavenge dead whales that had escaped, and they eventually float up to the surface, and they are in this collection of islands called the Shantar islands in the far corner of the Sea of Okhotsk, right by the former border between Russia and China. The border was called the Irtysh? River. And it was stayed that way for another three years until it went to its present border on the Amur river, but this was deep wilderness and looks like a beautiful part of the world but very, very dangerous. They mostly whaled from shore. The tides were so extreme – 30-foot rise-and-fall that you couldn't take a sailing ship and navigate it safely. They would get it into the area, anchor it as securely as possible.

Odence

Row the boats?

Churbuck

Row the boats around and camp on the beach, but it's also like the bear-attack capital of the world. Chatfield gets out of there safely and Handy stays an extra two weeks and loses the ship in a gale. It goes ashore on a thing that the whalers called Elbow Island which was about three miles off of the mainland. And no one dies. He gets the entire crew ashore, and they build a cabin and make the roof out of the sails. And immediately winter hits. Early October, it goes deep Siberia freeze. Handy waits until early December until the sea freezes and then takes the party across the ice. And they're on the island. And crosses the Shevchenko strait on foot and then does 40 miles over land in like waist-deep snow with no winter equipment.

Tye

They managed to build a house for safety for the beginning of winter and then go 40 miles on ice in a Siberian winter?

Odence

And they’re probably out of food?

Churbuck

They ran out of food. So he split the crew in half. He left the chief mate and half of the crew in the cabin, and he took another. So there's 36 men in the crew, so he took about a dozen men and they went over land, tried to go along the beach, but the coastline is so sheer with cliffs and promontory, they had to go inland and finally make it to the river, the Irtysh? River, where the natives had had a summer salmon camp. And they found some shacks, and they were seeking shelter in the shacks against another blizzard when all of a sudden, a Cossack, a Russian soldier, shows up and flips out like, "Who the hell are you guys?" and runs away in terror. And they're like, "Looks cool." And the Russian says, “Stay here, I've got to go ask the governor what to do,” and apparently there had been so many desertions of American whaling ships that the Tsar had set up 40 miles down this river, the first of the gulags, this fort called Udstkoe?, which was basically his easternmost outposts to basically enforce the border with the Chinese. And it was this failed settlement. They had to supply it by horses every year from Irkutsk, a 1500-mile slug and they would eat the horses.

Odence

So they’d pack stuff in on the horses.

Churbuck

Pack stuff in on the horses. Eat the horses. When the Russian governor found out that they weren't deserters but had been wrecked, he sent the natives down with dogsleds and hauled the crew back, and they spent the winter in this Russian fort or village where Bethuel Handy - he became fluent in Russian.

Tye

Are the other guys still on the island?

Churbuck

Other guys are on the island. They send another expedition. The tribe was called the Evenks. They were part of the Tungusic tribe, and they rode reindeer like the Laps do. And they brought food. They did three food missions back out to the island, and no one died, which was remarkable. But the following spring, Chatfield came back and rescued him.

Tye

So this is twice he saved his life.

Churbuck

Right, brought him back to San Francisco. Chatfield had figured out early on that he could make a lot of money by avoiding Maui. Lahaina is where all the whaling ships went for their sort of winter quarters and Chatfield found that San Francisco was actually a much better place to go. Lower prices and he could also sell his cargo, all of his whale oil, and make more room in the ship for another load. And so they went back to San Francisco. The discovery I found on all of this was, Bethuel told his story to a reporter at *The Daily Alta*, the oldest newspaper in California, and they ran it on the front pages of serial for five days and it's just in great detail. Tells all the stuff -

Tye

You've got to somethday, not telling you what you ought to be doing, write this up.

Churbuck

I did. I'm now finishing.

Tye

But I was gonna say, as a book and a screenplay. This has got to have a wonderful -

Churbuck

As it unfolded, I mean, and I don't think the story would have been possible to even scratch the surface of it if it wasn't for the good old internet because in doing the research on that part of the world, I -

Tye

You used that to find out the stories?

Churbuck

Well, they digitized *The Daily Alta* and what were going to be the chances I'd end up in a microfilm in San Francisco and stumble on it?

Odence

You must have peed your pants.

Tye

They're both heroes in different ways. Chatfield sounds like an incredible hero and this brother-in-law who punches him out, he goes and saves his life twice. But the idea that the other guy makes it through a Siberian –

Odence

It's like a shot in some sort of survivor show.

Churbuck

The sad part of the story is, what's the word, hagiography. You know? It's like a biography of a saint. You know, it's a very flattering thing. Yeah, the myth around Chatfield - my family was like, oh, you know, civil war hero and whaler and he was a wonderful guy. But what emerges between the lines is, he was a success, because he was a brute. He was what they call the “bucko mate,” and even in his memoirs, he talks with great glee about like, you know, "Three of the crew deserted and I went to shore and took them all on with the belaying pin and thumped them."

Tye

That makes him more flesh and blood and believable. The hagiography - nobody believes that stuff anymore.

Churbuck

And gives he gives this whole shipwreck thing like, you know, four pages, but it's all about him. "I told him not to stay and I went back and got him."

Tye

Is his version in any of the stories?

Churbuck

Bethuel? I finally got in touch with some descendants and they sent me a four-page handwritten manuscript called *How I Met My Wife*. That's where I found out about John Thomas, and this is like, holy shit, like, totally different spin on things. The interesting thing is after this trauma of a shipwreck and slogging through the winter in Siberia - there had been a French sailor that had been eaten by a bear on the island they were wrecked on one month before they got there. They didn't know about the - but the Russian name of the island Medvezhyi Ostrov. Medvezhyi is Bear Island.

Odence

Place where people get eaten.

Churbuck

Right, but what was really fascinating was, one of the bestsellers of 1860 was written by a young man from New Bedford, who had been on a separate ship that was in the Sea of Okhotsk that same summer, had a brutal captain who beat this kid and just bullied him. So he deserted. And he ended up in the same Russian camp. And his father, not having heard from him, wrote letters to the state department, and there was just like, big hunt to find this kid. The kid wrote a book called *Arctic Rovings*, which is all about his experiences, and there's a Captain Handy, who he said, "Okay, well, come be my roommate, they gave me a shack and you can stay with me." And he was like, "Ok."

Tye

Great, so you're getting different angles on the person.

Churbuck

Exactly. It began to triangulate and flush it out. But Chatfield, when they got to San Francisco, after the rescue, Chatfield left, said, "I'm done." He sold the ship to the Folger brothers, Folger coffee from Nantucket. They had set up a trading company in San Francisco. The final captain of the *Massachusetts* was Bethuel Handy. He jumped right back on and went right back to the Sea of Okhotsk and had a successful voyage. So Chatfield comes back to the Cape, gives up whaling, works as officer in the merchant marine, on a path back and forth to England and New York. And then a civil war breaks out. And he enlists as what they called an acting master, who was a sort of a civilian commission, and the way the US Navy worked back then was the Annapolis graduates, they didn't know how to sail as well as these old salty guys, so they would have a - you get it, the master commander thing, the guy who actually does the navigation and, you know, tends to the ship is a professional captain, but the officers are the gunnery people and the like. So Chatfield enlists and is accepted, goes to New York and is put aboard as an officer on a Staten Island ferry that had just been built - one of the first steam ferries and is assigned to the blockade in Key West. And while he's in Key West, I think within a month of arrival, they intercept a British ship trying to sneak around Key West between Cuba and on his way back to England and they boarded and find Confederate support, ambassadors going off to try to convince the Queen Victoria to come in on their side. And actually, the seizure of that ship made it to the Supreme Court.

Odence

Is that the Trent affair?

Churbuck

No, similar to but this was a ship called the *Circassian*. It was the last cash prize money ever awarded the US Navy, so the *Circassian* is what bought my house. As a picture of it, and I always wondered.

Tye

So he gets prize money for having this big interceptive Confederates on the way and then the Navy gives him cash?

Churbuck

Government takes half and the crew and officers split the other half.

Odence

Which was the old system and everybody gets a fair share. You know?

Tye

I'm intrigued with all - so did he not make a lot of money?

Churbuck

I think he had money whaling.

Tye

So he had money. And then this was just on top?

Odence

I did. I sort of did the economic equivalency and a whaling captain in sort of the heyday of the 1840s and 50s could expect to make a million in today's money for three years of work.

Tye

So he already had money and this was just more money.

Churbuck

Right. That was sort of a windfall.

Odence

But he probably got expenses out of that too, right.

Churbuck

Yeah. So he has this kind of interesting experience during the Civil War of being given a command of a small schooner and told to just sail up and down the coast from the Everglades up to Tallahassee, breaking up salt works and freeing the slaves, and the Navy realizes that he's a really good pilot in shallow water because of his experience in Cotuit. And when they have this huge action in St. Mark's - was the last battle of the Civil War, they use Chatfield as the pilot to get all the ships in, but he had like a fairly benign experience in the Civil War. He captured Tampa. Tampa surrendered to Thomas Chatfield. Reluctantly, he was like, "I want nothing to do with this place," and left. But Bethuel, meanwhile, gets back from his sort of voyage of redemption. Also enlisted in the Navy and is assigned to a gunship called the *Wissahickon*, an unidyllic-class gunship that's got steam engines, but it's rigged for Bluewater naval warfare and is assigned to the Admiral Farragut Squadron and the Battle for New Orleans. And so, crosses the forts on the Mississippi under the barrage and somewhere after New Orleans, during the siege of Vicksburg, something happened to Bethuel. Something definitely happened to his ship because it was so damaged that Farragut pulled it from action and sent it back to Philadelphia to get repaired and, when it got to the Philadelphia Naval Yard, Handy, awaiting orders, leaves the ship and goes to a church, and misses his orders to get on his next ship, which was fortuitous that he did, because that ship was wrecked in a hurricane - lost all hands in the Bahamas. When he gets back, they said, "Where the hell were you? You missed your ship." And he said, "I made a promise to God on the Mississippi. The first thing I was gonna do was go get baptized." And I found the letters in Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy. He directly corresponded - Gideon Welles was the one who wrote the letter to him saying, "Where the hell were you? I am now busting you from acting master to ensign and Handy made his case and said, "I was answering a higher authority than you sir. Sorry, I made this promise to God."

Tye

And it worked?

Churbuck

No. And so they bust him and he resigns.

Tye

These are wonderful competing antagonists in your story. One seems to have this sense of timing that he gets out of Siberia and the other one has -

Churbuck

Chatfield was just a really good opportunist. I mean, you could tell he was like politicking for himself. He becomes friendly with the Admiral in Key West, who introduces him to the Masons. And that's why Chatfield came back here and started the Mariners Lodge.

Tye

Wow.

Odence

In your house.

Churbuck

Yeah, in my cell loft.

Tye

His brother-in-law seems like just the opposite of that and it's so interesting.

Churbuck

Yeah.

Tye

He listens to God and it seems like a more authentic -

Churbuck

The sad part is, I think the disgrace or shame of being sort of reduced in rank -

Tye

Did him in?

Churbuck

He never came back to Cotuit except to come for a funeral.

Odence

His wife was here?

Churbuck

Well no, his wife during the war was with her parents on the Hudson. And they moved to Passaic, New Jersey.

Tye

Because of the shame? This is all the shame?

Churbuck

I have to infer. I have to infer that there was a reason why he didn't stay now. Part of it is, before the Russia wreck, after he had set sail from Nantucket, his father died of cholera on a schooner in Albany and he had been his father's crew on the schooners before he started whaling. When he got back, Mary Nickerson Handy, his mom, had sold Handys point and moved into the current house across the library, because she was sick of trying to get across the marsh in the winter and felt completely isolated out there, because mail and post office and the grocery store were -

Odence

So the current house is more or less across the street from the library and that's where David lives.

Tye

This is the house in front of your house.

Odence

No, one down.

Tye

One down. One big white house?

Odence

Yeah, that's where David lives. That was 1860.

Churbuck

1860 is when they did the move. When Chatfield came back from the war, he went to the old house at Handys point and surprised the new occupants, who were like, "Not your house, dude. You're downtown now." And I think that really was the final straw for Bethuel, to lose his birthright.

Odence

We got the house from the child's family that was - my house is the child's family, and they also bought that property and had another house there and sold it to the Chatfields.

Tye

But imagine what he must have, physically and psychologically, have gone through.

Churbuck

In a span of like three years, from a shipwreck, another whaling voyage, and then the trauma of what sounds like a really bad situation. In reading other accounts from Naval officers that were on the Mississippi under Farragut, you were expected to stand on deck and not hide behind anything. You had to set an example and so you stood and you're under the bluffs of Vicksburg and just taking full fire the entire time.

Tye

And I also love the religious, I mean, hearing the voice of God telling you that you got to do that and so did that house stay in the family? This is generations ago, that stayed in the family either full time or summerhouse or the –

Churbuck

Yep, it stayed. It was a full-time house up until 1955?

Tye

And you're born in?

Churbuck

Boston, in '58.

Tye

And you go? You were in Melrose?

Churbuck

Yep, that's where my grandparents were living when I was very young. My grandfather had been a boat builder in the house here and he invented those split sticks they use in libraries to hang newspapers on racks and decided that he wanted to - well one, I think it was a real important step up socially for people not to be here. Like this place was a really hard place in the winter.

Odence

But in between, the Chatfield established in that house.

Churbuck

Chatfield's here, established in -

Odence

Had some daughters?

Churbuck

And Chatfield becomes a coastal schooner owner. And does that for basically the next 30 years, just continues to sail.

Odence

And he had all daughters?

Churbuck

Only daughters – five daughters, no sons. Started the Masons.

Tye

What was his mission starting the Masons?

Churbuck

Again, I think it was social, but all the early Masons in Cotuit were all captains. They're all like Bluewater captains.

Odence

Ergo, America's waters.

Churbuck

Not schooner captains, but guys who had been to China or had been the Pacific. And it was sort of like a little shadow government. I mean, they conned the church. There were two competing parishes in town. There were the Methodists and the Congregationalists, and so these old captains said, “You know, you guys should really think about federate, you know, and combining your two congregations and we'll take that church off your ass.” So that's how they got the church.

Tye

The Masons have always been to me, this incredible, mysterious secret world, and some people say the Masons ran the country, at least parts of it where they were strong.

Churbuck

I think I think one could argue that the Mariners Lodge in Cotuit ran Cotuit for the latter part of the 19th century.

Tye

Wow, because these are all the powerful people there?

Churbuck

Yeah, I mean, if there was legislation on Beacon Hill that had something to do with like cutting the Wianno cut through Dead Neck, it’d be rolling to Nickerson and Thomas Chatfield and Ulysses Hole, go up to Boston and there'd be a little thing on *The Barnstable Patriot* and then -

Odence

As I recall, some of them weren't overtly on village committees and stuff. It wasn't all -

Churbuck

Well, they ran the school. The captains all ran the school. They basically set, that was the closest thing to a town or village government. When it was town meeting time, it's fascinating to look at the town meeting coverage. You know, it's one Captain after another. That was back then. I mean, that was the highest cred that you can carry on the care.

Odence

So one of the daughters then married a Churbuck.

Churbuck

His youngest daughter married Alton Clifford Churbuck, from Bridgewater, Massachusetts, who was a teacher in the Cotuit school and went on to be the principal of the Chinatown High School in Boston. They only had one child, my grandfather, who learned how to sail from Thomas Chatfield. But Alton Churbuck died in a car crash when my grandfather was 10 years old. And he moved here full-time in the 20s and stayed here through the 50s. He passed away, young – 65, I think in the 60s.

Odence

Chatfield?

Churbuck

No, Henry Churbuck, my grandfather. Chatfield died in 1922.

Odence

No, no, Henry Churbuck? Henry Chatfield Churbuck.

Churbuck

Right, Thomas Chatfield, who had no middle name, he died in 1922, like the age 93.

Odence

So Henry Chatfield becomes a boat builder?

Churbuck

Yeah, well, I mean, it was the Depression. He really was struggling and the building of Camp Edwards was a big opportunity and he somehow got a job there. On the first day, he was like sitting on a roof and had no clue what he was doing. This guy turns to him and he says, "You have no idea what you're doing, do you?". And he said, "No, you know, but I need the job." And that was Bucky Botello.

Odence

Oh really?

Churbuck

Botello's lumberyard.

Tye

So your grandfather, after doing the Chinatown deal in Boston, comes back here to -

Churbuck

That's his dad.

Tye

Great-grandfather?

Churbuck

Yeah.

Tye

And your grandfather, what does your grandfather do?

Churbuck

Grandfather - he's raised, you know, in Cotuit in the summers and lives up in Melrose in the winter. And then goes to like one year of college in Boston. I think got my grandmother pregnant while he was selling greeting cards. He was a traveling salesman, because she was from the Berkshires, from Adams. Her father was a chemist in the textile mills there.

Odence

What was Nellie's maiden name?

Churbuck

Schmidt. Yep. And that changed to Smith in World War One because anti-German stuff.

Odence

She had sort of a Germanic -

Churbuck

Oh, she was very Prussian. And they moved into the house in the late 20s, early 30s.

Tye

So he goes as a traveling salesman to Western Mass, knocks on her door gets her pregnant, and then they get married?

Churbuck

Her father, the chemist, had started a photo photography studio and had a little shop where you could go get your picture taken and so he was selling greeting cards. And I think she was working behind the counter.

Tye

Oh, geez.

Churbuck

No, it was definitely a shotgun wedding. It was absolutely a shotgun wedding. There's no question in my mind, although they never would have said that. We tried to do this type of thing with my grandmother and the other old-timers and they always leave out the juicy details. They always do. The best of history always goes to the grave.

Tye

So how did you find this out?

Churbuck

Oh, you find an uncle or someone will have a couple gin and tonics.

Tye

So they come?

Churbuck

(Phone ring) Sorry, let me kill this. Oh, it's my mom. There was a death in the family last night, so.

Tye

Oh sorry.

Churbuck

Just turn this off - there we go.

Tye

They're in Melrose, but come here?

Churbuck

Come here.

Tye

What does he do here?

Churbuck

He starts off as a carpenter at Camp Edwards. Gets into woodworking and sets up a little woodworking shop under his grandfather's sail loft here in Cotuit and builds instrument cases for the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. The Navy needed to put glass meteorological instruments into boxes that could be thrown against a brick wall from like 20 feet away. That was the spec. And he really got into like woodworking and that sort of sustained him through the war. He was fore-and-aft during World War Two because of rheumatic fever as a child. I guess German measles, rubella back then if you had it, trashed your heart valves. So he was ineligible to fight and after the war started building Cotuit skiffs and I think he built about 8 or 10.

Odence

Sounds about right.

Churbuck

And then as soon as they could, in the mid-50s, moved up to Melrose and that's when he started his company making school furniture.

Tye

He's not the same one who did the library holders for the newspapers?

Churbuck

Yes.

Tye

And did he patent those?

Churbuck

No, he didn't patent them, but he may have copied them. That was his mainstay.

Tye

Because I think those are brilliant things.

Churbuck

Yeah, but it was very cool though throughout my like youth, in any classroom that had wooden furniture, to get my hands and knees and look underneath and see his name under there.

Odence

As a kid, I always found the boat shop intriguing. Talk about your memories of that and what's there today and what you've discovered.

Churbuck

Yeah, that's kind of fascinating because -

Tye

Boat shop did you say?

Odence

Yeah, so if you go to the Churbuck house - most houses, there's a clear distinction between inside and outside. The Churbuck house sort of fades it from inside to outside, the back end of which is this kind of open boat shop at the back.

Churbuck

It was a remarkable house as a kid, because it really was in the same condition that it probably was in 1910. The wiring was obviously, like the you know, there was still chamber pots in all of the rooms and the bookshelves had old pulp novels.

Odence

Well, you're living room still looks like something out of Victorian times?

Churbuck

Yeah, I mean, it was like living in a museum but it just was normal. My first memory of the place, one summer was - my father was working in Texas. We lived there and drove all the way back. And I was having breakfast the first morning in the kitchen. And they had a cook, who hated children. Didn't like children in her kitchen. And I was just sitting at this table terrified, eating pancakes and I remember looking up and, all of a sudden, on the shelf, this cat came through this flap in the side of the wall. They had built a ramp up the side of the house that the cat could come in, pop through this red rubber flap, and then a shelf, and the shelf was right up by the ceiling, so high that the cat would never dare jump into the house.

Tye

This was their cat? It was not a stray cat?

Churbuck

It was Willie. And Willie lived at the Herring when the Herring weren't in and then would come back and hang around the house. And that to me was like the most amazing, mind-blowing memory I could have imagined, like a cat just came through the wall.

Tye

What did your parents do?

Churbuck

My dad? Again, he was born on the Cape. Raised here, went to college. No, during the Korean War, got drafted but didn't go to Korea, because of our relative Congressman Charles Gifford. Remember Bethuel Gifford Handy? Well Charles Gifford, the Congressman, just lived down the lane and so my father ended up running a ski lift at an officer's club at Berchtesgaden in Hitler's old hangouts in the Bavarian Alps during the early 50s. Then he came back, got thrown out of Worcester Polytech by blowing up a chemistry lab. He was a pyromaniac. Went to BU, got expelled from BU. He got into this great scam. He would take the truck, the Maplewood products truck, cover the logo with a tarp, get a jumpsuit with a couple of buddies, his fraternity brothers at BU, and with a clipboard, would walk into like the Parker house or the Ritz Carlton and tell the concierge that they were there to pick up the furniture for steam cleaning and they would clear up the lobby of these hotels and furnish the frats at the BU with hotel furniture. That backfired on them and one of his friends said, “Hey, I’m taking the GMAT or whatever the entrance exams for business school tomorrow,” and they were drinking. My father said, "oh yeah, you better go to bed," and decided the next morning to go take it. Aced it and got into Harvard Business School.

Tye

Without having graduated from college?

Churbuck

Yeah. Without having his degree. On the strength of his essay, I remember reading his application and his application was about how one summer, his mom and dad took their first vacation to Europe and left him in charge of the factory. And he tells this story of, you know, I ran the factory for three months and realized I don't know how to run a business and I wanted to come to your school and learn how to run a business. He was very smart guy - engineer, mathematician-type and went to work right out of Harvard Business School at Honeywell, and then ended up at Arthur Andersen, where he developed the first project management program for mainframes to estimate the construction of offshore oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico. That's why we lived in Texas. And his career was like taking off, I mean, he was just this like wunderkind and my grandfather, I remember one Christmas, came down to Houston and told him, "I'm gonna die." His heart was failing. "If you come back and take over the family business, I'll buy you a Wianno senior." So he bought him a boat and so we moved back and that was sort of beginning of my introduction to Cotuit.

Tye

And he ran successfully the business, kept it going?

Churbuck

He did. He expanded it and he bought a huge mill up on the Merrimack River at Amesbury. Merrimack at Company. Was like a half mile of brick and he continued to do that. He died young though. In a car accident. Age of 46.

Tye

So when he was in Amesbury, was that what got you to Lawrence?

Churbuck

Yeah, good point. So we lived up on the north shore when we moved back from Texas, first in a town called Georgetown.

Tye

And I grew up at Haverhill.

Churbuck

Yeah, and so we were in Georgetown, the factory then had moved from Wakefield to Peabody and then he moved it to the Merrimack tech company in Amesbury, right by the Lowell boat shop, and we moved to Andover. That was where we were.

Tye

That's where you grew up? Andover?

Churbuck

Yeah.

Tye

So half my family ended up going from Haverhill over to Andover and I know Andover very well and - did you ever go to a dermatologist when you were growing up? So, it would have been my father if you had gone to one, but when did you get into newspapers?

Churbuck

So I went to prep school in North Andover at Brooks.

Tye

My brother was at Brooks and probably -

Churbuck

Before me. The name was familiar.

Tye

Yes, so go on, so you went to Brooks and then?

Churbuck

Yeah, *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune* had this section in the Sunday paper where they would use high school correspondents, and they went around and asked all the local high schools, “Do you have someone who wants to write a little story every week?” And so I got the job from Brooks. After I got married and needed to get a real job, Phillip and I were bartending together out in San Francisco. When I came east, I got a job at *The Tribune*, covering Salem, New Hampshire for starters.

Tye

What years was this?

Churbuck

That would have been '82.

Tye

Was Brian Lee there?

Churbuck

Yeah, yep. Guy named Bill Campwell. We used to call him “Bill Can't Write Well.”

Tye

It was a good newspaper.

Churbuck

It was a great paper and there was a guy named Barney something. He was the Haverhill guy.

Tye

So Barney did Haverhill forever. I think originally for the *Haverhill Gazette*.

Churbuck

Yes, he was like an old timer that came in after going to the Gazette. Yeah. That was a big battle between *The Tribune* and *The Gazette*, and with *The Little Sun*.

Tye

As you know, *The Gazette* and *The Tribune* now covers Haverhill, or tries to.

Churbuck

Right, and it's edited out of Alabama.

Tye

Exactly. So you spent your life in newspapers?

Churbuck

No, at *The Tribune*, I became their Statehouse Bureau Chief and I realized after the '84 presidential election, the great thing about being the Statehouse guy at *The Tribune* was the New Hampshire primary. Because it was such an important paper for the candidates. I mean, I'm like riding around on the back of a limo with George McGovern or Jesse Jackson, like holy shit, this is the big time. But as soon as the circus left town, I was like, "I'm not into sitting in the press gallery at the Beacon Hill and listening to the legislators do nothing." So a buddy of mine at *Eagle Tribune* had gone to work as a flack at WANE. And he said, "Dude, you gotta get into this PC thing. There's this new newspaper called *PC Week* starting up in Boston." And so, I was so desperate to get out of the Statehouse press gallery, interviewed, and then got a job there, became the news editor there, developed an ulcer, and in '88 got a call from *Forbes* and they said, "We're starting a computer section. This is where the money is."

Tye

And you're doing all this with Cotuit as a summer thing.

Churbuck

Yeah, as a summer thing.

Odence

Your grandmother was still?

Churbuck

Grandmother passed away in '91 and at that point, I'm the eldest of three siblings and my brothers and sisters and I sat down. The younger ones were like, "We need a first home, not a second home." And so I bought out two shares and my little brother and I now co-own the house.

Odence

I want to get back to the workshop, to the boat shop.

Churbuck

So the boat shop. Yeah, the part about growing up in a museum was, as a kid, this boat shop was frozen in time from when they were building Cotuit skiffs. I mean, all of the templates and the patterns and the jigs, even the floor has the plans painted on it. You can still see.

Odence

Like, full-scale?

Churbuck

Full-scale.

Odence

That's amazing.

Churbuck

But then upstairs, on these folding staircase with this huge trap door, was the sail loft, this big room with a flat floor and a bench. What Chatfield did after, when he got into later on in life and he didn't sail anymore and he became a sailmaker and a rigger. He'd service the coastal schooners that would go back and forth before the canal, I mean, Cotuit was a fairly major stop for the schooner fleets. On a good day, 300 to 400 schooners would pass by Cotuit in either direction.

Odence

Wow.

Churbuck

They were the semi-trucks of the day. Until the canal, they all had to go past Cotuit. Vineyard Haven - its major purpose was a place to wait for the right time because they had to time it perfect to get around Monomoy. So Chatfield had a nice little business and I mean we still have these fids which are these pointed rods that used to break strands of rope apart to splice them.

Odence

And some of this rope was big cable.

Churbuck

Well, a marlin spike, which is a fid, is like that long. These are fids that are this big.

Odence

Sure, 6 inches and now you're spreading your arms the full width. Amazing.

Churbuck

So he was like a rigger and doing I think a nice little business out of there.

Tye

Because all these boats are passing by and they would stop when they needed something done with their sails, wow.

Churbuck

Exactly. Well, Cotuit was a pretty good anchorage. Not inside of the harbor. They anchored outside in place called Deep Pole right in front of Dead Neck, and it was just easy enough to row out what they needed. I think that's why Chatfield liked being a schooner captain. All of the families in Cotuit - the way they worked, that there was no insurance for these schooners. And what they would do is, they would build a new schooner and then sell shares so the master sailor owner would take four shares and sell the other eight shares to family members and neighbors and it acted as sort of a de facto licensing. It was like going to Mass America. You couldn't sell your shares in your boat unless the other captains trusted you.

Odence

And it was spreading the risk too.

Churbuck

Yeah it did, it spread the risk and because they lost these ships all the time.

Odence

So, somebody who hasn't made your share on one ship was going to have little pieces of other property.

Churbuck

Right, he was diversified. And the Cotuit guys were really interesting. They were so hardcore from the whaling experience that they took the - there were two cargoes no one wanted to touch. One was quicklime, because it would ignite if it gets wet. But the other was granite.

Odence

Well, what are the chances of it getting wet?

Churbuck

Haha, the easiest was lumber, because you can't sink a ship full of wood. But granite, all of the Cotuit guys went to Harpswell, Maine to this one quarry, which is now where Outward Bound was born, Hurricane Island. Yeah, the quarry is there and Harpswell is where all the Cotuit guys would come. The reason granite was so lucrative was: one, they had to haul it from Maine, around the Cape, and up the Hudson, where it was transshipped on the Erie Canal into the Great Lakes and so it was used for to build Chicago and Cleveland. But it beat boats to death, caused the boats to spavin and just leak. And so the letters that -

Odence

Not to mention, you go down pretty quick.

Churbuck

You go instantly. And Chatfield, he lost one - the *Thomas Eaton*. I remember that vanished, never to be seen. And interesting, Bethuel, after he left Cotuit, for a time he was in Leadville, Colorado. He got a real prospector thing going and so he tried mining again. But then, in 1896, he shows up again on the Cape after colliding with another schooner off Monomoy, sinking. No one dies. He gets rescued. I found the transcript of the trial, an inquiry where he was again disgraced and bound by the judge to be untrustworthy, perhaps inebriated at the time.

Tye

What is his ultimate fate?

Churbuck

Dies in 1904, Passaic, New Jersey, never to be seen again. *The Barnstable Patriot* is fascinating because it was such a big deal to leave the Cape. Even to go to Boston was, you'd get an inch like, you know, “Thomas Chatfield went to Boston.” Or “so and so was visiting from Cleveland to see his uncle.” And there's three mentions of Bethuel Handy coming back and all around funerals. So, no Handys are left.

Tye

Is he a big character in your book?

Churbuck

Yeah, I mean, I really set out to just why - there's really only one place I can think of in the harbor that's named after a native Cotuit family. All the rest of names are after summer people. Lowell, Point, Codmick. There’s Handy Point. There's no Handys in Cotuit. First corpse in the cemetery is Azuba Handy, but there are no descendants. Why did he leave his birthplace and why did this interloper come in and get canonized as the old soul?

Odence

You and I were talking about street names when we were walking over here. And I didn't mention that Sea Street was Handy Street.

Churbuck

Not anymore?

Tye

Sea Street was called Handy Street?

Churbuck

Yeah, but not after him.

Odence

So it must have been. So there were Handys who?

Churbuck

There was a lot of Handys.

Odence

There was a Handy store. And the Austen's house now was the Daniel Nickerson house but there were Handys in there. And I think in my grandparents', there were Handys in that house for a while.

Tye

Is the area behind your house that was - how did you describe it?

Churbuck

The boat yard?

Tye

Is it still there?

Churbuck

Yeah, come over and see it.

Tye

By the way, it's Barney Gallagher, the *Haverhill Gazette* guy.

Churbuck

That's it. Barney Gallagher.

Tye

He had something called “The Street Light” or “The Street Lamp.” He had a column that was the Haverhill column and it was how Lawrence covered it. So, you're coming a full circle with this and you end up back here and you end up back here pulling together all the roots of the family story. This is going to be a great book and are you really working out with the publisher now and doing?

Churbuck

I'm trying to get a new agent, a guy named Stuart Krichevsky is the guy I want, because he did In *The Heart of the Sea* for Nathaniel Philbrick and he did *Perfect Storm* for Sebastian Junger.

Tye

So you want someone who gets the?

Churbuck

He's the maritime guy.

Tye

My only recommendation, find the agent. If it's not this guy, find somebody soon and have them help you decide what story you're trying to sell here, because you've got a dozen great stories to tell here.

Churbuck

What I did on first draft is, I wrote it in the most rigorous, footnoted, bibliography, dry version possible just because I wanted to make sure that I got the details correct and knew where the holes were. And then I struggled on the rewrite and wasn't quite sure who my protagonist was.

Tye

That's where a good agent will help you figure out. It will do two things. It gives the agent buy-in because they think they're part of shaping it and a great agent will be part of shaping it. So somebody said something wise to me recently when I was looking at a potential topic for a next book and they said when you think of - I don't know if you’ve seen the movie called *Schindler's List*, Steven Spielberg movie -

Churbuck

Of course

Tye

They said, “When you come away from that, you only remember one person's story, a lot of people's stories are woven through that.” You want to decide who your - I think you've got actually two protagonists here because it's such an interesting contrasting story. Handy and what's his name?

Churbuck

Chatfield.

Tye

Chatfield. And the two protagonists only work if there's tension between them and it seems like there was extraordinary tension.

Churbuck

It was, but it's invisible.

Tye

No, but you can make it –

Churbuck

Only actually when he says, “how I met my wife,” does he begin to even verge on showing any emotion.

Tye

No, that's even more interesting. You're making the invisible visible with it and bringing out the - and the idea that he never, that one of them, who has more natural rights to Cotuit into this whole thing ends up being -

Odence

Yeah, that's interesting irony.

Tye

Yeah, he's in Passaic, New Jersey, and Leadville, Colorado, and whatever. He's clearly exiled from here or feels he’s got - he exiled himself.

Churbuck

I think I think he was the last of the mariners of Cotuit and I think the quick conversion to a summer resort after the Civil War, he couldn't stomach it.

Tye

So but he sounds like a character with more integrity. The other guy seems like he's an operator and this guy seems like he's got -

Churbuck

If you look at their portraits, one looks like the kind of guy that will get drunk and kick the shit out of you, and the other one looks like a really nice guy.

Odence

And now you're going to identify which is which.

Tye

I presume Handy is the nice guy.

Churbuck

Yeah, he's just got this really friendly-looking like, you know, nice face.

Tye

Yes, the nice guy doesn't make it. The other guy -

Churbuck

But Chatfield, I mean, he's posing for his picture and -

Odence

He's really stout, right?

Churbuck

He's stout, little squat and holds his fists like he's pissed off.

Tye

But that's great, you've just described your narrative here and the whole thing. But this is also, I think appropriate for this tape because this is a big piece of Cotuit heritage. These guys matter here.

Churbuck

It's been a great experience to just start to see the different connections to different families in town, a lot of whom have vanished but were still here when I was a kid. You know, the Burlingames and the Burses, the Coons and the Fishes and the Cashes and the Giffords. They're all gone.

Odence

Yeah.

Churbuck

But in the 60s, early 60s, you know, my grandmother would say like, "There is your third uncle, twice-removed." And I remember with Bob Bowden, one day down by the yacht club, we were like talking about the connection through Aaron Nickerson, Horace Nickerson in Clara Bowden's book, *The Cudderword Ship*, and Dale Edmonds is sort of eavesdropping, and he goes - Bob's doing the like well, "I think we're fifth cousins." And Dale goes, "You guys are fucking hillbillies." And we started talking about it. And we were like, "Yeah, you're right, in one way or another." But that was the other interesting thing, is everyone in the middle of the 19th century that lived in Cotuit, it was like some gene pool thing. You did not marry locally. Like if it was an outsider, like a guy named John Thomas who arrives on the boat. That's a candidate, you know, and as soon as Bethuel Handy gets off of the Cape and goes to the Hudson -

Tye

Why?

Churbuck

Why? Because I think that they wanted to diversify. I think it might have been just biological.

Tye

They thought that they should have a diverse pool?

Churbuck

"I don't want to marry. You know, I know her family or I've seen her my entire life. And ehh."

Odence

I remember getting to high school in a town with a bunch of separate elementary schools and we were a lot more interested in the girls from the other elementary schools.

Tye

So it's just the natural instinct that the outsider looks interesting and you know well it's -

Churbuck

Well, I don't think we can even comprehend the isolation that was here before the Civil War.

Odence

Yeah, so the population is like 600.

Churbuck

Yeah. I mean, the description of going to see - you know, Bethuel talking about going to go see his grandfather and having to open 12 gates on Main Street, because that there was no street. You had to go through everyone's backyard and

Odence

The cows didn't want to cross the street.

Tye

Was it considered in those days - so they have property near the water. Was that considered a choice piece of property or was it sort of dangerous?

Churbuck

Low rent. Buggy, it stinks.

Odence

And the captains got to see enough water.

Churbuck

There was that, but also, you know, the oystermen and stuff - that was kind of like the last resort, you know, and the idea of a shack on the beach? You know, I can look at Handy’s point now and go like "Oh shit, why'd they sell that place?" But it's next to a marsh. It had to have been buggy. And it was a working shipyard, so it was loud and nasty.

Odence

Yeah, it just wasn't as attractive. The captains lived on Main Street.

Churbuck

Yeah, and there was definitely a class distinction, even among the captains. The ones that did the China trade were at the top and then below that were the merchant guys. And below that were the whaling guys and then there were the fishermen.

Tye

Because it was more lucrative to the China trade or was it just where you had to be more of a good sailor to make it all the way to China?

Churbuck

You'd have to be a good sailor. I mean, the impact of the Gold Rush on the supply of sailors was so extreme that Samuel Hooper, this merchant prince of Boston, is so desperate to find a captain, he comes all the way to Cotuit on a rumor and buys the Dannhauser house.

Tye

Right, because the other ones are dreaming of glory.

Churbuck

They're all gone. Oh yeah. The impact of the Gold Rush on Massachusetts towns was just amazing idea.

Tye

I had no idea that there was a kind impact.

Churbuck

Oh we're talking - entire boards of select men would resign.

Tye

To just go out?

Churbuck

Take off. Ministers, doctors, and they all created these companies. They were called the Argonauts, but the Cotuit company - that in itself was a fascinating story. I mean, Rhetire Sturgis and his embezzlement and all the rest. But, you know, the big fanfare when that little schooner took off for California.

Tye

And did any of them make?

Churbuck

No one made money. No one. The ones who made the money -

Odence

Levi’s made money.

Churbuck

No the Folgers, yeah, they showed up, ditched their whaling ship but they didn't go to the -

Odence

No, yeah I get it. It was more of the service business that built up around the Gold Rush than the actual run and some of the Gold Rushers obviously did.

Tye

Is that where the Levi's got their start? It was Gold Rush-related?

Odence

Making pants for the Gold Rushers.

Churbuck

Sure, I dated a girl in college, Kitty Ames. Ames plow. And they were the shovel kings of the Gold Rush. But yeah, all of the big Nantucket fortunes, you know, Hallens and Coffins and Folgers and Macys - all made their money in the Gold Rush, not digging gold.

Odence

Yeah, right. So we're probably pushing our time on this thing.

Tye

Right, so most of the people we interview are not great storytellers. They have nice stories.

Churbuck

Well, I didn't even get into my memories. I mean, has anyone talked about the hippies in the park?

Odence

No, that's a good one, so let's take a few more minutes to do your memories.

Tye

So, this is an appropriate thing to be discussing in the, what was the groovy room?

Churbuck

Yeah.

Tye

A long time ago. I think yeah, tell us about the hippies in the park.

Odence

We call them the park hippies.

Churbuck

Well, I'm fascinated and have you talked to Betsy Meyer Siggins?

Odence

Yeah.

Churbuck

Okay. So you got the music thing?

Tye

A little bit of the music thing and the -

Odence

But we didn't talk about the park. I call them “the park boys,” yeah.

Churbuck

So the park got completely infested with hippies for three, four years. Yeah. And they're leaving and -

Odence

I don’t know, I didn't go in.

Churbuck

Well, I had to because I lived there.

Tye

Locals or people came from?

Churbuck

Everywhere. It was like a magnet. So George Jung, who was played by Johnny Depp in that movie about the cocaine smuggler from Weymouth. Yeah, George Jung did all of his drug deals on the payphone right by the Cavaliers sign at the end of a school street on Main.

Tye

Why? What was the attraction?

Churbuck

Hi buddy was Michael Mayne. And Michael Mayne, the Maynes lived - Mr. Mayne was a scientist I think at Woods Hole and they're still - one of them, Jimmy Brave, Freeheart?

Odence

Freeheart.

Churbuck

Jimmy Freeheart is a Mayne. Michael Mayne took a chainsaw to the garage door at the Yarmouth state police barracks and walked off with 40 bales of marijuana, which I covered as my first story as an intern at *The Cape Cod Times* when they did the bust over McCoy Bay and he had talked to another state policeman, a corrupt cop, to help him get this pot up to Providence where they sold it to Raymond Patriarca. But they found out that it had gotten soaked in salt water and it rotted. And so Michael Maune was sort of the king of the park and - (someone enters room and greets the crew). Yeah, I'm fascinated about that whole park story. I think that the story of Michael Mayne is just fascinating,

Tye

But I'm confused. What brought them. Why?

Churbuck

Michael lived here. There was a bunch of Maynes here in town and it's "M-a-y-n-e" and he was sort of the draw, but it turned into like a pretty much a full, 24-hour-a-day commune.

Odence

And my perception was, I just knew there were these guys that seemed odd. I wasn't comfortable walking through the park.

Churbuck

Oh, it was terrifying. My brother Tom would steal booze from my father's liquor cabinets, sell it in Dixie cups to the hippies.

Tye

And did somebody try to break it up or was it?

Churbuck

No, this is what's fascinating, is that the powers that be in Cotuit back then tolerated it. It was like, there are no like big drug-busts or no outcry and they just said -

Odence

Yeah, I never thought about it. As I say, it was just a thing. Just didn't feel comfortable going through the park. The other thing I was thinking about from our youth that I was going to bring up if we had time, and I guess we do, is I remember you and Tom being experts on the dirt roads and I couldn't find my way around.

Churbuck

Oh the fire lanes?

Odence

No, just the back roads that are now fully populated.

Churbuck

Yeah they were always called Fire Lanes.

Odence

They were sort of, off of Main Street and it was all dirt. There was no signs and you guys could find your way around and I felt like I was lost in the woods.

Tye

I'm confused, what part of Main Street?

Odence

You know, off of Crocker Neck and if you go back in Nickerson now and the -

Churbuck

Oh, there's one up in Russian Marsh.

Odence

Clam? What did they call it? You know, down towards -

Churbuck

Crocker Neck?

Odence

Towards Crocker Neck and all that. Clamshell Cove?

Odence

The coves. The coves area, Santuit road. There was nothing, I mean, Cotuit was pretty much Main Street and you know, little a school street sticking off it but anywhere else it was just dirt roads and you guys - so how did you guys know your way around so well?

Churbuck

There was a huge amount of paranoia about forest fires before. You and I were born into pre-subdivision of the Cape where there was nothing but scrub pine from here to the canal. And that is true in Cotuit. I mean, the coves, the first subdivision was that around Kellyville, the golf course, but there was so much paranoia about forest fire that the fire department had that big brush breaker. And I remember my grandfather was on the volunteer fire department, but they were terrified that the woods would go up. And so, they had these fire roads that they built through so they could get the brush breakers in there as it started. And so, my grandfather knew where all the roads were. And my father, when he was growing up here as a townie, that's where they would do all of their misbehavior. Down at Oregon at the Lloyds, there was this place called Beer Beach, which in those days was like going to like the other end of the planet. It was so remote.

Odence

And that's on the southern end of Poppanessa Bay?

Churbuck

Yeah.

Tye

So misbehavior was drinking?

Odence

Yeah, drinking, bonfires. I mean, Reed Higgins and my father, I mean, they used to light fires on the beaches, throw shotgun shells in it, and laugh, and then come home with buckshot in their legs. Reed, you got to get Reed to tell the story. There was a plane crash on Dead Neck during World War Two. It was a pilot in the Navy or something. And he landed, it was a bad landing. And my father and Reed rode over there to help the pilot, and the pilot was sort of groggy and trying to get out of the thing, and they stole the stick from the plane, which Reed has.

Odence

Wow.

Tye

Any rum-running stories?

Churbuck

Yes. Yes. So, Merrill Nickerson, this old timer, who got a little confused.

Odence

He's one of the recordings, by the way, talking about rum-runners.

Churbuck

Merrill, one day down at a town dock, when I was maybe 17 years old, mistook me for my grandfather. And asked me about the time that we went out and what do you call it? Snagging and bagging? And so, they would watch, and I think their move was, they had a boat, and they made it look like a Revenue Cutter or whatever the authorities were using, and they would spook the smugglers into ditching the bags into the water and go back and grab them. And that was like a big deal for the locals until what's his name got murdered. One of the Burse brothers. Charles Burse got a shotgun to Centerville when the mob found out. There was a speakeasy that Jim Gould in his dying days was obsessed with finding, somewhere up in the Old Post Road area, called Chalkies. And it was a real favorite of Beacon Hill. Politicians would come down here. There was a brothel. There was like the whole deal, you know, lost in the Pines somewhere.

Tye

When? In what year?

Churbuck

During Prohibition, during the 20s. And I think that same property, wherever this Chalkies speakeasy was what turned into Camp Candoit.

Tye

Did he ever find it?

Tye

No, he's pretty convinced that the reason that Camp Candoit got there was they wanted to basically eradicate any evidence that it had been there, and it had something with Foster Furcolo, the old governor. Yeah.

Odence

So good.

Tye

This has been great. I want to offer you -