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Benny Dottridge
Transcribed by Lane Sillin

Dottridge

A year ago, in operation, they put a balloon in there to try to hold it in place in the joint. And then we were working on putting the wooden hauler out here and I tripped over a piece of wood and I went down and landed on my elbows, and that thing caught. So the doctor says, the next thing, you gotta have it replaced. So Dr. Alfonso does the replacements. He's really good. So I just finished PT with that.

Tye

So the good news I'm going into Milton Hospital is that the, to me, part of the nightmare of all the surgeries was being in hospitals, it seemed like factories and the, Milton was at least more convenient and more human scale operations at the...

Tye

Can I take a minute, I just turned on the tape recorder. And let me take one minute and tell you who we are and what we're doing with this project.

Dottridge
Yep, sure.

Smith Dottridge
Before you start, any coffee?

Odenice
I'll—I'd go for a half, that would be great. Just black's fine.

Smith Dottridge
English muffins? Any water?

Odenice
Oh boy.

Smith Dottridge
Do you want water?

Tye
I'd love water. Thank you.

Smith Dottridge
Ice?

Tye
No ice, just plain Cotuit water would be great.

Dottridge
Tastes good, doesn't it?

Odenice
Yeah.

Tye
It does taste good.

Tye
So what we're doing—we about, just as the COVID was hitting, we interviewed, on his way out of town, Jim Gould. And Jim, partly just to see what he had to say about Cotuit history, because he's an interesting guy, and he didn't infect us with COVID, but he infected us with his obsession for Cotuit history. And so for the last two and a half, three years, thank you very much, we have been interviewing people in town, who go back, understand Cotuit history. And we're trying to understand partly how the village has changed. But my driving question in all of this is what makes Cotuit the best place to live in on the planet. And I think that it starts with a bias that this is an unusual and special place.

Odenice
Yeah, that's not a leading question at all.

Tye
Not at all leading. And Phil knows a lot more about the answer to it than I do, and my, my sense is that, from what I've heard about you and what your sisters say that you know more than any of us. And the—so we'd love to—and we'd love to have it be both of you, if you're game to do it. But before we even get started on any of that, could you just say your name

Odenice
Could you put it over by Benny?

Tye
So I'm going to put it over by—but I don't want to lose—so we'll just move it back and forth. And, and I'm going to put this right here and if you would just be kind enough to say your name and today's date, that would be...

Dottridge
I'm Bennett Dottridge and today is April 23rd, 2023.

Tye
Great. So we're sitting in Ben's home on Lake, and could you just start us off?

Dottridge

We live at—we live at 51 Lake Street.

Tye

In—tell us, when you—were you born here? What was the...

Dottridge

Yep, I was born and brought up in Cotuit. I lived across the street in the little cottage out back that's... faces Lewis Pond Road, but you got there from, from Lake Street. And then we moved to High Street, 88 High Street, which is right up on the end of the street.

Tye

In the house that your sister, one of your sisters is in now?

Dottridge

My sister lives in there now. My great grandfather lived there. And we lived with them until they passed away. And then I was brought up there. There were five of us children and my father went on a rescue call one night and he brought home two kids from the rescue call. Their father had died, and they stayed with us, and they stayed until they graduated from high school. Larry went to college and Helen, Helen got married and moved to Falmouth.

Tye

So you had what amounted to seven kids.

Dottridge

We had what amounted to seven kids. So there was always plenty of room at the table for somebody else to come and sit down and eat supper. Supper was at six o'clock. The table was set for six o'clock. My father worked for the forest fire department for 30 years, and he used to work ten to six. And as long as it wasn't raining out, during especially the spring and the summertime, he worked seven days a week. He didn't have days off unless it rained.

Tye

And you had—your sisters were explaining that you had, was it a radio system or something in the house that he was on call basically all the time?

Dottridge

Well, we had—in the beginning, we didn't, there was no radio, but they put a radio in there, I don't know when I was, I guess it was—the radio was in there for a long, long time. We used to answer the fire phone and blow the whistle from the house. My father got somebody that he knew that worked for the phone company and they ran up some wires between our house and the fire station. And so they set up crank telephones there. And when somebody came into the fire station, the first thing they were supposed to do is find out where the fire was and put it on the bulletin board. And they went to the crank phone and cranked the phone and then picked the receiver up. And then my mother would pick it up on the other end. And she'd tell him where the call was. And he'd write it on the board. And later on, I don't know, in the 60s sometime, they took the whistle off of the fire station and they moved—put one down

by the golf course and one up in Santuit by the water tower. At the fire station, they put a horn up there, an air horn. When they put the air horn up there, they had a box built and had two red boxes there, scrounged circles, and there was a lever on each one of them, and there was one that had a five on it and one had a two on it, and the two was for rescue calls and the five was for fires. So he just pulled that lever down and it would go through its cycle, it would blow the horn five times and then it blew it five more times, or two times and then two more times.

Odenice

Now I remember it going off at noon every day. Did somebody have to manually do that as well?

Dottridge

No, there was a timer at the fire station that used to go off every day at noon time.

Tye

Explain, just, I'm sorry to interrupt. But why would it go off every day? It was just to test it? Or...

Dottridge

They tested it every day at noon time.

Tye

So people knew that that was one they didn't have to pay attention to at noon time.

Dottridge

Yep. And they knew it was noon time.

Odenice

I always thought it was just so I'd know to go home for lunch.

Smith Dottridge

Our kids were told to get their legs off the street. So you hear that? Get off the road.

Dottridge

When I was when I was really young, I'm talking about in the probably early 50s, and even in the late 40s, they used, during the day they used to answer the fire phone down at the Kettle Ho. I don't remember what the name of the restaurant was down there then.

Odenice

Cracker Barrel?

Dottridge

Cracker Barrel and— ah yes, that's what it was. And they would answer the fire phone down there and they could blow the whistle from there.

Tye

Just let me ask you a totally dumb question, and irrelevant sort of, but the... what happened if there was a fire at noon, would anybody pay attention to it?

Dottridge

Oh, it would blow five times.

Tye

So they knew...

Dottridge

So they knew it was a fire.

Tye

Okay. And so everything now, between your house and your old house where your sister is now, is all of this Dottridge?

Dottridge

No, no. My grandfather lived at 23 Lake Street up here. And he was a carpenter. That's why it says Grandpa Dot's Shop on the garage. And my uncle lives here next door or lived next door here. He bought the land.

Odence

Is that Spike?

Smith Dottridge

Mhmm.

Dottridge

Spike. He bought half of this land from from Albert and Annie Smith. This was Carol's grandma and grandfather. They have an acre of land here and they split half and they gave him half. Now I want it back, but they won't give it to me. So when I was a kid, my aunt Marion lives over on Island Avenue, right straight over here at 50 Island Avenue. So when I was a kid, this road ended right out front out here. The tar ended and then it was just shells, and then it became a woods road real fast. And when it got down to where Highland Avenue that was a woods road, going both directions. There were houses at the top of the hill, but right where Marion Morris's house was out on the pond out there, that's where the hard top ended. And Lewis Pond Road was just a woods road. Well at least a road was a woods road, there was nothing up in there. It used to be the Santuit golf course way up in there where Kings Grant is, part of that.

Odence

And there was, and there was a, there was a diagonal road across the middle of this block, right?

Dottridge

There was a lot—there was a road that went up to my grandfather's driveway and came up around through and around the back here, and it went by this house out here, which was the Giffords house. And the big house wasn't there, and it went out the other side. It also split off out here and where, by Tom Hadley's garage and came around out at the fire station.

Odence
Oh, interesting.

Tye
But you've been here, your entire life you've been here year round.

Dottridge
I've been in Cotuit all my life. I've lived in five different houses on the same block.

Odence
And you as well?

Dottridge
With two wives.

Smith Dottridge
No, I grew up in Hyannis. Moved here 45 years ago.

Tye
So your entire life is...

Smith Dottridge
Yes.

Tye
How old?

Dottridge
I'm 78 years old

Tye
78 years old. So for 78 years, and how long you—I'm sorry to ask this, but, you've been the wife for how long?

Smith Dottridge
43 years.

Tye
43 years. So you've been here to

Dottridge
I've been in this house for 43 years.

Tye
You live here.

Smith Dottridge

Well, I I moved here when I moved back to the Cape.

Tye

You just say your name, maiden and married.

Smith Dottridge

I'm Carol Smith Dottridge. Benny and I are married. And this was my grandfather's house. My grandfather built this house. My father grew up here.

Tye

So was it coincidental that it was in the middle of the Dottridge plan here?

Smith Dottridge

The big house across the street, next door to Tom Hadley's house, next—across the street from the fire station, says Evan Smith on it. That's my great grandfather.

Odence

Okay. I was wondering...

Smith Dottridge

Which I didn't know until I started looking around. My brother did our genealogy, so we've got the genealogy on both sides.

Tye

You were born in Hyannis, but you've got roots in Cotuit as deep as the Dottridges.

Smith Dottridge

Yes, and Marstons Mills, my mother, my mother was a Hamblin from Marstons Mills.

Tye

Wow. And so, going back to your early days here, one of the things we're trying to understand is how the village changed, but also we're intrigued by—the fire department seems like a reflection of community. It's a central institution in the community and the...

Dottridge

The fire department was—everybody belongs, all the men belong to the fire department.

Tye

All the truly all the men in the village were volunteers at some point.

Dottridge

There were 40 members of the fire department.

Tye

Wow. All volunteer.

Dottridge

And it was all volunteer. Now, you didn't get 40 people for a fire. I mean, you might get 20 people, or during the day, you might get two.

Tye

Just one second on that 40. So 40 people are volunteers and they form the fire department, but your dad, who was a forest fire watcher was working as a paid full time person reporting elsewhere outside of Cotuit.

Dottridge

Correct.

Tye

Where was he working? Where was that?

Dottridge

He worked out of Osterville until he, in the 60s he became the forest warden. So he still worked out of Osterville. But...

Odenca

And is that the town of Barnstable?

Dottridge

Town of Barnstable forest warden, yes. So he didn't have to work seven days a week back then, but by that time, I'd already graduated from high school.

Tye

So, sorry to be dense about this, but the the forest warden's job is to look for any fire or fires just in forested areas?

Dottridge

There used to be a lot of forest fires. So there was—they formed the town of Barnstable forest fire department, and the forest fire department consisted of two men that went on a patrol truck, pickup truck, with a couple of hundred gallons, 250 gallons of water in it, and they patrolled around looking for fires. When, if the fire tower saw smoke, then they would give them the line, the magnetic line, they had maps in the fire towers, and they had maps on the roof of the fire truck that had compass settings on them, and he would blind the... he had a turret that went around on a table that had two ends on it, and he would line that up with the smoke and then look and see what the line was, see what... and he would call and say, I got a smoke on my line of 240, looks like over towards Santuit. So then the Sandwich fire tower would look too, and if he could find—he might, if he saw it, too, he might call and say I've got a line of two seven or 170. And so they'd take the 240 and the 170 and see where it crossed up. They had strings on a map. And he had strings, he had the same thing in his truck on the roof. And he would line that up and then he would see where it was so they'd know the area of where to go.

Tye

And then he'd go look for it and they'd go call...

Dottridge

And he'd go look for it.

Tye

Santuit people and go...

Dottridge

Well and they'd go look for it. And if they said it looked like a fire, then he'd tell them to you know, blow the Cotuit in. Wow. But there used to be a lot of forest fires back. There were some real big forest fires back in the 40s. '47 was a big year. Burned all the way from the canal to Prince Cove.

Tye

So the way you're describing it, on the one hand, it sounds like an ancient sort of jury rigged system. And on the other hand, it sounds brilliant that they really, this worked with just two guys looking. They could figure out where things were.

Dottridge

Yeah. And they had three brush breakers in the town of Barnstable, and the forest Warden was in charge of those brush breakers, and the county had three brush breakers.

Oden

What did a brush breaker do?

Dottridge

A brush breaker can drive through the woods and go after the fire. They've got bars on the front of it. Our brush breaker in Cotuit, Station 267. Very, very good brush breaker. And if there's a fire, they can drive through the woods and go after it. That's what they do, they try to pinch the fire off. They start and go down one side of it and then somebody else goes down the other side. And they try to pinch it—get it smaller and smaller until they get to the head of it and knock it off.

Tye

And are there still as many forest fires here?

Dottridge

No, there's not—nowhere near as many forest fires.

Tye

Because we've got less forest? Or because...

Dottridge

Because there's a lotta less—there's less forest, yes. That's, I mean, there's still a potential there, you know, in places to have fires. But.

Oden

Somebody told me the reason for all the dirt roads when I was a kid, back towards Crocker Neck, down Crocker Neck and Grove, that that was access for forest fires. That's, that's why there were dirt roads in there, is that?

Dottridge

There was always dirt roads just because there was camps. And people drove out there. I mean, we used to drive out down Crocker Neck and go out and go all over the place out there. We'd go looking for ducks and things like that. This is the dirt roads that, I don't know why they were there, but they were there long before me, and they weren't, you didn't drive your car down there.

Oden

No, I remember riding my bike as a kid. You'd get lost.

Dottridge

You know, I used to ride my...

Tye

So this is—

Dottridge

That's a brush breaker.

Tye

This is the one that's still around.

Dottridge

Yes.

Tye

Wow.

Dottridge

I helped design that.

Tye

That's very cool. Did you start from scratch or do you buy it as a brush breaker?

Dottridge

No. We went to Plymouth... and we went up to Plymouth and Plymouth has... not Plymouth, Plymouth has brush breakers similar to that, we went to Carver, and their breaker 28 is, was the newest one, and we designed ours after their breaker 28 with modifications to it. And there's a place in Hopkins, and I think it is, that builds fire apparatus. They people order fire apparatus through them, and they come in and they finished putting everything together on and deliver the fire apparatus to people's houses, to the stations. And they had a guy in there that was building the brush breakers.

Tye

So can I just ask

Dottridge
from scratch

Tye

That's impressive. Can I ask just the two kinds of your work? So on the one hand, you're doing fire work. And on the other hand, you're working for the electric company. What's the electric company out doing any of the was it indoors or outdoors stuff?

Dottridge

I worked, I read meters for four years. And then I worked in the engineering office for about six months and ended up in the control center. And I liked it in there and I went out, from there I went out and worked on a line truck for a year. And then I went back into the control center as a supervisor, and I did that for 30 years.

Tye

My question was, because I've always been intrigued by what linemen did, because they seem like they're the people out in the field who would actually know fire prevention stuff as well, that the way you control brush around lines and all... Did you see the two work—two kinds of work that working with electrical companies did helping you in the fire work?

Dottridge

No, no, I mean, maybe a little bit. But the the electric company used to have tree trimmers that came along and trimmed the trees. And now they still have tree crews, but they have more tree crews, and they have a much better system of trimming the trees. And there's a lot more, there's a lot less outages because of trees now, because of the way they do the trimming.

Tye

And less fires?

Dottridge

And less fires.

Smith Dottridge

You did that last family when you came from the electric company. And you worked with the firemen down there. You worked with the electric company. Remember when you did that? You did the firefighter and electricity or something?

Dottridge

I used to take—when I became the, the system operator on the Cape, I did a class on electricity and the firefighter to teach them what to do around wires and poles and all of these things, all of these instances, you know, what to do and...

Tye

To save from getting electrocuted as well?

Dottridge

To be safe. Yeah. And the safe thing is stay away from wires. Any wire that's down is an alive wire.

Tye

It sounds like a good safety lesson for, not just firefighters, but for everybody.

Dottridge

According to our safety book, according to the safety book, it's not dead until it's... test... what do I say. Til the breaker, til the line is open, tested, and grounded.

Tye

So always assume it's alive until it's proven that it's dead.

Dottridge

Correct.

Tye

I should stop with...

Oden

Well, that's okay.

Dottridge

Now, you know, one thing that—about Cotuit is, Cotuit is off the beaten path. And people didn't come through to Cotuit unless they had business in Cotuit. So you didn't have a lot of traffic coming through Cotuit. And one time, years ago, many years ago, Route 28 was, came right down School Street. And, you know, made a left on Main Street and out Putnam Avenue. That was the main road. There used to be a blinking light down at the corner of School Street and Main Street.

Tye

So when that was the set up, did that mean more people coming to Cotuit?

Dottridge

People had to go through Cotuit because there was no Route 28.

Tye

They did. So then, it seems to me one of the great strengths of Cotuit now is, unless you're intending to be here, you're not here. But then, that wasn't true.

Dottridge

That was back in the 40s before. There was—must have been in the—I don't know when Route 28 was built.

Oden

I think I saw a map that actually called, you know, called Quimquisset Road into School Street, I think it might have called it Route 28.

Dottridge

Yeah, it was probably Barnstable Road. Route 28.

Tye

Do you remember that as Route 28?

Dottridge

I don't remember. But I remember that, that the state used to plow Route 28 and up Main Street and out Putnam Avenue. I remember the state plowing us.

Tye

It seems to me that Cotuit got really lucky to move 28 and we get to stay hidden.

Dottridge

Because when they, once they did that, now Cotuit became its own little paradise. It always was its own little paradise because it had a very good harbor. And it was a port before my time. But my great grandfather, Captain Bennett Dottridge, sailed the seven seas. I mean, he went to sea at 17 and went to China at 19 and got his first boat at 23. And he had four boats. The last one sunk off Fire Island in New York, and he lost his son Ali. Ali drowned. He didn't know how to swim.

Tye

Did your grandfather, how many times a year was he able to come back here when he was gone?

Dottridge

I don't know. He's my great, great, great, great grandfather. I don't know how often he came back here. Then he came and he worked for the coal company.

Tye

Was he the original Dottridge in Cotuit?

Dottridge

No.

Oden

No, no, come on.

Tye

That was great, great grandfather. How many greats do we go back to get to the original?

Oden

A bunch. Samuel—

Dottridge

A bunch.

Tye

Samuel was the one who—

Dottridge

You go back after Bennett, it goes back to, I think it's James. And then, yeah, my mind's not with it today.

Smith Dottridge

I don't know who they all are.

Odense

But no, the Dottridge homestead was 1808 when—

Tye

Samuel.

Smith Dottridge

Yep, Samuel.

Dottridge

Samuel came to Cotuit in around 1808.

Tye

So 1808's a lot more greats.

Dottridge

And he brought his house with him.

Odense

So I got a question, I have a question about that. He was Samuel Benjamin.

Dottridge

Yes.

Odense

And then you're Bennett, and the captain was Bennett,

Dottridge

Captain was Bennett.

Odense

Was there—did it get... Where did Bennett come from? I just...

Dottridge

I don't know. Yeah.

Smith Dottridge

Didn't it come from the friend? Wasn't there a friend that was...?

Dottridge

There was a—Captain Bennett had a friend that liked him so much that he named his son Bennett Dottridge Coleman.

Odenice

Oh, okay, so another captain.

Dottridge

He was a captain too. But he was no relation. And I was born on his birthday.

Odenice

Oh really, okay. And he lived in that yellow, yellow and green house, I think on School Street?

Dottridge

I don't know.

Odenice

I think so.

Dottridge

I don't know.

Odenice

That's interesting. I always assumed it was, that he was a relation, but he's just a friend.

Dottridge

Cotuit was, you know, just it was always a great place.

Tye

What made it that—you used the word paradise, which I think is a great word to describe it. Why par—if you were explaining to somebody who was coming from Hyannis or from the planet Mars, why Cotuit's a paradise, why is it a paradise?

Dottridge

You didn't have to lock your door. You knew everybody. When, if there was a call coming for a fire, they'd tell you the name and you knew right where to go. Everybody would help everybody else, they'd all pitch in if there was a problem someplace. If somebody needed help, they'd all pitch in. I mean, just when we put this addition on our house in 1980, this piece here, we put all this framing up on the roof and one day, we had about 10 firemen here that came over and all helped. People used to do things like that.

Smith Dottridge
Everybody raised each other's kids.

Dottridge
You know if anybody—

Smith Dottridge
My poor kids.

Dottridge
People left you alone.

Smith Dottridge
Poor Kevin, he would ride around town, and if he did something wrong?

Odence
Couldn't get away with anything.

Smith Dottridge
I knew before he got home.

Dottridge
People left you alone in Cotuit, they left you alone, and then, then if you needed help, everybody was right there.

Tye
Everything you're saying—both of you are saying—is in the past tense. When did that go away?

Smith Dottridge
Got too big. There's too many houses, too many people. People came from the city. And you come from the cities.

Dottridge
They still don't know who they are.

Smith Dottridge
They can't, they can't imagine that you could be so laid back and... but you can, and you can get to know everybody and not live in your big house down on the water. See all the houses have changed, you know.

Tye
But weren't there always? I don't mean to push back on this but—

Smith Dottridge
There were people from the city. There were summer—

Odence

But there are more of them now? Or the...

Smith Dottridge

Oh, yeah, this house is a summer house, the one on the end of the street is a summer house, the one on the end of this street is a summer house. Yes. The one across the street is a summer house. So where your neighbors used to live, now are people that are wonderful neighbors when they're here. But they're not all here all the time. And even though we love the people next door, they're a great family. But it's not the same as having lights on in the house. And in the wintertime, there's nobody. And of course, we were part of that going to Florida in the winter. But you know, now it's even worse.

Tye

So can I just push back on that for one second. So everything you're saying makes sense. And yet, to me, there's something great about the winter when people go away, and we have more of this paradise to ourselves.

Smith Dottridge

It gets lonely though. And dark. It gets lonely and dark.

Tye

And when you're raising kids, that's especially apparent.

Smith Dottridge

And once we're retired. You know, we left in the winter.

Tye

Starting when?

Dottridge

When I retired and when she retired and...

Smith Dottridge

Yeah, we would go on school vacations. I was teaching, so every school vacation we left. And then we started traveling with the camper.

Tye

Where were you teaching?

Smith Dottridge

Mashpee.

Tye

So your kids benefited from it because they grew up in an era when neighbors were around here, they did everything.

Smith Dottridge

They walked to school.

Tye

Are they here? And how many kids?

Smith Dottridge

No, my son's in New Hampshire, and my daughter's in Hoboken, New Jersey. They wanted more—bigger companies. They wanted bigger jobs.

Dottridge

I have three daughters.

Smith Dottridge

And he has three daughters.

Dottridge

I have one in Delaware. And I have one in Marstons Mills and one in Osterville.

Tye

And the reason none of them, even though two of them are nearby here, aren't in Cotuit, is there a reason or it just happened that way?

Dottridge

Price of houses is too much.

Tye

Too high here.

Dottridge

Too high. You know, back when, when I was younger, there were no stop signs all over the place, and speed bumps. You didn't, you didn't need those things. People knew enough to look left and right and see if there was somebody coming.

Tye

I thought it was a joke when I—the other day at Piney and School, when they added those signs, that the... It was kind of surprising.

Dottridge

I mean, I think all of these stop signs they've added...

Smith Dottridge

Changes, though.

Dottridge

Not all of them are a joke. I mean, the one on Ocean View Ave, on, at Ocean View Ave and Main Street. That's a great idea because you can't see the cars coming up from Main Street. You just, if you're

coming out of Ocean View Ave you can't see 'em coming. So a stop sign there makes sense. But these other ones, you know, and that takes away from the old ambience of Cotuit.

Tye

But what we were listening to, the Fire Radio here?

Smith Dottridge

Yeah.

Dottridge

Yeah, we got a few fire radios.

Smith Dottridge

Which one, there's three or four of them around. I ignore it.

Dottridge

This one's just on Cotuit frequency so that I can hear. The one in the kitchen has got a few more in it. And the one in my office has got a whole bunch in it.

Smith Dottridge

It used to be that he'd be out the door as that thing made the first noise because he knew the voices of the people that were maintaining the radios. He knew the tones because every department had its own tone. It was very simple. It had its own tone. And you heard those two notes? He was gone.

Tye

And you can't read it that way now?

Smith Dottridge

He's better than I am.

Dottridge

I can still—

Smith Dottridge

He can still pick it up.

Dottridge

I don't go anymore, I can't, you know.

Smith Dottridge

I mean, the boots were here by the door.

Dottridge

I had to get done in 2001 because I couldn't keep up all the requirements that you have to do to stay on the fire department. But I thought I'd go on another 10 years.

Smith Dottridge

One of our first dates we were in the truck and we were up in Mashpee and there was a fire came in on the radio in Falmouth, and he looks at me and he says, "Do you want to be the first ones to a fire?" Okay, this is the way my life is gonna be. He had his boots and everything. He was the first one there.

Tye

Wow.

Dottridge

You have the Mashpee fire engine there, and, and my brother was on it and one of the other guys, and I grabbed a Scott Pack, and we grabbed the hose, and off we went inside, and we put the fire out. Next thing you know there was Falmouth guys all over the place. So we backed out, I took the Scott Pack off, put it on the truck, and I said here you go. Here's your Scott Pack, here's your hose, see you later. It was New Year's Eve. We were headed to my sister's for a party.

Tye

And you made it to the party?

Dottridge

Yeah.

Smith Dottridge

It's, it's different though. The beach is more crowded.

Dottridge

You used to walk—

Smith Dottridge

You used to be able to go to the beach. And you could walk to the beach, and you could walk through people's backyards, and there were paths. When we came to Grandpa's house, we never went on the street.

Dottridge

Through her path that was through here to my grandfather's.

Smith Dottridge

We always went the back paths, and now somebody—I hate to say it, I don't know who you are and the way it's getting you really. Taking your life in your hands when you're doing something like that.

Dottridge

When we were young kids, the temperature had to be 76 degrees before we could go to the beach. My mother would take us to the beach and we'd grab our stuff, and she didn't have a car. And we walked out and on, down Coolidge Street and went across, there was a path across from Coolidge Street that went right down to the beach. We walked down there to the beach.

Smith Dottridge

Everybody knew everybody.

Dottridge

There was a lifeguard down there and.

Oden

The Ropes Beach.

Dottridge

Ropes Beach, yep. And every spring, there was a guy that came in there with a bulldozer and at low tide he pushed all of the sand off of the beach and pushed it out into the water, and went down to [Charlie's savory sandpit] and got new sand and put new sand on the beach. And that—by doing that, it kept the water out there so that it wasn't so muddy. Only at real low tide, you know, did you get into, you know, out into the mud, but if the tide was up at all, then you had a nice sandy bottom there to go swimming. It was a great place to go swimming.

Oden

I don't remember that path down from Coolidge. But I remember hearing Leonard Peck talk about when they stayed in the Porter cottage. And he talked about a path that he'd take up to the grocery. Would that be the same one?

Dottridge

Yeah, same path. Went right down there and came right down by the Porter cottage. You know, right down there. Went right along the fence line.

Oden

I saw an old map and there was a road—it showed a road going, going down that way. Years, you know, in the late 1800s.

Dottridge

Could have been something. I wasn't here then.

Tye

Was it a better or worse place when there were more businesses and hotels and all of that activity, commercial activity in town?

Smith Dottridge

I don't remember that so much. I remember the—we used to come over here and visit. We came every Saturday night for Grandma's beans and stuff.

Tye

When you were living in Hyannis?

Smith Dottridge

Yeah, when we grew up in Hyannis, we'd come here. Grandpa had chickens out back, the chicken coop is still there. Charlie and Pammy left it and they use it for a storage shed, but the chicken coop is still

there. And yeah, we had a great time. We'd go hunting with Grandpa but he'd just let the dogs chase the bunnies. We'd go down to Cotuit off of Old Post Road. We'd go down in the woods there and he'd let the dog go and the dog would run one way and then you'd hear him start howling and Grandpa'd say, "he's coming out right here and he's got a bunny." You know, he'd never catch anything, but it was just...

Tye

You grew up in Cotuit, but you spent a lot of time—I mean in

Smith Dottridge

In Hyannis.

Tye

In Hyannis, and you spent a lot of time with your grandparents in Cotuit. What was Cotuit like compared to Hyannis then?

Smith Dottridge

Well, Hyannis was busy. Hyannis was the city. Hyannis was where I went to school. I didn't go to one of these little schools, I went to a bigger school. Mom taught in the school and Dad worked at the phone company. So. She didn't teach, though, till we went into school. So she was always with us. And we were close to the beaches, same as this. We'd head to the beach all the time. I'm sure we would live a similar life here that we would have lived in Hyannis. But you still, you still had to get into the car to go to the store.

Tye

Here, not in Hyannis?

Smith Dottridge

Oh no, we had to in Hyannis, too. We went to Main Street. There were no grocery stores on the outskirts and there was no mall or any of that. I mean there were a few things—he can tell you what was down, downtown. I don't remember. I mean, he remembers when the fire station was downtown.

Tye

What do you remember about downtown Cotuit?

Dottridge

Downtown Cotuit was, there was the, building of the, down where the park is now, that they tore down to make Park. It was a two story building there that had a grocery store in there. And there was a barber shop. And the post office was there. And then there was, I guess it was apartments above it. That got torn down. And when they, let's see, that was around '57. Because the school used to be where the post office is, that's where I went to school. We'd walk down the street. Everybody walked to school. There was a bus that picked the kids up who lived in Santuit. But everybody else walked to school. It was the same design as the one in Osterville, and the one in Osterville they moved down to [John Lawrence Funeral Home] and added to it. But it was raised up off the ground, you had steps to go up in and then there was a basement underneath. And there were some rooms down in the basement. But they had—up top were three big rooms. And there were three, there were two classrooms in each room. One teacher, two classrooms.

Odense

And there were playing fields behind there, yeah?

Dottridge

There were playing, there was a field down, down in the back in the hollow down there, that was, there were no trees in there. There were fields down there. We played baseball and everything else in there. And when there was snow on the ground, we slid down, we slid down the hill. And we'd go out at recess and we'd slide down the hill and we'd get soaking wet. And they had these heaters, the air heaters that were over by the windows. And we'd take our wet things off, we'd take our jeans off and sit in our underwear and let all the stuff dry. Imagine doing that today.

Tye

So I can't imagine doing that. But it also seems like everything you're describing would create a sense of being, belonging to a community, you're in school right here, you've got a store right here, you've got, you get your hair cut here.

Smith Dottridge

I think all the construction and all the houses that came in have really changed not just the layout, but how you travel through the layout. We used to think nothing of going through the woods, you know, and we'd go blueberrying up Highland Avenue and, and up in the woods there. They're huge. All natural stuff. And we lived on the land a lot. Even when I was coming to visit, just like going to Marstons Mills to my grandfather's we'd go fishing. They lived on the cove, and we'd go fishing and we caught fish and []s and clams when I was knee high to a grasshopper. And we learned to do all that when we were really young. So by having all that property that you could roam and you could live off of it made life so easy. Everybody knew everybody. And now you've got more people, you've got people coming down, less living here less full time. You don't know a lot of the people around. You know them to say hi to, but unless you really take the time to become neighbors, it's really hard.

Dottridge

Back then, there were these people, rich people. I mean, they're the ones that bought that building downtown after the new school got built. And they moved the school up to where the old school on old Oyster in '57. And they took that building down, and they put a post office there. And after they put the post office there, they tore the building down and made a park, because these people didn't want the businesses in Cotuit. And that's how the businesses that used to be down there—I don't remember those that used to be where the park is, and the others that were around there—got eliminated because those people bought them up. And that's how the park got, I believe, a lot of the park used to be businesses.

Tye

Do you think they didn't get what really made the community special? They just want it to look like a nice park.

Dottridge

They didn't care. They were here and they didn't want you know, the other people to be here and they didn't want the business to be here. And that's what's happened in Cotuit is newcomers have come in. And now that I'm here, I want it to stay the way it, you know, is now, and then somebody, then more

newcomers come in, and they want to change things around and then they want it to stay that way, you know, and they, they keep coming in and they say, "well, geez, I can't see around this corner, I should have a stop sign here." And that's what's happening with the stop signs is somebody complains. And they complain enough and so they, the highway department goes and puts a stop sign out there. Or they go to the Civic Association and they convince them that, that we need stop signs here. And I don't know who is advocating the stops—all the stop sign stuff, but you know, they, they want to change things. The more they change, the less it is, you know...

Smith Dottridge

They think they're making it safer.

Dottridge

They may think they're making it safer, but you know,

Tye

I have an argument that they're making it less safe because I watched what was going on at these stop signs, and nobody pays attention to them. So it's unsafe if you have a stop sign that some people think people would stop at, and others just decide that —

Dottridge

Somebody's gonna get really whacked

Tye

Somebody will get whacked.

Smith Dottridge

I come out of Putnam Avenue and I don't really care who might be coming down the road, I do not assume anybody's gonna stop on these streets. I've seen them go through and—

Dottridge

Somebody's gonna get really whacked there.

Tye

But you're talking about lots of institutions that have changed not for the better. How about the fire department?

Dottridge

Well, it used to be—the fire department, it used to be like a family. And the people that were on the fire department were there because they wanted to help somebody. On the fire department, every time a call come in, you were going to help somebody.

Smith Dottridge

There were so many living around here.

Dottridge

You know, didn't matter what kind of a call it was, you were going to help somebody. And it's a nice feeling to be able to help people.

Tye
Still today that feeling?

Dottridge
Well,

Smith Dottridge
It's getting better.

Dottridge
It's getting a little better, but no, that most of the guys don't live in Cotuit because they can't afford to live in Cotuit. They live in Mashpee or close by. But it's, it's a job to a lot of people. So many people it's just a job. And so there's three men on duty, and when they go out on a call, and they call for three guys or people to come back to stand by at the station so there's somebody there if another call comes in. You might get somebody and you might get nobody. Some days, you'll get people that come and other days you don't get anybody, like a Sunday. Especially in the summertime.

Odenca
Does it still make sense to have the Cotuit fire company be separate? You know, there was discussions of joining COMM and all that stuff.

Dottridge
I don't think joining COMM would be a bad idea, but a town fire department wouldn't be good. That wouldn't be good at all, I don't think. Joining COMM you wouldn't lose anything. Other than you wouldn't have a fire chief in Cotuit and the fire chief would be in [...]. You'd have, you'd have the guys that are there. The three guys on duty. You might get more guys, more people that came, came back because you got a bigger pool to draw from. They do a pretty good job of getting people back instead of [...], but they have a big pool to draw from. But all the fire departments have problems getting, coming back for calls.

Tye
So if your grandkids were sitting here with us today—do you have great grandkids?

Smith Dottridge
No.

Tye
Just grandkids? So if your grandkids were sitting here today, and they would say, Grandpa, Grandma, tell us a story about what it was like growing up here that, that we know you're upstanding, serious people, but you grew up here and had a blast, and what was the—tell a story to...

Smith Dottridge
The kids love to hear it.

Dottridge

When I was small, like I said, we had the run of the neighborhood. Down here and High Street and Coolidge Street but that that was our perimeters. And there used to be, Mr. Brigham used to live across the street here. And he had a small farm here and my friend Jerry Morgan, lived out back over here. And we were best friends. It was just, I mean, we were the only boys in the area here, you know. And he was my age. So one day we went down to Mr. Brigham's, Mr. Brigham had a couple of turkeys. So,

Oden

And where was that?

Dottridge

Right across the street

Oden

Where the []s are?

Smith Dottridge

Yeah.

Oden

okay.

Dottridge

Where, you know, and he was growing these turkeys. It is... the way I remember it, these turkeys are about that tall. So, you know we weren't very big, but we lassoed those turkeys and we walked them down Lake Street down to my grandfather's. My grandfather had chickens. He had two chicken coops out back, two houses, and we put those turkeys in one of the chicken houses, chicken coops. Well, turkeys and chickens don't get along well at all. We were sitting there having a supper, and there's a knock knock knock on the door. And my great grandfather gets up and he goes to the door and opens the door, and it's Mr. Brigham. And he turns to me, he says, "Benny you don't know anything about Mr. Brigham's turkeys, do you?" I said, "not me Grampy." He says, "Come on, let's, let's go out back. There's an awful lot of noise out there in the chicken house." So we get up and we walk out back. I'm sure my father probably wants to come too, but we walk out back and he opens the door and there's those two turkeys, and oh, what a mess in that chicken house. So Mr. Brigham took the turkeys. I don't know if they still had the lassos on them or what, but he got them back to his house. I guess we went back in and had supper. I don't remember. I don't remember what happened though. Any, what was said to us. Probably, "Don't do that again" or something. I think my grandfather was just laughing his head off. To think that we walked those turkeys all the way down there and nobody saw us with a lasso on them, two turkeys walked them down the road, and nobody saw us.

Tye

Did the chickens survive?

Dottridge

Yep.

Odence

So Grandpa Dott was your grandfather.

Dottridge

Grandpa Dott was my grandfather. Yeomen Dottridge, Jr. And Ernest, Ernest Dottridge was his father. Lived over on School Street.

Odence

Okay, that was my... That's what I thought, because there's that, it does say Dottridge House on it.

Dottridge

And his father was Bennett.

Odence

Yeah, I got it. Yeah.

Dottridge

I lived there when I got married. I bought that house. The first time.

Tye

When you live in a village the size of Cotuit, and you live with a name as famous here as Dottridge, did that give you any special rights or responsibilities?

Smith Dottridge

It's not so famous anymore.

Dottridge

Well, when I was on the fire department, when I was on it I was king of the hill. My pop was fire chief. But I had, I had to do more than anybody else when I was on the fire department. Because I—he was my father. He didn't show me any favors. If there was a dirty job to do, it was my job. And I didn't mind doing anything. I did anything. When I was—I couldn't wait until I turned 16 so I could join the fire department.

Odence

That was the age, huh?

Dottridge

Yeah. I used to sit there on—go out on the porch and watch the fire trucks go by when there was a fire because I couldn't go. We had to wait until we were 11 years old to be able to blow the noon whistle before they automated it. And I used—we used to answer the radio check in the morning. Couldn't wait till I was old enough to do that. Every morning at nine o'clock they'd test the radios and each station is supposed to just answer so that they knew the radio worked. And if there were any messages, they gave the messages out then, but they don't do that anymore. In fact, some messages—or they still have the radio check.

Odenice

What did Ernest do? Was he, he was before there was a fire company, right?

Dottridge

I really don't know. He was the shellfish warden. I know that. For the town of Barnstable. I don't know what he did. I really don't know.

Odenice

And he, you don't remember him. He was—

Dottridge

Well, vaguely.

Odenice

Yeah,

Dottridge

I mean I know when I was three or four I used to walk over to his house. But I think he died in 1948, so I don't remember him much, no.

Odenice

Do you remember your great grandfather Giles?

Dottridge

Yes. Yeah. Because we lived with them. And, and my grandmother, she lived a couple of years after he did. And my brother David was her favorite. He couldn't do anything wrong. Whenever he used to do something wrong, he'd run and jump up into her lap.

Tye

How many of the seven of you are still around?

Dottridge

Around Cotuit?

Tye

Around, in the world, is everybody still here?

Dottridge

Everybody's still here, yep.

Tye

Anybody but we met two sisters and we talked to them. How many of the others are still—is there anybody other than you three who are still on Cotuit?

Dottridge

David. David lives on Putnam Avenue. Chucky lives in Mashpee. Chucky's the youngest, he's 14 years younger than me.

Tye
Who was the oldest?

Dottridge
My sister Susan. And then I come next.

Tye
So, one of the things that we ask everybody that we're interviewing is who else to interview. When you think of people who have been here for a long time and who are good storytellers who understand—

Dottridge
David Weisman.

Tye
David Weisman?

Oden
He's on the list.

Smith Dottridge
Yeah.

Benny Dottridge (2)
Lane Sillin

Tye
That background now, the other story...

Dottridge
Yeah, we were married. Christmas Eve. Went to a Christmas party. We came back here, and we went next door to my uncle's house, about 11:30.

Smith Dottridge
Joan's the one you needed to interview. She's not around.

Dottridge
One of the neighbors from out back was over there, and he had a Santa Claus. So everybody just kept telling me, "Put the Santa Claus suit on, put the Santa Claus suit on." So I finally says, "All right, I put the Santa Claus suit on." So I put the Santa Claus suit on, and then Joan says, "Come on, we gotta go to Aunt Marion's." So, so she and Carol and I walk over to Aunt Marion's and I knock on the door and she comes and says, "Hi, Benny." You know, "how are you doing?" And so, I talked to her for a few minutes. And then I said, "I gotta go next door. Joe Hallett's there." Joe Hallett was a local plumber. I believe he came from Osterville, but he lived in Cotuit forever. He did our plumbing. He was a nice guy. And he had a young son who was married, married a woman that was a lot younger than he was, and they had a son. Spencer Hallett. Spencer Hallett Plumbing. He was about 10 or 11 years old, maybe a little older, I don't know. And so I walk over there and I knock on the door, and he came to the door, slams—opens the door and slams it. Goes back into the living room. Says, Joe says, "What's wrong, Spencer?" He said, "it's Santa Claus." "Oh, don't give me that." He says, "It's Santa Claus, Dad, it's Santa Claus!" He says, "It ain't—Santa Claus isn't it? He says, "Dad, I'm telling you, it's Santa Claus, Santa Claus is here!" And Joe comes to the door and opens it up and says, "Oh, hi. How ya doing?" "Okay," so I talked to him for a little bit. He says, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I was looking for Katherine []." He says, "Well, she died." "Well," I said. "Is she down there or up there?" I said, "'cause I can't find her." And so then he says, "Well, come on in." So we walked in, the three of us walk in. He says, "You want a drink?" "Sure." So he gets us all a drink. We sit down. Finally, he says, "Will you take that goddamn mask off? I don't know who the hell it is."

Dottridge
Like, you could do stuff like that. We all—

Dottridge
I didn't get shot either.

Smith Dottridge
And that was only 45 years ago. Not like it was back when we were kids, either. In the 70s, into the 70s

Dottridge

Or late 50s. You know, I used to take my shotgun and put it over my shoulder and walk down the street and go, go out and walk down to the river and go hunting. Nobody said anything about walking down the street with your gun over your shoulder or anything. It didn't bother anybody at all. It's just the thing that people did. Used to go to the coop, you know. The coop has always been there. But we used to, Mr. Crocker had the coop, and everybody had a charge account at the coop. And if my mother needed something for supper, she'd send one of us kids to the coop and we'd just charge it, sign for it, and bring it home. And, you know, Mr. Crocker ran that place and he had just about anything and everything that you could ask for in there. And he used to always have somebody in there that knew—knew how to cut meat. And it was one of the best meat markets there was around. People came all over, from all over to go to the coop to get my, get their meat.

Odenice

I remember Luke

Tye

Now I understand, when the coop was there when the grocery store was also in the other building, they were both there and they didn't compete? Or they did compete.

Odenice

Are you talking about the grocery store in the building that was torn down.

Dottridge

Which building?

Smith Dottridge

In the park.

Tye

The building where the park is.

Dottridge

Yeah, there was a store down there too. But the other store had—[]

Tye

And we've heard stories about Milton Crocker, especially during the war, when he knew people were having tough times, and they couldn't pay their bills. He just looked the other way. Is that the?

Dottridge

He did, you know? And he would tell you that, you know, you need to put a little something on this. And if it got, you know, but if people were really having a tough time, then he looked the other way.

Odenice

People took care of one another.

Dottridge

They took care of one another. But he, behind that, when you come in that door, there was a shelf unit on that wall. And that was a hardware store. And it was just about everything that you could think of on that shelf unit. He knew just what to buy. If you went in there looking for something, it was there.

Tye

That's what a general store is supposed to be, it's supposed to have everything. And he did it.

Smith Dottridge

Yeah, he was great.

Dottridge

Harry says, "I've got a story for you." He says this guy come in just, just now, and he says, "I need a plunger." Okay, so Harry took him over to where the plungers were. And he says, "no, I need one for for a sink that's got two holes. I need two plungers." He says, "Okay, if you want two plungers, I'll sell you two plungers." So, the guy walks out happy as hell. Got two plungers 'cause he had two drains in his kitchen sink.

Smith Dottridge

You know, one of the things, when we got married we had a, we just got married in the house at the end of the street. And it was a second marriage for us. We just, we had five kids. And Harry gave us []. And John Christianson, who used to live two doors down, two houses down, was a baker. He made us a cake. And everybody brought food and everything. It was, just everybody got together and did all this. We had a wedding, my niece's wedding out here a few years ago. Put up a tent. Everybody—our kids, everybody came to help. We have a son in law—ex son in law—who's an electrician. He came in and wired the place up for everything. I mean, we just all do it. This is what we do. He's taught all the grandkids to fish. We've taught them all to claim and [], and taught them the rules. We've even taken these kids down that now come down next door, and they go with us.

Tye

So, I bet your grandkids someday are going to tell stories, like today's the good old days, and all the changes that happened down the road. What I can't figure out anytime I'm listening to people tell stories—I wish I lived in Cotuit in the era that you're describing. There was more a sense of community and where it was, or the Cape. On the other hand, it's still better than most of the world.

Smith Dottridge

Right.

Dottridge

It still is.

Smith Dottridge

You know, growing up in Hyannis, we could take our bikes, I'd tell—let's go to Spanky's over there. And you'd tell people this was my, this was my, so to speak, hunting ground. Anywhere south of South Street, down Ocean Street and Sea Street, near [] Street. We could go anywhere on our bikes within those parameters and to the beach. And until we were, I think it was 13, first time I rode up to Main Street on my bike. That was the big thing. But we used to ride our bikes to school up, there was a dirt

road that went up to the school up there where John Paul is now, and it was the railroad tracks. And we rode up on our bikes to school. And if you had a problem at school, everybody knew your parents. I didn't do some work one day, Bill Koval who was the math teacher, he called my father and he said, "Would you call Carol and get her tail back up here? She needs to finish." And I can remember going up there and taking my bike after school. And you could do all that stuff. I mean, I suppose in every small town all over the country, you could do that stuff.

Tye

You could, but I'd still bet more people keep their doors unlocked in Cotuit than in 95% of America.

Smith Dottridge

Yeah, well, we've had things stolen here out of the shed. So we're kind of careful if we're gone for any length of time and whatever, but yeah. It's, it's still a good place to be. When you look at some of these houses sitting on Route 28, you know, or up on Route 130. That's a great place. I mean, I remember when Putnam Avenue was, I used to call it, we can't remember what I called it, but it used to be dark. There were no houses on Putnam Avenue. Once you get past the cemetery, you pass maybe, what? [] where Kathy is? There was nothing.

Tye

But you've just told, you started out telling us one way that it's gotten incredibly better. The idea that 28 ran through the town. You know, that's a pretty good improvement to get rid of that.

Smith Dottridge

Until they put a detour in.

Dottridge

But that—28 was, didn't go through town when I was a kid.

Oden

But before.

Dottridge

So yeah, that was an improvement for the people that were here. I used to have a paper route. And I went from School Street and Main Street all the way up Main Street to []... and I delivered the papers. I had to walk up to the house and put it in the door, like, there was no throwing it on the grass.

Tye

Were you delivering Cape Cod Times?

Dottridge

Combination of Cape Cod Times and the Standard Times. It was a combination. And I had 45 or 50 papers that I had to deliver. And if it was raining bad my father would take me in the car sometimes. And if it was snowing bad he'd take me in the car sometimes. I used to, I used to take a piece of rope and wind it around my tires to make chains out of so that I had better traction on my bicycle.

Oden

I never knew that trick. That's a good one.

Tye

That wasn't the same rope you used to lasso the turkey?

Dottridge

I don't think so. But I mean, I earned money, and I wanted a camera. So I rode to Osterville, to the drugstore in Osterville on my bicycle, bought a camera and, you know, and brought it home, rode back home. I didn't think anything of riding my bicycle to Osterville.

Tye

And that was the nearest drugstore—

Dottridge

That was the nearest drugstore.

Smith Dottridge

It's too bad all the moving stores—A&P in Osterville we used to use all the time.

Dottridge

Used to go to the [] in Osterville. It was...

Smith Dottridge

And the country store.

Odense

I remember.

Smith Dottridge

Remember when Angelo's got put in up there, you know, it's just, it just grows.

Dottridge

We got older and we, you know, I had my driver's license. I used to go to Mashpee. For fire calls, for calls and especially brush fires. If there was a brush fire, I'd go and meet the fire chief and, and jump on the truck, and off the two of us would go. He'd go out of the station by himself, all by himself. And if he didn't get anybody, he'd take the hose and wind it around through through the passenger window and out the driver's window and drive through the woods, and drive with one arm and put the fire out while the other arm. If I got there before he went in the woods, then I'd go with him.

Odense

I think my questions, most of my questions got answered.

Tye

So these have been great stories. What we will do is a couple things. At some point, this will go up online at the Historical Society so people can listen to it. But if you if you think your grandkids or anybody would want to hear these stories, we can send you a copy and we're also we'll send the

interview out to be transcribed and could give you a paper transcript of what we did. And I just want to say thank you and I want to ask one question after I trained—

Benny Dottridge (3)
Lane Sillin

Dottridge

One of the biggest fires we had was down on Ocean View Avenue at the Wickham house.

Odenice

Oh, yeah, that was horrible.

Dottridge

Another call came in and we all came running. And I went out on the first truck, and we had a half a dozen guys on the truck. And when we got there, Spike was—my uncle Spike, he was the chief.

Odenice

And this is probably late 70s?

Dottridge

This was,

Smith Dottridge

Yeah, we were married. We were together.

Dottridge

No, this was in the early 80s, around '83, or something like that. But we got down there, and there was fire showing, and a lot of smoke. And he was, chief was hollering, "There's people on the second floor around the back, get the ladders and you gotta get them down." Everybody, you know, so I told everybody, I says, "You guys grab the ladders," because there was four guys in the back and another guy, there was five of em. I says, you know, "Don't need all of us." And I took him to hook the truck up to the hydrant and I pulled some lines into the front yard. And they pulled them out of the back window. She came out okay, but he was very difficult to get out.

Odenice

They were very elderly, right?

Dottridge

Yeah, they were elderly. But he was large and the window was small. And the fire was in the room that he was in. Which, the fire started in the... he always had a fire in the fireplace every night. And a spark came out into the living room and set the living room on fire. And then, then the living room was charged and sent things up the chimney into, into the next, the room above it, they had a common chimney. And so it set that room on fire. That room was all wood. And he was in the bedroom. And so there was only one window in their bedroom and they couldn't get out down the stairs because the fire was downstairs. So she got in that one window and he got in the other window and that room was on fire. So there was fire in the room behind him. So he was being burnt on his backside. They finally got him out and down the ladders and got him on a stretcher and pulled them around. When we came around the front side of that house, the whole end of the house just completely blew up. Kaboom. Blew all the windows out. And there was just one great big ball of fire.

Odenice
Wow.

Dottridge

And we got the fire knocked down on the first floor. But the fire was upstairs and got up into the attic. And the house there, they had three roofs. They, when they remodeled, they put one roof on top of the other. So we weren't able to get up through the, the ceiling and pull the ceiling. And they would pull the ceiling and get a line up in the air and whip it around and knock the fire down where we were. And then you pull it down. And then I was []. We'd just go from one end to the other. And it was like that for a long time. And they tried getting on the roof. They broke every axe hammer we had trying to go through the roof. While, while I'm up there, I told the guys, "Nobody goes in that room over there because it's not safe." There was a lot of fire underneath it. And then next thing I know, I hear this kid hollering, and I go in there and all I can see is his head and his arms like this. He gone through the floor and was hanging down into the floor of the room below. So I grabbed a hold of the back of his coat and hauled him out of there. And I just grabbed him and just picked him right up, pulled him right out there. I asked him, "What are you doing in here? I told you not to go in here." He says, "Well, that guy told me to go in here." And I said, "What guy?" "The guy in the white coat." Well, the guy in the white coat was a Mashpee fire chief. He wasn't somebody that... he wasn't very well liked. And I went to him and asked him, I says, "What are you doing telling that nice kid to go out into that room? You know, I told him not to go in there." I says, "You get out of here." So he says, "You can't talk to—" Well, I had some words with him. I used some expletives, as you can imagine, and I told him to get the hell out. He says, "You can't tell me to get out. I'm a, I'm a chief. And you're just a cap here." He says, "I'm a chief," and I says, "Well, I'm a captain in Cotuit, and you might be a chief in Mashpee, but you ain't a chief in Cotuit. Now get your ass out of here." So he went out, and he walked down, went down to, to my uncle who was the chief, and he says, he says, "Your captain up there just threw me out of there and told me this and that." And he says, "Well, he must have had a pretty good reason for it." We were there 13 hours that day.

Odenice
Wow.

Tye

The kid survive? He was okay?

Dottridge

Yeah, he was okay. They finally got the Centerville-Osterville ladder truck thing. They cut the fence off and the hedge off, and they drove the ladder truck straight in towards the house and ran the ladder. And when they got into the yard, the ladder truck sunk right down into the ashes.

Tye

Jeez.

Dottridge

And... put the ladder out, and they got a chainsaw from somewhere. I don't know where the chainsaw had come from, but they got a chainsaw, and with a chainsaw, they were finally able to cut through the roofs.

Tye

I can't imagine 13 hours fighting a fire. You were there all—

Dottridge

We weren't fighting the fire 13 hours, but we were there for 13 hours.

Tye

Were you there yourself?

Dottridge

I was there the whole time.

Oden

And Penn Wickham didn't make it, but his wife did?

Dottridge

Yeah. He made it for a while. He was a nice guy. I mean, Bill Perry was his caretaker. He came to me one day and he said, "The boss has got a tree stump that he wants to get out." He says, "The town came and took down a tree, but there's a great big stump, one of those elm trees." It was a great big stump there. He says, "The boss wants it outta there." And I says, "Well, it's going to be difficult, getting that out of there." I says, "I can get it out, but it's gonna cost them you know, it's gonna ruin my chain." "Doesn't matter what the cost is," he says. "The boss wants it out of there, and he wants it out of there now." I says, "I'll be down now." I worked and worked on that thing. I don't know how many chains I went through, you know, cutting it to get it below ground, but I got it down there below ground. And he paid me for... I didn't charge him anything exorbitant. 'Cause he was a nice guy. He was a really nice guy.

Tye

So my last thing that—