VICKIE VIEIRA
JACK MANICI

VIEIRA: I am the vice president now, but not for long. There’s an opening for vice president.

ODENCE: Heard there was an opening for president, too.

VIEIRA: There is. That’s one more year.

TYE: Let me take two seconds and tell you what we’re doing with this, why we started this. And at the beginning of the pandemic when Jim Gould was leaving town, I panicked that I had always wanted to sit down with him and have him tell me anything he could about Cotuit history, a/nd that he was going. And Phil and I met with him in his backyard, and we kept enough of a distance and it was really enough that he didn’t infect us with COVID but he infected us with his passion for Cotuit history. And we decided that we would tape a series of interviews. We started with people who were in their 90s and have been working our way down. And the point of these was partly to do them for the historical society, your wonderful historical society, but partly that someday we hope to do a magazine story or an NPR story or something.

VIEIRA: Oh great, let’s make Cotuit famous.

TYE: Seriously, yes, let’s not tell people where it is, just…

VIEIRA: No, but just make it famous.

TYE: But the guiding passion that there was a single question with this is: What makes Cotuit the most special place on the planet? And I think that everybody has had an incredibly different sense of what that is, partly based on…

…

TYE: So, what we would love to do is just ask you if you wouldn’t mind saying your name and the date and then telling us a little bit about… It’s the 14th or…?

ODENCE: No, no, little beyond that.

TYE: Oh right so, I’m sorry, what is it?

ODENCE: You missed Valentine’s Day?

VIEIRA: You’re in big trouble.

TYE: I missed the day of the month but not the celebration.

ODENCE: 17th.

VIEIRA: There you go.

TYE: 17th, so we’re here on February 17th…

VIEIRA: 2024. My name is Vickie Vieira, Victoria Lynn Vieira, but please call me Vickie, everybody, or know me as Vickie.

TYE: And tell us how you first came to Cotuit.

VIEIRA: I was born. So…

TYE: That’s a good way.

VIEIRA: I was born at Cape Cod Hospital, Dr. Higgins was the doctor who delivered me, and Dr. Higgins’ father was the doctor who delivered my mother. My mother was a first-generation American. Her parents were from the Azore Islands, Sao Miguel and Pico. And I on my father’s side I am first generation American, he was from Madeira Island. And I was born in 1954.

ODENCE: Were his parents here too?

VIEIRA: His father was here but wasn’t born here.

ODENCE: Right,

VIEIRA: His mother died before… that’s why he came, because he wanted to be with his dad. And he has, actually, a pretty interesting story. You want to hear?

ODENCE: Yeah absolutely.

VIEIRA: So it was the middle of World War II, his mother died in the late… in 1940-ish. I don’t know the exact date.

ODENCE: And his name was Manuel, right?

VIEIRA: His name was Manuel Orlando, and my grandfather was Manuel Amancio. And everybody called my dad Bill, because when he came to America, he wanted to be an American. And Manuel doesn’t sound very American, so he told everyone to call him Bill. Unfortunately, he never lost his accent. My cousins called him the Portuguese Ricky Riccardo, because it was quite an accent. But he wanted to come to America to be with his father who was here. And he kept filling out paperwork, and his father kept filling out paperwork, and it kept not going through. And it’s pretty obvious why: they wanted a 17-18 year old boy to be in Portugal to fight for Portugal when it came to that, so they were not gonna let him out of the country. So he had a job with an insurance company checking the boats in the harbor, and he would go on the boats and check the cargo and get off the boats and report back to the company and one day he got on the boat and didn’t get off. And so he was an illegal immigrant.

TYE: This would have been 1940-something?

VIEIRA: ‘42 maybe? Oh it was after ‘42 ‘cause my mother had already graduated from high school, so it was right in the midst of World War II. So his boat came into New York harbor, they found him, he jumped overboard, very brilliant, and swam to shore. He was a very good swimmer. People used to see him out at Ropes’ or the Loop swimming across to the island all the time. So he was a really good swimmer. Swam somewhere to New York harbor, got arrested immediately, and he came here to see his father and luckily he had some relatives who had some money in New Bedford, and they went to a lawyer and the lawyer said. “You have to leave the country and you have to re-enter legally.” So he went to Canada, where he was told to do nothing wrong, because if he did anything wrong, he would be deported and he would never be allowed back into America. So he said, “Of course, I won’t do anything wrong.” But what he did was wrap silk stockings around his stomach and bring them back to my mother, and that was contraband. So he, yeah, he was a bad boy. But he was a great dad!

ODENCE: So I’m trying… So how did he, where did he and your mother get together?

VIEIRA: He knew my uncles, my mother’s brothers. They went to… they played sports, they went out drinking together, they gallivanted, as my grandmother would say, they would gallivant, they went to football games. And my uncles said to him: “You should meet our sister. She’s beautiful and she’s very nice.”

ODENCE: And this was all back in…

VIEIRA: No, this was here. He met my mother in Santuit at her house.

TYE: Did she have a Portuguese background as well?

VIEIRA: Yes.

TYE: Can I just interrupt for one second and say I was just in Lisbon and looking at, interviewing historians about the migration during World War II. Lisbon was an extraordinary escape for, among other people, French Jews who had made it over the Pyrenees, and if they could get through Spain and make it to Lisbon, they could take a boat to New York or Boston like your father did.

VIEIRA: Right, and he took his boat straight from Madeira, but same idea. So he met… they introduced my parents and they went to a football game. And my dad let her sit in the stands and went off with my uncles, which did not impress my mother, but I guess something he did later did impress her and they got married.

ODENCE: Where did one play football around here? And I’m assuming you mean soccer, or was it… no “football” football?

VIEIRA: No, this was a Barnstable High School football game, ‘cause my uncles had all played for Barnstable High School, and those same uncles were on the first Caliers’[?] team here.

ODENCE: Oh, ok, what was their… Her maiden name?

VIEIRA: Rubelo. Manny Rubelo, Vick Rubelo, the twins, Rick, and John, who was killed in World War II. I never met him.[?, whole thing]

TYE: So he came directly living in Cotuit or via New Bedford?

VIEIRA: He… I’m not sure, I don’t know. I’m sure it was told to me, but then I was a little girl and I didn’t ask too many questions. So he got to Cotuit, he then went to New Bedford, where he went to Canada and came home.

ODENCE: And what about your grandfather in Cotuit?

VIEIRA: Where did he live?

ODENCE: What had brought him here?

VIEIRA: I’m not sure, but I know that he and my grandmother did not have a very happy… He came to America a lot. He was gonna make a fortune in America, and my grandmother was totally against it. And he was home twice, and they had two children, so that’s about it for their marriage. I don’t think it was a very happy marriage. And he came here and set up in Cotuit. He was a jeweler in Portugal, but there wasn’t much need for a jeweler in Cotuit, so he became a barber, Manny the barber, and he was right on the corner of…

TYE: Barbershop here, right?

VIEIRA: Yes. And he lived upstairs. He was not a wealthy man at all.

ODENCE: I never connected the dots from Manny the barber to you, so now I got it.

TYE: And did he start… I mean it was called Manny’s so it was his shop…

VIEIRA: I think there was another barber shop at one time, too, his wasn’t the only one. But yeah, everybody went to Manny the barber except me. My mother wouldn’t allow me to have my grandfather cut my hair because, quote, “He takes all day. We don’t have time for this.”

TYE: Wow.

ODENCE: There had been a jeweler in town, as well?

VIEIRA: I know, and that’s probably why he couldn’t become… do that. I don’t know, he was a very free spirit.

ODENCE: It’s just hard to imagine this village. Two barbers, a jeweler.

VIEIRA: A big store on the corner, Sears. Yeah, it’s very hard to imagine that now, and three hotels.

TYE: Stop there for one second, so I didn’t know there was a Sears on the corner.

VIEIRA: Wasn’t Sears and Roebuck’s, Benjamin Sears.

TYE: Ok.

ODENCE: And Sears was an old Cape Cod family from Harwich, I think, that they go way back to, you know, 1600.

VIEIRA: I have a friend who is related to them through the down-Cape.

TYE: What kind of store was it?

VIEIRA: Everything, even coffins. When Tommy Burgess does his walks, I do the research for him. So I get to learn a lot about these places, and… And then he does more research and he tells great stories, and I don’t, but yeah they had a big sign and I recall writing for him that everything that they sold: dry goods, this and that, coffins. I’m like one stop shop, eh?

TYE: That’s great, yeah. And so you grew up here and with siblings who…?

VIEIRA: No siblings, cousins. My four cousins, Manny Rubelo and Marian Dottridge Rubelo lived… their children lived down…

ODENCE: 31 Main I think?

VIEIRA: No, 50-something Highland Avenue they lived at.

ODENCE: Ok.

VIEIRA: They lived at where she still lives on Highland Avenue. And we lived on the corner of… We lived at a house that you know very well on the corner of Louis Pond and Highland Avenue, and so I was within walking distance of these four cousins: two older than me, two younger than me. So we were just one big bunch that went everywhere and did everything together, so I didn’t have brothers and sisters but I had these four cousins that I was very close with and I still am, they still live around here and we’re still very close.

ODENCE: Yeah, I meant the house, the Santuit House.

VIEIRA: Oh yeah, the Santuit House was 31 Main, that was my grandmother’s house.

ODENCE: But 51 Louis Pond, yeah, I got interested in the history of that house when we tore up the floor of the laundry room and found a slab…

VIEIRA: With my initials!

ODENCE: No, your full name!

VIEIRA: My full name?

ODENCE: Vickie Vieira, scrawled in with your index finger, I assume.

VIEIRA: My dad put that in, I assume. That was a very special day at my house. We got a dryer, an electric dryer. This was a big deal, and he had to pour a slab of concrete to keep the dryer even. Oh yeah, we didn’t have a dryer.

ODENCE: And did you ever imagine somebody might tear up that floor and find it? You did? Well that was me.

VIEIRA: I’m really glad!

TYE: So what did your dad do here and what did your mother do?

VIEIRA: My mother cleaned houses. She was the cook for Marianne Odence. And my dad worked for Toman Brothers Masonry Corporation, which no longer exists, but it was in Wianno, and they’re responsible for a lot of chimneys and swimming pools around here.

TYE: And you grew up with Cotuit being the center of your universe or was it…?

VIEIRA: Absolutely, and we walked… You know one thing I was thinking about the other day, there were so many less people then, so many less families, but so many more kids. There were so many kids when I was little, riding their bikes up and down the street, me and my friends, me and my friends walking. We’d walk down to the Cracker Barrel and try to get Mrs. Coleman to sell us an ice cream for less than the five cents that it was. She never did, but we continued to try.

ODENCE: And was it Cracker Barrel Kettle Ho?

VIEIRA: Yes.

ODENCE: And you were next door to Dougie and Ross Nickerson?

VIEIRA: Yes I was, and Jerry Morgan, we had lots of fun together. I had a big crush on Jerry for a little while, but he was 10 years older than I was so my mother convinced me it was hopeless.

ODENCE: Which house was he in?

VIEIRA: Jerry Morgan is Ross’s older brother. Their mother was married to… Phyllis Scutter was a Morgan. That big house that is on the water, left of Main Street, that’s been done over. Not Ocean View, but right next to it. That was the Morgan House, and so she was married to this Morgan man, whose name I don’t know, and they had a son, Jerry, and then he was killed in the war, Mr. Morgan. So she remarried later, now to Nickerson. And they had two more boys, so all three of the boys and Gene and Nelson…

ODENCE: That’s a lot in that small house.

VIEIRA: Yes and that was a very small house!

ODENCE: And Barb Leclair was one of your friends?

VIEIRA: Barb Leclair was one of my best friends. When we went to Cotuit Elementary School, you could walk if you lived the last stop, the closest bus stop to the elementary school was in front of my cousin’s house on Highland Avenue, so I had the choice of walking down Highland Avenue and going on the bus with my cousins, or going up Highland Avenue to school. I walked up Highland Avenue to school and Barb Leclair used to come to my home. We’d meet and walk to school together all the time.

ODENCE: Who were your other buddies?

VIEIRA: Ginger Perry, there were… My class was, I think, 18 people, that was it. All the way from kindergarten, which was not… you had to pay to go to kindergarten, and it was half-day. So not everybody ended up going there. Stewie Rapp was in my class. I’m probably the only person alive who still calls him Stewie.

ODENCE: I’d say two.

VIEIRA: Oh good. Billy Crocker, the youngest of the… Harry Crocker and Clair Crocker’s sons was in my class. David Coleman, who was around doing as an electrician now.

ODENCE: And Ginger Perry was on your street too?

VIEIRA: No, on my street Abigail Burlingame was the only other one. Cyndy Savery, Fred and Ethel Savery’s, Ben and Ailer’s sister Cyndy was a friend of mine.

ODENCE: Jeff Peck was probably…

VIEIRA: Jeff Peck was a year younger than me, but yes. He and Doug Nickerson were the same age.

ODENCE: Right, that’s right.

TYE: Was that far enough to truly need a bus?

VIEIRA: Well there were people down in Kellyville. Now do you know about Kellyville?

ODENCE: Tell us, I want to write a paper about Kellyville.

VIEIRA: I think you should. I don’t know all the history of Kellyville, I just know that after the war, this man named Kelly builds spec, what we would call now, spec houses, I guess he still called them that.

ODENCE: Yeah, it was three brothers and they were from Boston, yeah…

VIEIRA: So they built off down Grove street, that area, and they’re still there, those houses. They were very… they were perfect for… There were a lot of guys who lived at Otis Air Force Base and they needed housing. There were a lot of people home from the war who needed housing, and they sold like hot cakes, and they did the Kellys well. So that was definitely too far for anybody, and I think the Mycocks, no I don’t know if they lived way down there, but some people lived way down there, and the end of Main Street was too far, so there were some people on Main Street who went to school that had to have a bus. The Burlingames for sure. Carol Jones, I don’t know if you know the Joneses, they didn’t live there for very long, but she was down there. Oh the Sousas, both Sousa families. Yeah.

TYE: So a small number…

ODENCE: Jim and Betty?

VIEIRA: Jim and Betty and Joe and… his wife who was Nelson Nickerson’s sister. Buddy Nickerson, that whole bunch there? There were like eight or nine. Big family.

ODENCE: Hard to keep track of the Nickersons around here.

TYE: But you knew everybody in those days?

VIEIRA: Well yes, because of how small the kids, and I remember kindergarten there was no bus, but all the moms did a carpool, so you know, every so often it was my mom’s turn to drive and she’d go round the neighborhood and pick up all the kids and take them to kindergarten. And the school was one of each grade. And we had a principal who we shared with Marstons Mills, so he wasn’t in the building often. One male principal and six female teachers, but then we, by the time I was in sixth grade, we had a male teacher, and he was like… he was very special because he was the male teacher. Yeah.

TYE: And you said eighteen kids in your class.

VIEIRA: I had eighteen, nine girls and nine boys.

ODENCE: Is that about the same size as the other classes?

VIEIRA: At one point I think we went up to 24, we had kids come in and out, but that core 18 stayed and that was the group that left Cotuit Elementary School to go to Barnstable Junior High School, which was a shock for all of us Cotuit kids, ‘cause all of the sudden I went from 18 kids in my classroom to 300 kids.

TYE: Where’s the Junior High School?

VIEIRA: It’s now St. John Paul School. And that used to be Barnstable High School. My mother graduated from there. And so we went there. I was in shock for two years, I was just… I had never seen so many kids. They split all the Cotuit kids up: every single one of us was in a different group.

TYE: Wow, intentionally?

VIEIRA: Yeah, but I didn't like that very much, and I don’t think the other kids did either. And we would drive the bus, Roger Snow, we wouldn’t drive, we would ride the bus. Roger Snow drove the Cotuit which was owned by the Scudders, and then there was the Santuit, which was owned by Tony Hawk, Tony Sousa.

ODENCE: I don’t know who that is.

VIEIRA: He owned the gas station which is now Cotuit Center for the Arts, Tony Hawk, Tony Sousa… his buses were named… he had two different buses.

ODENCE: Cause Sousa meant hawk?

VEIRA: No, he had a nose!

ODENCE: Oh I see.

VIEIRA: And there’s a famous Tony Hawk now, I think he’s a snowboarder, and every time I hear that I think, oh! And those were his granddaughters, he named the bus after his granddaughter. Also Bill Perry had a schoolbus named the Sonia Lynn after his daughter.

TYE: But so it must have been, going from this classic village that has just one grade, one classroom per grade, going into a different world. Did the sense of community get shattered at that point…?

VIEIRA: No, we were tight. As soon as we… we ate at different lunches, but enough of us ate at each lunch we filled a table, and it was like the Cotuit kids had a magnet, and we all sat together for lunch. We all got off the bus together, separated, boom! Back for lunch and back on the bus to go home. So we didn’t lose it, no.

ODENCE: Was there any, I don’t know, how did the Barnstable kids perceive Cotuit kids?

VIEIRA: Oh, we were from the boondocks, oh my gosh. Yeah we were worse than Marstons Mills. They called the Marstons Mills kids the Millbillies, and they didn’t even have a name for us, because it’s like we didn’t even exist. It was like, “Oh Victoria, she’s from Cotuit. Obviously she knows nothing.” That changed in high school. They got to know us, they had two years to get used to us and by the time we all went to high school it was much better.

TYE: But if you’re a kid growing up today, and you were from moment one out of Cotuit, it must have been a totally different sense of what the world was.

VIEIRA: Oh, completely different. I’m so sad that that school is not a school anymore. I can’t even tell you. ‘Cause Mrs. Perry taught first grade. Everybody had Mrs. Perry for first grade. We had a couple of different second grade teachers, I had, I was lucky to have, Mrs. Schmid.

ODENCE: Fran?

VIEIRA: Fran Schmid. I had her twice because she had sons that were older than me. She was the real fifth grade teacher, she was not the third grade teacher, but when her sons got to fifth grade, she switched down to third grade, and then they were gone by the time I got to fifth grade, so she switched back, so I had her twice and she was the best teacher, she was great. It was a very tight-knit… We did little plays, we got up on that tiny little stage and we just had a blast, and we all… I don’t know how to say it. We all felt like we were special, and we owned the place, and we didn’t feel that way at Barnstable Junior High School. Yeah.

TYE: Are any of those teachers still alive, do you know?

VIEIRA: I don’t think so. I don’t know if Helen Asluss might be alive, ‘cause she was younger, but I would think nobody else is, no.

TYE: And was there a sense, when summer came and the village was invaded by summer people, was there a sense that they were coming into your village?

VIEIRA: No, but it was them and us. We weren’t them. I mean I wanted to take sailing lessons, and my mother said, “We don’t do that. Those are the rich kids.” So I learned how to sail[?]. I mean I could learn, but not at the… It’s not that important to me, but yeah there was a, you know, we were not the rich kids, and I don’t know if in anybody else’s home that was said to them, but that was said to me a lot. Who do you think you are, a rich kid?

ODENCE: That’s too bad, there’s much more outreach now, more emphasis given.

VIEIRA: Yes, and we had some friends like some summer people friends, and we had swimming lessons with them and everything. But you know, our parents didn’t do much with them, so because of that we didn’t do that much with them. There would be one or two girls who would come to our birthday parties, like Sydney Savery always had. Some of the people would rent in Kellyville, so she would have… and they lived down off of… they had a new house down there. So some of those girls would come to her birthday party because they knew her more than they knew us.

TYE: And did… are your parents still around?

VIEIRA: No, my mother would be over 100. My mother was born in 1923 and my dad in 1925, and my dad died very early, he was 50. So no, no parents.

TYE: Did they ever do histories at the Historical Society or anywhere taped interviews?

VIEIRA: No, Betty Peck did interviews in the 1970s, but my mother wasn’t that old in the 1970s, so no.

ODENCE: I was very disappointed that Betty didn’t think of that until two years after my grandmother died. I would have loved to have my grandmother around today. But we do have all those, those are all digitized now.

VIEIRA: I have her book.

ODENCE: Yeah, I have one sittin’ here somewhere.

VIEIRA: Yeah, she was great.

ODENCE: To have her record her voice would have been great.

VIEIRA: Well I think my mom worked for the Rothschilds and she worked for your grandfather and she worked for some very wealthy people, so in her mind anybody who could spend the summer here was very wealthy, not just a little bit, you know, had some money and they could leave their place in Boston or wherever and come down and cool off. They were all very wealthy, and we were just regular people, blue collar, you know?

ODENCE: Well in fairness my grandparents were here year-round. Acted like summer people in the summer, I guess.

VIEIRA: But the kids were off and so I think that’s… Yes, my mother worked for them and your grandfather’s favorite thing, God bless his soul, was chicken livers and onions. And he used to say, “Nobody can make them like Margaret,” which was my mom. And so the minute she found out she was pregnant with me, she walked in and said, “I quit!” Your father was like, “No, you can’t! Who’s gonna make my breakfast?”

TYE: So when you think of what Cotuit is now, what has it lost, what has it gained?

VIEIRA: I think it’s lost the really tight sense of community. Not that there isn’t a sense of community here, but it was everybody knew everybody. Everybody also knew everybody’s business, but everybody knew everybody and if there was a problem… Like, I used to go out and walk to my friend’s house. There were no, well there weren’t a lot of sidewalks. But my mother would tell me, “Get on the sidewalk on Main Street.” And that, well, you know, McDowalls, Martha McDowall was my buddy, I’d walk down to her house from Louis Pond Road, it was just a straight shoot. And then her mother would send us to the post office all the time. And often we would go to the post office, and you don’t see kids doing that anymore. Or go down to the Coop and “Here’s 50 cents. Go to the Coop, get milk, get eggs, get two pieces of penny candy and bring me back the change.”

TYE: And you think that that’s because there’s more fear factor, or there is legitimately more reason to be afraid now, or?

VIEIRA: No, I don’t know if anybody’s… I think society has changed and so you don’t just… I mean look at the way we used to ride in the car, or the back of my dad’s truck. I was always in the back, nobody would do that now.

ODENCE: Or a station wagon sitting on the back tail…

VIEIRA: Exactly, so nobody would do that now, and just because they found out, “Oh, probably not a good idea in all cases.” And so even Cotuit has been hit by that bug and it’s true. I think people are right to do that, it’s certainly… I would let my child ride their bike somewhere, but I set down a lot of rules first. My mother never said don’t talk to strangers to me, not once. It’s just the way life is now.

TYE: So can you take us through your history from: You’re growing up here, you got to the elementary school here, then to junior high, then to Barnstable High. And what, away from Cotuit for a while after that or back?

VIEIRA: Well I wasn’t away for long. I love it here and I’m a homebody kind of person, like if somebody told me you can’t travel anymore, I really would say, “Oh I wanted to go…” But it would not be the end of my life. I know people that if you said you can’t travel anymore they would be distraught. I would be fine, I’m a real homebody kind of person. I’ve always loved Cotuit. So I went to Barnstable High School, I was a really good student.

ODENCE: So you did get out of Cotuit. All the way to Barnstable.

VIEIRA: I did, I went to Barnstable High School, I took the college course, and…

TYE: Let me just stop you for a second: Barnstable High, you describe going to junior high and the Cotuit kids, made them dispersed into different classes, but that would hang out if they could together at lunch and on the bus going and coming. At Barnstable High was there the same sense?

VIEIRA: We weren’t quite as tight because we had made a lot of other friends by then. And still, I think Abigail Burlingame was in a couple of my classes. And Diana Newton, in high school, and maybe Sydney Savery too, but I don’t remember a lot of other… And we were all in, Diana, Abigail wasn’t, Diana, Sydney, and I were all in the National Honor Society. And that was pretty good, for three Cotuit kids to be in the National Honor Society that had 20 kids in it.

TYE: So it is, is it because Cotuit kids were especially bright or had gotten a great grounding in education?

VIEIRA: No, I thought we got a great education at Cotuit Elementary School, and it just so happened that that year three of us were… And Ginger Perry would have been too, but she was at private school. There were five girls in the top group. Takes boys longer to catch up. I taught school for 35 years.

ODENCE: That’s even more impressive that you had a majority of the girls in the group.

VIEIRA: And we were a pretty smart bunch. I think we still are a pretty smart bunch, we’re all still alive and kicking. So I really liked art, and I was going to be an interior decorator. And my mom was at that time working for George Clark, who owned the chateau right down the street. And he would let me come in and look at the design books. And he would talk to me about his wallpaper in there and where everything came from. And then one day, he always had classical music playing, one day I heard Maria Callas, and I thought, I said to him, “What is that?” And he said, “It’s an acquired taste, Vickie.” And I didn’t know what acquired taste meant, so he explained it. And he said, “Do you want to borrow some of my records?” And I said yes. He left me a lot of records when he died, and I listened to her and I had always sung. I had always sung, I had solos in church, I had solos at school. But then when I got to high school, my schedule was so full of college prep courses, I couldn’t do it anymore until my senior year and I said, “I finally have extra time, I’m gonna join the chorus.” So I went in and Mrs. Hagan was the chorus director at the high school and she said, “You need to stay after school and sing for me so I can tell if you’re a soprano or an alto.” And I said ok. And she said, “Everybody sings the national anthem,” I said, “Oh, ok.” So I went in and she said, “I’m gonna start it on a G, do you know what a G is?” And I had taken piano lessons with Regina Fuller, and I also play piano by ear. I’ll back up a little. When I was five, I wanted a piano. My parents couldn’t afford a piano, so my dad went to Sears and Roebuck’s, which was in Hyannis, and he bought me a chord organ, it was about this big. It was the predecessor to a small synthesizer. And you pushed buttons for the chords and you had a little keyboard. And he bought it for Christmas for me, and he got two books, well Santa got it for Christmas for me, sorry. And one of the books was Christmas carols and he said, “I will read you the numbers for “Silent Night,” Vickie, and you will play them.” I said ok, and so he read, “5-6-5-3,” [sings melody] that’s what that is. And he says, “That’s silent night,” and I said “No, it’s not,” and I played “Silent Night” with two hands. And he says, “Who showed you how to do that?” I said, “Everybody can do that,” and no. So from that time on I was given piano lessons and a piano. And so I went in and sang for Mrs. Hagan, and she said, “Where have you been the last four years?” and I said, “Chemistry, Biology, Algebra, Geometry, all those classes that you have to take, World History, to go to college.” And she said, “I could have gotten you out of some of those classes if you’d just come,” she was furious with me, and at last I just said, “Well here I am, do with me what you will.” And so I went to all the music festivals, I auditioned and went to all of the festivals, All Cape, Southeast Districts, and All State. And I auditioned for… I took three months of lessons at the Cape Cod Conservatory, and I auditioned for the New England Conservatory and they took me on the spot, so I went there. I wanted to go to another college and major in interior design, and my father said no. New England Conservatory is the best music school in the world, which was arguable, but in his mind it was. “And your mother doesn’t have to get on a plane to visit you, and that’s all I’m paying for.” So I went to New England Conservatory, and it was a big eye opener, because I was the best here, and I was not the best here. But I got a great education, I sang… Berkshire Chorus, the Tanglewood Chorus didn’t exist during the year, it only existed during the summer then, so they needed a choir to sing with the Boston Symphony when the Boston Symphony performed anything that required it, so it was us, it was the New England Conservatory Choir, so I sang with some of the greatest conductors and soloists in the world. Seiji Ozawa above all. I am on a record that won a Grammy. I don’t have the Grammy, Seiji Ozawa has the Grammy. Had it. Somebody’s still got it, and that’s a big loss, let me tell you, I’ve never been so impressed, and with a lot of very excellent musicians. He conducted rehearsals with no score. I’ve seen many conductors conduct a concert with no score, but I’ve never seen anybody conduct a rehearsal. I think Gustavo Dudamel, who is fabulous now, does that also. But I was just… he’d say, “Oboes, measure 75, you played a B-natural, I’m sure I heard a B-natural, but I’m sure it’s a B-flat.” And lo and behold, and it always was, he was always right.

ODENCE: Amazing.

TYE: Did you think you wanted to make a career of music?

VIEIRA: Oh I was sure of it. I was going to sing with the Met. That is exactly what was gonna happen. If you’d have asked me at 21, that was exactly what was going to happen. But what did happen was my father died, and there was no money. And I had been accepted already at graduate school, I was a senior, and I had to call and say I can’t come. It was so difficult. Plus I had lost my dad, we had no money, my mother and I thought we were gonna lose our School Street house. So I went to work, and I worked, I was lucky enough to get a job at Mashpee Elementary School, the Davis School which is now Mashpee Town Hall, and Cape Cod Academy, so I had those two jobs going.

TYE: Teaching music?

VIEIRA: Teaching music. And the second year I was teaching, I thought I was making some decent money and I could probably go back to graduate school, so I made phone calls and my mom said to me… And they said you don’t even have to audition, you were already accepted two years ago, you’re in.

TYE: Where was that?

VIEIRA: New England Conservatory, same place. So I… my mother said, “You better apply for a scholarship, because you know, you can do that now.” When my father was alive, there was not a need. I would never have got a scholarship, I was an only child and he made a decent living, so that was out of the question. So I said ok, so I filled out the paperwork and I send it up and I get this very thin packet back and I think that means I’m not getting a scholarship, but I was wrong and I opened it up it says, “Student has full scholarship.” And then I read these words below it saying “student is below poverty level.” And I look at my mother and say, “I just bought a car? I’m not below poverty.” And I was paying the mortgage on the School Street house, but let me tell you what the mortgage was: $178 a month. And I was furious, and my mother said, “Do you want to argue with them or do you want the money?” I took the money. And it took me four years, because I was teaching the whole time.

TYE: And going back and forth to Boston.

VIEIRA: The first year I was only teaching part-time, so yes, I was going. The bus and I were great friends. I would go to Boston two days a week and fit as many of my graduate classes as I could in two days, and then I could also take, the conservatory allowed me to take, a summer course if it was taught by a New England Conservatory teacher. If it wasn’t, they didn’t want anything to do with it. So I said… my voice teacher, and the head of the voice department, took pity on me and they helped me find places where I could do this. And so my dream was still: soon as I got my masters’ degree I was leaving those children that I was teaching and I was going straight to New York and there would be a sign over the door of the Metropolitan Opera saying, “Thank God you’re here, Vickie!” Well, needless to say, I learned better, but I didn’t even need to really learn that much better because when I… Because it took four years to get my masters’ degree, I fell in love with teaching, and I loved those kids and I loved my job, and so I sang around here as much as I could and I sang summers sometimes, I did a summer away. And I never went to the Met, but I always could pay my mortgage and I think that if I’d gone to New York, that would have been a big problem.

TYE: You stayed for 31 years, you said?

VIEIRA: 35 years I taught at Mashpee. I taught at the Davis School which is now town hall, and after the land suit in Mashpee in the 70s, they built what was then called the middle school, it’s now called the Quashnet School on Old Barnstable Road, so I went there and I taught kindergarten through eight grade, and I got to do some cool stuff because eight graders can sing better than little kids, so we had extra groups and lots of singing and lots of singing in the community. And I worked with great, great kids and great, great teachers.

ODENCE: And a beautiful auditorium.

VIEIRA: Well that’s later, that didn’t exist yet. So when they built the high school the superintendent came to me and said, “Do you want to teach at the high school level?” And before he finished the sentence I said yes. And then I said, “You may have just said a stupid, stupid thing, Vickie,” but I wanted it. But I taught at the high school, and when I retired they named the auditorium after me. So it is the Victoria Vieira Performing Arts Center. I was just there the other day for “Women Rock.” I still don’t understand the whole reasoning behind that, but I’m not gonna argue with them. It’s like take the money, Vickie, take the auditorium!

TYE: And all that time in Cotuit?

VIEIRA: Yes. I lived on School Street, 329 School Street, until… I was married in my 30s. That was not a good thing, it was a very, very, very bad thing. And it didn’t last long. And then I wasn’t married for a long time, and my mom died and I still had the house and I met a wonderful man and married him in my 50s. And he died, very shortly, we weren’t together very long. But before he died he said, “You cannot keep this house. It’s gonna bankrupt you.” That house was moved here. So there was a little camp house in the back where my grandfather, Manny the barber, lived. And it was very undeveloped land there, there wasn’t much. The bog was still running, the Ryder Bog next to the house. And then he died and my dad was to inherit this land. Well turns out my grandfather had never paid taxes, so my dad didn’t really inherit the land. He paid for the land. And he and my mom were planning, this was when they were in their 40s, so it would be the late 60s. They planned to… mid-to-late 60s… build a house there. And he was working on home, a big, big home, on the water in Yarmouth Port. And the guy said, “Bill, can you get somebody to knock that little beach house down, we don’t want it.” And my dad said, “Can I have it?” And Bob Hayden moved it right down Main Street, down School Street, and that’s the front of the house. And my dad built a back that was the same size, so the house that he got was 20 x 40, and then he built another 20 x 40 to the back, so the house was 40 x 40. And I put an addition on the upstairs area in the early 80s. And so that’s where I lived, but it was literally thrown together in pieces and if you went into the attic off of my bedroom closet, you could see outdoors. So my husband was right, and so after he died I sold the house. It was not easy to sell that house, and I loved that house, I couldn’t understand why nobody wanted it, but it was the real estate market at the time, and I bought my house that I live in now off of Putnam. But I have always, always lived in Cotuit, yes. And the real estate agent said to me, “So where are we looking?” And I said, “Cotuit!” And she goes, oh ok, and she showed me a house in Marstons Mills and I said I don’t know why you’re showing me this house, and she said, “Well it’s close to Cotuit,” and I said no.

TYE: So why? Can I stop you there for a second and just ask: What is it that Cotuit has that Marstons Mills or anything else doesn’t?

VIEIRA: If you look at it, nothing. I mean if you just look at the outside of the village of Marstons Mills it’s lovely, the village of Osterville is lovely, but Cotuit has my heart and soul.

TYE: Not just because family was here, but because there’s something about it that’s different?

VIEIRA: I think so, it just pulls you in. My husband, Lou, his name was Lou de Palma. He lived in 27 different countries, he worked for the government, and he had lived all over the world, and he had a house in Centerville, and when he came to Cotuit he was like, “We’re selling my house, I’m moving here.” He loved it, absolutely. He said, there are old Facebook posts where he has pictures of Riley’s and the Loop and he said, “Who would ever want to live anywhere else,” so I think…

TYE: But for you, why?

VIEIRA: I don’t know, I really don’t. I don’t think it’s any one thing, I think it’s something different… It’s like falling in love. You love that person. Other people see that person and they say that person is wonderful, but they don’t fall in love with them. And you do. I think that’s what this is like. I think everybody who gets into Cotuit falls in love with Cotuit. For whatever reason, I think it’s different for everybody, but it’s… Cotuit definitely has a special pull, it’s an amazing place.

TYE: So some of it is the physical place, some of it is the people, some of it is…

VIEIRA: Yeah, I think it’s more the people and the land. I feel rooted here. And I love the people here.

TYE: So you clearly have a sense, a passion for, and have devoted yourself also, to the history of the place with the historical association. When you think of the history of Cotuit, what is it, again, that distinguishes this place from the other villages, from the other towns on the Cape?

VIEIRA: Oh this was *the* place to live! There was no such… Hyannis? Osterville? Maybe Nantucket, maybe New Bedford, but Cotuit was bustling unbelievably. Big, bustling… it wasn’t a city, but for what we had, what was on Cape Cod, it was the place to be, and I think most of us have no idea of that.

ODENCE: And what time frame are you thinking when you say that.

VIEIRA: I’m thinking of the late 1700s all the way through the 1800s. We don’t, you know, people who just get here don’t know any of that, and that’s why I’m so passionate on everybody I see, “You should go down to the historical society and look this stuff up. If you like your house, get down there!” You know, because it’s all available and more and more of it is becoming available.

ODENCE: When were you drawn into the history of Cotuit, I mean?

VIEIRA: Well, Mrs. Shaw was a good friend of my parents and Keith Rapp graduated from high school with my mother, so…

ODENCE: And his mother is Mrs. Shaw.

VIEIRA: Mrs. Shaw is his mother, yes. And she talked, you know, she loved my dad. I don’t know, a lot of people, he was a very, he had a great personality. And my dad used to have… most of our backyard was garden because that’s a Portuguese thing. And he had a magnificent garden. I didn’t like it because the zucchinis were under my bedroom window and I complained and said, “Couldn’t you at least have put some flowers there?” He did, God bless him. But we had, not an abundance, we had an over-abundance of vegetables, and he would take them in Tallman Brothers buckets and leave them on people’s doorsteps. Mrs. Schmid, the Shaws, anybody. Anybody that mentioned anything about, “Oh, I love fresh vegetables,” bang, you got fresh vegetables from Bill Vieira. So Mrs. Shaw just loved my dad, and also Helen Dottridge was a good friend and her daughter, so I remember, 1960-something, ‘7, ‘8? Oh yeah, ‘7 probably, would be the 10th year anniversary of the historical society, so they had a tea and I got to dress up in period costume that was in the attic that no longer exists because it wasn’t taken care of the right way. And Barbara Leclair, Dottridge-Leclair, she did, Jessica was there, Jessica Rapp.

ODENCE: I remember seeing pictures of her next to her grandmother. Are you in that picture?

VIEIRA: I don’t think I’m in that picture but I was there that day. And they had a big tea and a big celebration and I thought: “This place is great!” And ever since then I have liked it, but I was really busy teaching for 35 years so I didn’t do much except go to an occasional strawberry festival or something. Or go in the gift shop, I always liked the gift shop. And I took my husband to a strawberry festival and Jessica sat down. And I took him through the house and I was telling him about the house, and Jessica goes, “You know more about this house than the docents do.” And I said, “Well, the Dottridges are my relatives, you know, so yes I know a lot about it.” And so she talked me into joining the board, and that’s when it all started.

TYE: So it must have been, if you were leaving every day to teach in Mashpee, I would think, no offense to Mashpee, but being in Mashpee during the day would make you come back and relish even more being in the cocoon of Cotuit.

VIEIRA: Yeah, but Mashpee was nice, it was. When I was there, again, there were two of each grade in that school, but it still was…

TYE: Small…

VIEIRA: So it always had a small school population. I think the biggest we had was we might have had 800 between grade 7 and grade 12. But it’s gone back down again. So I always… So I think that’s why I liked that school so much, I felt very much at home in that little Mashpee school and in that little school system where we had one principal and everybody knew everybody, and I think that might have had something to do with it, so I didn’t mind being in Mashpee. But I tell you, driving down Quinaquisset Avenue, you get some of the best views, that the color down the beginning of Quinaquisset and when the snow’s sticking like it’s sticking today, and that’s another one. And that was my route to get to School Street, I was up and down Quinaquisset Avenue, before [?], before… I mean nobody used Orchard Road unless they lived on it.

ODENCE: So just connect the dots to the Dottridges.

VIEIRA: So the Dottridges are related to me through marriage. My mother’s brother, Manny Rubelo, married Marianne Dottridge, who was the youngest of Orman and Lila’s children, and…

ODENCE: And Betty Peck did a recorded history with Lila?

VIEIRA: With Lila, yes. Lila was a character. I’ll just leave it at that. I don’t want her to go down in history as being not a nice lady because she was a nice lady, but don’t get on her bad side. And she had three daughters and all three of her daughters married Portuguese men, and she did not like the Portuguese people. But her daughters did. So anyhow, that’s how I’m related to… Those are my cousins. They’re Dottridges. I’m not a Dottridge, I’m not on that family tree that Jim Gould put up there, but my relatives are.

TYE: How much did you maintain your ties to Portuguese-American community here.

VIEIRA: Pretty much. I have only been there twice. My dad was always afraid to go back, he was afraid he’d get thrown in jail because he left illegally, so we never went back when he was alive. I’ve been there three times. Sorry. My mother and I went in the early ‘80s. I got a thing in the mail to go to a Bach music festival, and I saw one of the singers that was performing, I thought, “Wouldn’t I like to this,” and then I saw that in was in Funchal, Madeira, which is where my dad lived, and I said to my mother: “I think we should go on a trip this summer,” And she said, “You’re going to graduate school this summer, how are we going to pay for…” But we did go. And we paid for the trip and we had a wonderful time and I met my father’s sister, which was a big deal to me. I wanted her to take me to where my grandmother, where they used to live, and where my grandmother was buried. But she never did, and I said to my mother, “Why did she keep putting this off?” And my mother said, “Because they’re in a lower class now then they used to be and they don’t want you to know,” and that’s a big deal. So I’m sure I could go now and find my grandmother. But it’s fine. I never met her, so.

ODENCE: Do you know what brought the Rubelos here?

VIEIRA: Well my grandfather’s part of the Rubelos lived on Sao Miguel. And they were ok, they were pretty well to do, but they wanted a better life for their children, so that’s why they came to America. My grandmother’s family lived on Pico, which is very poor island, very, very poor. And she was the oldest of 10 children. Her aunt had no children and was coming to America, and said to her parents, “Let me take Maria, and she’ll have a better life.” She was 14. She thought her parents were throwing her away. And she had terrible sea sickness, which my cousin Cathy inherited from her. My grandmother couldn’t even go down to the Loop and sit, she would… So you can imagine what it was like to be coming to America in steerage. So her aunt got her a job cleaning in New Bedford, and she had a boyfriend. And her aunt did not think he was the right one. So her aunt told her she would find somebody for her, and she found my grandfather, who my grandmother did not think was the right one, but she had no choice. So they had an arranged marriage and they were fine, but I don’t think it was the best thing for either one of them. But yeah. So that’s how they got here. And they came to Santuit because my grandfather’s father had heard of the other Portuguese, there were a lot of Portuguese people who lived up in Santuit and they farmed. And he had heard this was a fairly good thing to do, so they came here to do that. That was the idea.

TYE: So when you were growing up with those strong connections to Portugal, was there as… I don’t know when the Brazilian community on the Cape started expanding, but they were different worlds?

VIEIRA: It wasn’t here. Totally different, no wasn’t here when I was little. We had the Holy Ghost Hall, which we didn’t have a hall, there wasn’t a hall when I was little. They did the celebrations at the Grange, which is now Saint Michael’s Church.

ODENCE: What was it called?

VIEIRA: Yeah it had a good name, and I know it, and maybe it will come back to me. But anyhow that’s where they did everything, so…

ODENCE: … Grotto.

VIEIRA: Yes but it had another name. Anyhow, the Church, the Catholic church, used to be up there. Now my grandmother and grandfather didn’t used to always live at 31 Main Street, so before it was closer for them to come to the Cotuit church here on School Street. So that’s where my parents were baptized. My mother and her brothers are all Protestant. But their parents are Catholic. On my father’s side of the family, his mother is Jewish and his mother is Baptist. And she sent her children to Catholic school because it was the 1930s and Hitler was around, and she was very worried about her children, so she wanted nobody to know that she was Jewish, because the Jewish law is that if your mother is Jewish, you are Jewish. So I’m not, because it was my father who was Jewish. And so, the Baptist-Jewish guy comes to America and he marries the Catholic-Protestant girl, and they get me. So I’m a little bit of everything.

TYE: Ecumenicalist.

VIEIRA: Very ecumenical. So I don’t remember the question.

TYE: We were talking about the Brazilians.

VIEIRA: Oh, the Brazilians, no. But Saint Jude’s was up on Route 28, and that’s where there was a big feast of the Holy Ghost, which is Pentacost time. And so, we, that was a big celebration. We would march down in a little parade on a Sunday down Route 28. And nobody had a problem with that. To the hall, to the Grange Hall and there would be *sopa doce*[?], which is a kind of egg drop soup, and another just plain *sopas*[?], which I liked better. And there was lots of drinking and there was lots of merriment. So the Portuguese community was pretty well knit here. We had lots of friends, you know, my parents… We were not allowed to speak Portuguese in my house because my father wanted to me an American so badly, and so he did not allow it. And so I…

TYE: You don’t have any, or you do? Portuguese?

VIEIRA: I can say things like [speaking Portuguese]: “There goes my suitcase.” I can call you some names that I won’t. And I can say, you know, “Looks like it’s gonna rain today,” nothing too… But I will tell you that I can say it like I am from Portugal because that’s what I always heard, and I found out that that’s not always a good thing because I would go to Portugal and I would come down in the morning and say *bom dia senhor*, and they would start and I would say, “No, no, stop right there.”

TYE: That’s the end of it.

VIEIRA: My grandmother used to, you know, they’d speak, especially my mother and my grandmother, when they didn’t want me to know what’s going on, would speak in Portuguese, yes.

ODENCE: Were the original Portuguese drawn because of guys off ships who would…?

VIEIRA: I’m not sure, I know it was a farming community here and they were mostly Azorean.

ODENCE: My guess was they worked on ships, and as that wound down they needed something to do.

VIEIRA: And that is why, according to Tommy Burgess, don’t quote me, but that is why a lot of houses that were not grand in Santuit have front porches, because that’s a big thing in the Azores. Everybody’s got a front portico. So if you look at that Amelia Frasier, do you remember Amelia who I used to work with?

ODENCE: Oh of course…

VIEIRA: That wasn’t her…

ODENCE: Yeah I forget her…

VIEIRA: …married name. Fenner! That front house, the house that is across the street from 31 Main has a front porch there. Those were all people from the Azores and they did things the way that they were used to them.

ODENCE: And Amelia, you and I just understood each other, but she worked the cash register at the Coop!

VIEIRA: Amelia, she and Marianne Jones, Marianne Morris, Marianne Jones, and Barbara Leclair. Barbara was there a lot. And that place was the best, I gotta tell you. Was there a huge selection? No. Today we have apples, tomorrow we’ll have pears. Whatever! But it was just, there was… You got whatever you needed there. You were treated like royalty there, the Crockers. I called Mr. and Mrs. Crocker grandma and grandpa Crocker. And Harry was there, you know, running everything, and then they had a few meat managers. The last one was Mr. Lou.

ODENCE: Lou, he was the one I remember.

VIEIRA: He was fabulous, he used to give us the off cuts of the steak for our cat.

TYE: Nice.

VIEIRA: That cat ate well, let me tell you. But you could, you know, the meat there was fabulous, there was always a big round of cheddar cheese and everybody would come and you could just take a big piece and walk around the store, but eventually you were expected to buy something at some point. And the bread, I remember where everything was in that store too. That’s amazing, boy.

ODENCE: Yeah, I remember the little small shopping carts.

VIEIRA: Yeah, and once they got a new cash register and a counter with a belt on it. That didn’t last, let me tell you.

ODENCE: I don’t remember that.

VIEIRA: No, grandma Crocker did not like that one bit, that lasted maybe a week.

ODENCE: You know, you mentioned, and we should probably wind it up soon, but you mentioned a Cracker Barrell. I don’t remember, and I obviously heard that’s what the Kettle Ho’ was, but I don’t remember a Cracker Barrell, so what was that like?

VIEIRA: It was the Kettle Ho’, and there was a soda fountain. What was now the bar.

ODENCE: Yeah, just like the Kettle Ho’ was *then*.

VIEIRA: Right, so that was a soda fountain and the left-hand side had cards. That’s where you could buy greeting cards, all kinds of greeting cards and at certain times candy, boxes of candy, you could buy a box of candy and a card right there. And there was one little checkout on the corner, and you waited. And that was my bus stop when I went to high school, so my dad would drive me. We would watch the channel four Don Kent and Jack Chase news, and then I would get in the truck and we would drive down to the end of the road and he would drop me off and there was a convocation of kids there. Everybody who lived nearby got on the bus there, but you would go into the Kettle Ho’, by then it was Kettle Ho’, go in and you would buy your gum and your candy… for school. And I didn’t get off the bus there, the bus brought me up to Grove Street. But if you got off there, you also went back in and got more gum and candy.

TYE: So I want to say that you are probably the youngest person that we have interviewed.

VIEIRA: Oh I’m so happy to hear that, ‘cause I’ve been feeling… I’ve still been teaching but now it’s much less, but I teach in Bourne once a week and I have wonderful students there, and we were talking about All Cape music festival, and I was getting them ready, and I said, “When I was in high school, the All Cape music festival was in Bourne,” and they looked at their regular music teacher and said, “Is that when you were in high school” And I said, “Oh no, honey,” and I wish there was a camera there to capture their faces when I said the words: “That was in 1972.” The shock on these kids’... I might as well have said that was 10 years after George Washington was president, it would have been the same thing. So I’ve been feeling old, so thank you!

TYE: Anything else?

ODENCE: No I think we’re good.

VIEIRA: Thanks a lot, I don’t know I rambled a lot!

ODENCE: No, really good.