

Subject: Betsy Siggins
Transcriber: Zoe Rosenberger

Siggins: Was still alive.

Tye: So Jane, can I tell you, I did a, uhm, a long interview about Cotuit and about jazz with Jane...

Siggins: Oh, good.

Tye: ...shortly before she died, and I just gave it to her children. There is a memorial, as you know, on Saturday.

Siggins: Yeah, yeah.

Tye: And I wanted them to if they wanted have live voice of Jane, not long before she died, and she was extraordinary. She knew, so her dad.

Siggins: I know the collection. I was the.

Tye: You knew the collection?

Siggins: Oh, yeah.

Tye: But she also, so somebody I, Jane was totally sharp when I got to her. Somebody who wasn't sharp, who was wonderful to talk to, even though he couldn't remember much, was Jack Bradley...

Siggins: Yeah, absolutely.

Tye: ...who was amazing. He donated all of his amazing photos to the, uhm, so he, his, it was really an interesting session because his wife knew all of the answers he should have been giving to the questions. And she was trying to extract from him the memory of it, and you could see the pain on his face in not being able to remember. Jack Bradley, an old Cotuit-ite, the, spent endless

time with Louis Armstrong traveling with him, as his friend and photographer. And he had these amazing photo collections. But he also had incredible stories. So since I did that interview, I read everywhere else Jack's memory of things that were really important about Armstrong that very few people knew. So if we could start with, and I think we're all vaccinated, and, and...

Siggins: Oh, yeah.

Tye: ...won't be running any, come a little closer. Uhm, as I said, the defining question is, uhm, what makes Cotuit what it is? But I'd love to start with you, just your story, and when you came to Cotuit, and why?

Siggins: You running?

Tye: I am, and I'm nervous as you a, uh.

Male Speaker: You wanted to do the, who it is, and who we are, and what the date is.

Tye: Yeah, great. So the date is.

Male Speaker: 28.

Siggins: 28, haha.

Tye: 28. So July 28th 2001[2021?]. And, uhm, we are here with Betsy Siggins in her backyard, as she is, uhm, getting healthier. And you came here when?

Siggins: Uhm, my dad had summered in Falmouth, all of his childhood. My grandmother owned a house on Mill Road, Mill Street in Falmouth. And the family came there for probably decades and decades, uhm.

Tye: I'm going to, by the way, occasionally look at this. I'm a non, uhm, audio-video person. And we did one interview that was a great interview, and then discovered afterwards, there was nothing, so I just keep looking because it's so light out. You can't see the red light, but I can only see, so there it seems to be working perfectly.

Siggins: Okay. So when my dad, we lived in New York City during the war, cause my dad was a naval architect. And he was working at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. And he was redesigning World War I vessels for World War II, uhm. And then he got a job at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, that brought us back. And I, I seem to remember that he didn't have great memories of the end of their life in Falmouth, so he picked Cotuit.

Male Speaker: Just, just random, huh?

Siggins: I don't know if it was random, but it feels like it was.

Tye: So that would have been around when?

Siggins: '47/'48.

Tye: '47/'48.

Siggins: Uhm, so we packed up the old car in New York, uhm. My dad had recently married Bernice Jackson, and she had a very young daughter. So the four of us moved here. And the first house we lived in was the Old Sheffield house, on Piney Road and Main Street.

Male Speaker: Okay.

Siggins: The big house on the.

Male Speaker: The one that sits up.

Siggins: Yep.

Male Speaker: Yep.

Tye: The big, the white one that's deteriorating a bit lately.

Siggins: I don't know. But, uhm, when we moved in there, we, there was no heat. We had to shovel I didn't, but my dad, or somebody, had to shovel coal into the pit, uhm. And then the house that I actually spent more time in, which was the corner of Putnam and Maine, across from the grocery store, uhm, that too had no heat. I don't know how we survived it, but we did, and.

Tye: And you were there summers, or how long?

Siggins: Full-, full-time.

Tye: You were full-time here? Wow.

Siggins: Yes, from '48 on until my father died in a car crash in 1960. By then, I was close to, I was in college, and I was at BU.

Tye: At the same house, by the way, here all the time?

Siggins: Yes, yes, uhm.

Male Speaker: And your dad was, uhh, designing a big research vessel that was?

Siggins: He designed the Atlantis I, and he was working on the Atlantis II when he died.

Tye: Hmm.

Siggins: Uhm. So after that I did, I did not have a home here, uhm. I was in Boston for a long time. And came back here probably in the, let's see, the late '60s/early '70s. And build the Little House on Poponessett Road with my second husband, uhm. And the years just rolled by, we would come in the week-, we would come weekends, we would drop, drive up here from New York City for a weekend.

Tye: Wow.

Siggins: What was I thinking? Hahahaha. Leaving New York at 5am in the morning.

Tye: Can I stop you for one second? So, the, from the time that you went off to be you when he died, uh, to the time you came back, was there a sense that this was so somewhere heavenly worth that you wanted to come back to, or you just happened to?

Siggins: I wouldn't say heavenly, uhm, but I was drawn back here, uhm. It was, it's really the only roots I feel like I have now. And, uhm, luckily my whole family feels the same way. Uhm, Dad was a big sailor, he sailed in all the little crew races. I don't know that he was very good, but he loved it. And he wrote several books about the ocean when he was still alive, obviously, uhm.

Tye: And about Cotuit?

Siggins: No, no. These were really research books for the Oceanographic, uhm.

Male Speaker: And when you say he was racing, was that with the CMYC?

Siggins: Yeah.

Male Speaker: Okay, I didn't realize he was so out there.

Siggins: He built with Leonard, he built one of the first skiffs in '58/...

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: ...'59, maybe 1960.

Male Speaker: And was that minus flight?

Siggins: Yep.

Male Speaker: Okay.

Siggins: And they worked in Nicky, what's his name?

Male Speaker: Moore.

Siggins: Nicky Moore's yard was the boat yard.

Male Speaker: Right.

Siggins: So we would go over there and pester all the adults while they were trying to build a boat, haha.

Tye: And have you been here since you move back in the late '60s, uhm?

Siggins: Pretty much, pretty much.

Tye: And at some point, transferred from being seasonal to being year-round?

Siggins: Yes, I mean, I, I retired from my day job at Passim, 19-, 2009. And so we, we'd some-, somehow Ronnie Michotte said, "I got a piece of land, land. It's not very expensive, but if you want it, you can have it." So dealing with him is a trip.

Tye: That was this?

Siggins: Yes. Yeah.

Tye: Wow.

Siggins: And so we had friends build this. Uhm, Walters-, Walter Schmidt. He and his crew built this house.

Tye: Can I ask you a dumb question? We're on Rushy Marsh. And I see on, uhm, what I assume is McCourt property all the time, Rushy Marsh...

Siggins: Farm.

Tye: ...Farm, uhm.

Male Speaker: It's that Marsh.

Tye: It is. But this, that predated, I thought he might have gone and found some name for himself, but the Rushy Marsh predated everything else that has been here?

Siggins: Correct.

Tye: And as we're looking out here, can you orient, what would, what is out here? You said his, you said McCourt stuff?

Siggins: You go, if you went down Rushy Marsh Road on foot. You walk out of here and you go left, you'll hit the back of his property in five minutes.

Tye: Which piece of, what part of his properties?

Siggins: Uhm, it's, it's the back end, behind the stables and the gardens.

Tye: Okay, ah. So I've walked near here with a guy who was a fan of yours, who told me we had the see you some time, Jim Heck.

Siggins: Oh, yeah.

Tye: But his, his place is out?

Siggins: He's on Pinquickset Cove.

Tye: That's down here?

Siggins: Yes, he's a great guy.

Tye: Okay. Uhm, my wife is also a big fan of yours.

Siggins: I like your wife very much, hahaha.

Tye: Oh, that's funny. So you go away, uhm, to college, you come back as a seasonal, uhm. You said, when I said, "Paradise," you said, "Not quite paradise." But what is it? You now know Cotuit better than I presume you know just about anywhere?

Siggins: I don't know, I don't know that that's true.

Tye: So what do you like about Cotuit?

Siggins: It just, it's comfortable.

Tye: Well, could you say the same thing about anywhere on Cape Cod or this is something to Cotuit?

Siggins: I don't know, I've never lived anywhere else on the Cape. Well, I was like three and five, and yeah.

Tye: So are you a, uhm, do you think there's something about this that really makes it different, or it just happens to be where you are, and you're living in a beautiful setting here?

Siggins: Both things are true. I, I, when my dad moved here, uhm, he had gone to Harvard, and then to Haverford. And he had, he was friends with a lot of the old, original people, who come here from Harvard, uhm, the Lowell's, other people like that, who summered here, uhm. And they sort of kind of knew each other a lot. And they played tennis together, uhm.

Male Speaker: Well, that kind of suggests that might not have been random if he knew them.

Siggins: Well, he knew them from Harvard. Yes, that's true.

Male Speaker: So that he probably was aware of Cotuit, at least for that thing.

Siggins: Oh, yeah.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Tye: So one of the things that, uhm, Jim told us about Cotuit is, I always assumed that Cotuit was a really nice place at a convenient end of the cape if you had to get to Cambridge or Boston or wherever. He's, and I said, "But, geez, the cool part of the Cape, the Cape that is the literary part of the Cape is Wellfleet, it's Truro, it's Provincetown." And he said, "But wait a minute. Cotuit was the literary part of the Cape before they were." That because President Lowell was here, he attracted enough people who were his colleagues or his friends, that if you had picked one place 50 years earlier, that was the centerpiece of an arts and a creative world that would have been here. Do you see any, in the time that you've been here, do you see any indication of that, that this is a place for interesting literary and arts?

Siggins: I think it's more so now in the last 10 years. I think the Cahoon Museum, I think the Cotuit Center for the Arts. All of that has really enriched Cotuit and interested different people to it. I mean, we're a pretty white town.

Tye: We are a pretty white town, haha.

Siggins: Hahaha, in fact, haha, uhm.

Tye: Are we an entirely white town?

Siggins: I don't know. Well, I would say 90%. I mean, if you see, see an African American is, it's out of the, you know, norm for a year. And that's too bad. But given the real estate world now, it's very hard for people to buy here.

Tye: Can I stick with that, and I, uhm, for a second? The, there are two reasons this could be a largely white town. One is because most of the Cape is largely white.

Siggins: Right.

Tye: And the other is because it was consciously, uhm, from real-estate people, or from whatever reasons, it was consciously white. And we've heard both versions of it.

Siggins: Well, I'll give you another little example. When my father married Bernice Jackson, who was then Bernice Minot. She was Jewish, and she didn't keep it hidden. And a number of the older Cotuit people did not like her because she was. I felt the sting, as did my younger sister who never comes back here because she has nothing but bad memories of how Bernice was treated.

Tye: So I want to stick with that for a second. One of the people that we interviewed, brought a brochure, was it Pines Hotel?

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Tye: From the Pines Hotel, and opened it up and showed us a very strange thing stamped in it. Not it was part of the original printing, but it was stamped in it, and it said, my memory is "No Jews Welcome," or "No Jews."

Male Speaker: It was a little politer than that. "Jewish clientele are not welcome."

Tye: Yes, so there really was a very sting.

Siggins: Oh, yeah.

Tye: Huh, uhm.

Siggins: Uhm, you know, Leonard and Betty were good friends of my family's, uh, always, uhm. The Schmidts were good friends, the Haydens were good friends. But outside of that, it was pretty much, Bernice was on her own. She was teaching piano to young kids here in town, uhm. It wasn't a happy memory for me in that, in that setting, uhm. And I was glad to get away when I went to college because I would, I was too artsy-craftsy for Cotuit, uhm. But interestingly enough, Jane Hayden sort of took me under her wing in the third grade and never varied. She stood up, stood up for me in ways that you wouldn't imagine, cause I was the Jew's daughter.

Tye: So Jane is also somebody who told me about Anti-Semitism.

Siggins: Yep.

Tye: That was, and she, now that you're saying it, she thought that it was partly traceable to the things that you're talking about a general attitude in town and partly traceable to a certain real estate agent or agents who consciously steered, uhm, people here or people away from here.

Siggins: Mhm.

Tye: Do you think it exists still?

Siggins: I don't know. I don't think so, cause I think money tops everything.

Male Speaker: That's my sense.

Siggins: Yeah.

Tye: What other, uhm, memories so you've got all kinds of different memories, memories of seasonal, memories of year-round, memories of when you were younger, memories of when you're more mature. What other the memories do you have of Cotuit in terms of how it is changed? And what makes it an interesting and unique place?

Siggins: Well, in my teen years, uhm, Leonard Peck would host square dances in people's lawns, on people's lawns. And we were always part of the team that, uhm, got to do that as the demonstrators for the summer folks. But we had a ball, we just love doing it. And we look forward to that every summer, uhm.

Tye: Were they on a certain day of the week? Were they on a?

Siggins: I don't know. I would say wee-, weekends probably.

Tye: Everybody invited, or a certain group that was his pals?

Siggins: Oh, I think it was Cotuit Mosquito Yacht Club-driven. I think those folks knew about it and. (*Speaks to someone else*) Watch that. Okay. (*Back to Tye*) Uhm, but those are happy memories. I mean, I'm still in touch with Jimmy White.

Male Speaker: Really?

Siggins: Yes.

Male Speaker: Haha, wow.

Siggins: It's amazing. He hasn't been back here in 100 years. And I keep, every year I say, "Is this the year you're gonna come back?" But, uhm.

Male Speaker: And is he the oldest of?

Siggins: Jimmy? No, Dick was.

Male Speaker: No, no.

Siggins: No?

Male Speaker: Not Dick. Uhh, Tom would have been.

Siggins: Right, right, right, right, right.

Male Speaker: Yeah, and Dick's still around, but, uh, Terry died this week.

Siggins: Yeah. But we used to go out to their house when they lived down the river a little bit.

Male Speaker: Point, point Isabella?

Siggins: Point Isabella, yeah. And they had an open house all the time. And everybody was invited. And we would go there for meals and square dancing, and probably some kissing.

Tye: Hahaha, ahh.

Siggins: I said it, hahaha.

Male Speaker: No wonder you're still in touch.

Tye: So you also lived in the heart of the village, uhm, at least when you were growing up?

Siggins: Yup.

Tye: The, how much different sense was the heart of the village then versus what it is today?

Siggins: I don't know. I, I feel things like the library, uhm, has helped grow the, you know, grow the community. Uhm, I didn't used to think that because I didn't know that. Uhm, but the touchstones were the library. When I, again when I was still in high school, the house at the end of, uh, School Street, you know the one you would drive into if you wanted to, haha, that used to be a drugstore, and they had a jukebox.

Tye: Wow. Aha.

Siggins: And we would go there after school and dance.

Tye: What kinds of music would have been on that jukebox?

Siggins: Well, luckily, there was some country western, like Kitty Wells.

Tye: Wow.

Siggins: I mean, it really was interesting, and we would have the greatest time there. And the other place was the Kettle Ho was, which the Perry's ran. And I think it was there that I went after I smoked my very first cigarette and got violently ill. And I think Mr. Perry or Mrs. Perry had to call my father. I didn't smoke again for a very long time. But those are the hotspots in town. And I think anybody was welcome, uhm. And so our, our lives kind of circled around those incidents. Now the one incident that Jane and I had talked about, uhm, before she died for her birthday, she had six of her old friends for lunch at Anne Tools' house. And she wrote down all the memories for each person, which I have.

Tye: Oh, wow.

Siggins: And she did not forget to remind me that on my behalf, we skipped school one afternoon. And Mrs. Crawford was sick, and so we had to substitute. And I said, "Hmm, let's get out of here." So we went up to Mr. Gordon's farm, and we, the barn was up and.

Male Speaker: And where is that?

Siggins: Oh, uhh, Rope, Ropes' house.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: The barn was.

Male Speaker: Behind, oh, yeah, yeah.

Siggins: Yeah. And so we played in the barn all afternoon, and nobody knew where we were. And did we get crap when we got back.

Tye: Hahaha.

Siggins: We got thrown out of the Girl Scouts for skipping school.

Tye: Wow, one day? Geez.

Siggins: Yeah, one afternoon, uhm.

Tye: Incredible, wow. And the school then you will going to?

Siggins: Was where the post office is.

Tye: Yes. And that was school, what grades?

Siggins: I think, hmmm, I was out of there by sixth grade. So one to six.

Tye: After six, where did you go?

Siggins: I, I went to Barnstable High School for about a year and then I went away to school.

Tye: Uh-huh, where did you go away to?

Siggins: I went to the Lincoln School, a Quaker school in Providence, Rhode Island. Then I went to small, artsy, prep school of Darien called the Cherry Lawn. It's not there anymore. But it was packed with kids from divorced Broadway stars.

Tye: Wow.

Siggins: Like I'm still very, very close to, uhm, Gwen Verdon's son, who happened to be in my class.

Tye: And then it was BU, majoring in?

Siggins: Theater.

Tye: Theater, hmm.

Male Speaker: Well, you know, we talked to Reed Higgins and had a sen-, you know, we asked him sort of what was that? We talked to a lot of summer folks.

Siggins: Sure, sure.

Male Speaker: To have sense for summer. And so I said, "You know, what did you, what did you do in the winter?" And it was, you know, it was a lot of going off in the woods and starting fires, you know, boy, you know, going down to the town dock, boy things. So, what were more, and I

have a sense for dancing, you know, dancing at the drugstore. But what other sort of girl things, did you do?

Siggins: Well Fran Schmidt...

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: ...who ran a wonderful program in the arts, and we had a theatre production at Freedom Hall every winter.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: We're always in it, whatever it was.

Male Speaker: Yeah, yeah.

Siggins: Uhm, and that, that filled a lot of our time.

Male Speaker: Yeah, I bet. Sure.

Siggins: And it was, it was great. I loved the.

Male Speaker: Lots of rehearsal and all that, I guess?

Siggins: Yeah, yeah. So that was one of my, also, uhm, I guess I was 16, when Bernice was hired to do the publicity for Highfield theater, when it was all Gilbert and Sullivan. Well, from 15 on, every summer, I was in Gilbert and Sullivan, in the chorus.

Tye: And again, at Freedom Hall?

Siggins: No, this was at Highfield.

Tye: Highfield. Was Freedom Hall, uhm, a much used community center?

Siggins: I feel like it was.

Tye: Hm.

Male Speaker: I've heard reference to a talent, talent show.

Siggins: Oh yeah.

Male Speaker: Talent show, you know, that was certainly before my time.

Siggins: Jane had some photographs of us on that stage at age 12. I don't know where, you know, whether Catherine has gone through them, or what, you know, where they are, but they were just fabulous photographs. We did, we had to (*Garbage truck honks*). That's the garbage truck.

Male Speaker: Ah, okay. We always attract noisy things when we're doing these interviews. We're like, there's nobody doing weed whacking.

Siggins: Hahaha.

Tye: Will you be talking on Saturday at the memorial?

Siggins: I don't know.

Tye: Question of health, in just getting over?

Siggins: No, question of, uh. (*Someone speaks distantly*). Can you move your car?

Tye: Sorry, sure.

Random Man: Just pull the bottom part here, cause the truck's gonna come up that side.

Tye: Great.

Male Speaker: So you'll get, you'll, you'll get yourself, somebody will get you?

Siggins: Yeah, Deb Schilling is taking me.

Male Speaker: Yeah. What time is that?

Siggins: Five to seven.

Male Speaker: Five to seven. Okay. There's a yacht club fundraiser.

Siggins: I know, I know. Jennifer asked me if I wanted to go. I said, "I can't do two things."

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: She's been great to me.

Male Speaker: Yeah, it was fun, fun having her down here now.

Siggins: Yes.

Male Speaker: Who would have ever thought?

Siggins: No one, hahaha. And that's quite a house she's built.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: Beautiful.

Male Speaker: Yeah, it's something. (*Short pause*). Well, I guess we can keep going. But one, one of the things I'm interested in is, who are some of the characters in town you remember? I'll put Leonard on the list for you. But I'm sure, haha.

Siggins: Ohh, what a pain in the ass he was.

Male Speaker: Yeah, true. But.

Siggins: Oh, no, he was a fabulous guy, but made life difficult for a lot of people, including his wife! Haha.

Male Speaker: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you a little vignette. When the, uh, you'll remember that the name of the talk Francis Mind was cloaked in secrecy, before the christening, nobody knew the name. And, uh, I think Betty made a, made a comment to me that she said, "Your father will be pleased." And Jeffrey picked up on that and assured me that the new tug/Tye(?) was being named after my grandfather. And never, never came clean until you know, I did, never said anything until the unveiling. And I'm and I'm thinking, "Who's Francis Mind?" (*He and Siggins laugh*).

Siggins: Well, that was, that was a treat. Sorry, haha. It was a true testament to, uhm, Leonard's affection for my dad.

Male Speaker: Oh, absolutely.

Siggins: And your dad also was wonderful with my father.

Male Speaker: Ah, I didn't know that.

Siggins: Yes.

Male Speaker: I mean, I knew they were acquainted, and I knew he liked them.

Siggins: Well, yeah, I, I think the ocean probably brought them together.

Male Speaker: Sure.

Siggins: But your, your dad would come to the Pecks for dinner.

Male Speaker: Yes.

Siggins: And my father was always there.

Male Speaker: Yeah, hah.

Siggins: But my father tells a funny story. He said, “You know, as silly as it sounds, I would never go to the Pecks for dinner, if there wasn’t a man there. I didn’t think it was proper.” Now remember, my father was born in 1893.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: So you didn’t go to a woman’s house if she was having a dinner, unless there was another man in the room.

Male Speaker: Okay.

Siggins: Really old-fashioned.

Male Speaker: So Leonard wasn’t necessarily there?

Siggins: Right.

Male Speaker: Okay, I got it. So Leonard was off teaching and, in high school, or something?

Siggins: Might have been, yeah.

Male Speaker: Yep.

Siggins: But I, you know, I remember Leonard like many people do as being a lot of different things. You know, I think he never, I think he never got over not getting a teaching job at Harvard.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: And it colored the rest of his life.

Male Speaker: No, he was certainly a cynic, and a long-term cynic and bitter guy.

Siggins: Yup.

Tye: Leonard was Jane's father?

Male Speaker: No.

Siggins: No, Bob Hayden was Jane's father. The Haydens were five kids and they lived on Piney Road.

Tye: And he was the one with the extraordinary collection of record.

Siggins: That's right.

Male Speaker: Yeah, yeah. But Leonard Peck was across the street...

Siggins: Right.

Male Speaker: ...and he was, uh, you know, kind of a literary guy, an English teacher but, but, uh, a boat builder and harbor master as well.

Tye: So Jane kept saying during the interview, “You’ve got to come by and look at the record collection.” And I said, I would do it when she was well, and could do. So can I ask you something about, uhm, the music scene here? My sense now, uhm, is other than the few things we read in the paper and things that are coming in from elsewhere, uhm, there isn’t the kind of rich music scene that there once was on the Cape. And I keep hearing about Ellington or Armstrong coming to Storyville, or coming somewhere on the Cape. How much when you’re growing up here, was there a vibrant music scene here in Cape Cod?

Siggins: Well, I had Gilbert and Sullivan every summer. Uhm, I had theater in the Freedom Hall with Fran Schmidt. Uhm, when I got to Boston, I, one of the places I went to was Storyville, when George Wein owned it.

Tye: He, by the way, just before the pandemic, my last interview before the pandemic, in New York, was at George’s apartment. And the good news was that he was, his mind was totally sharp. And the bad news was after the interview, sort of had to help him stand up and...

Siggins: Yeah, yeah.

Tye: ...not physically in good shape, but.

Siggins: Well, he’s a billion-years-old.

Tye: He is a billion-years-old.

Siggins: And he’s not gonna die, hahaha.

Tye: I’m sure he’ll never die. I just was in touch with his assistant, and told her new questions I had to ask him. And she said, “He’s totally sharp and he’ll be able to answer everything.”

Siggins: Yeah, yeah.

Tye: But he was, was he a force then?

Siggins: Oh, yeah. One of the memories I have is, he would look the other way when those of us who were only 18.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: Yes, he'd do this (*Literally look away*).

Male Speaker: Literally, literally, look away.

Siggins: Hahaha, yeah, he would cause we were in love with Mose Allison.

Male Speaker: Oh, wow.

Siggins: Oh my God (*Laughs*).

Tye: Jeez. That's great, the. So George Wein, among other things, was the, uhm, originator of Newport Jazz, or organizer?

Siggins: Yep. And then my good friend, Bob Jones worked on the Folk Festival until he retired about three years ago, but it was like a 35-year-run, uhm.

Tye: Wow.

Siggins: Uhm, so I've been going to Newport every summer, every year almost, since 8-, uh, '59.

Tye: Would you go for jazz, as well as folk?

Siggins: Nope, I went for folk.

Tye: Just for folk?

Siggins: Yeah, I was exhausted (*Chuckles*), uhm.

Tye: Was there a folk scene on Cape Cod when you were growing up?

Siggins: Not so much, no. I mean, I was working in Club 47 in Cambridge also. So I got my fill, I mean.

Male Speaker: Do you know Chris Smither?

Siggins: Oh, I know him well, very well.

Male Speaker: I remember him being at the Boden's for some party, playing guitar, not on.

Siggins: Really?

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: He's playing at Passim next month.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: Um, something else?

Male Speaker: Sorry, I threw a curveball.

Siggins: You did. Now I went blank.

Tye: You were talking about a jazz singer focusing on the Cape, uhm.

Male Speaker: Yeah, was it a vibrant folk scene was the question?

Siggins: No, no, I think we had to get our music in Boston. Uhm, now I have friends here, who are much, much younger than me, who do play in the various coffee houses on the Cape. That scene has come around again. And I'm mentoring two or three young people.

Tye: Can we, you just said, uhm.

Siggins: Oo, that stinks.

Tye: They're cleaning the septic?

Siggins: Aw, yeah, I'm sorry.

Tye: So you said we had to go to Boston for the kind of music. How much when you were growing up here, how much did Boston feel like, uhm, it was your neighbor? Or did it feel like you're in an island and Boston was a long way away?

Siggins: An island.

Tye: Yeah.

Siggins: Yeah, this town is you know. Somebody used to say about Cotuit, "You don't go there for any other reason, but to go there." (*Chuckles*).

Male Speaker: Right.

Tye: Which is to me, the up and the downside. The upside is that we're not a drive-thru of people going somewhere.

Siggins: Correct.

Tye: And the downside is, it's an island with some of the downsides of an island.

Siggins: Yeah. And, uh, you know, the beach thing just makes me absolutely livid that there are no beaches left here.

Tye: Let me ask you to hold it while the truck is here.

Siggins: Okay.

Tye: So say that again, what is the, what is it about beach thing that makes you livid?

Siggins: That there's not enough public beach space in Cotuit, and that everybody who owns up to the beach is very selfish about you walking across. Mary Ellen Hayden did the most wonderful thing, 10 years ago, he was walking from Jane's house to the Point. And I can't remember that couples' name who used to own one of the first houses as you went down the beach. Anyway, the walk, the mother was crazy. And she said, she saw Mary Ellen. And Mary Ellen was walking in the water, not on the beach. She came out, and she said, "What are you doing?" And Mary Ellen suffered no fools. She said, "Well, I think I'm walking on the beach." And the woman said, "Well, you don't have a right to. Show me some ID. Show me some ID."

Tye: Wow.

Siggins: So what Mary Ellen did was she pulled the top of her bathing suit down and said, "This is who I am!" Hahaha. So I mean, I, you know, I recall in my youth, being able to walk on any beach and swim off any beach. And, you know, Ropes' was not so muddy back then, and we really did a lot of swimming there, uhm.

Male Speaker: Yeah, there was a lifeguard...

Siggins: Yeah, yeah.

Male Speaker: ... and a, and a restroom.

Siggins: Yes, yes.

Tye: So is the difference, just that different people happen to own the places? Or is it reflective of something?

Siggins: I think it's reflective of the, of the economic, uhm, realities of the people who own beach property, uhm, were very fussy. They didn't want people wandering on their beaches.

Tye: Let me try something. So I think you're right. But I also think one of the good things is, the more expensive each property and beachfront homes gets, that it seems to me that the silver lining, which is that the people like McCourt, who might own beach property, probably have five or 10 other houses, and come there three weeks for summer. So you can go because they're never there.

Siggins: Right.

Tye: Is that what?

Siggins: I don't know. I mean, I don't bother trying to do that anymore. It's, you know, it's a hassle.

Tye: What I'm asking is: are there more of those kinds of people who are, uhm, wealthy enough that this is a very, very occasional thing that they come here? If we had been going 40 years ago, walking along Main Street and looked at people who live on the beach side, would they be more likely to be real people who lived here for the summer, but not the year?

Siggins: For the summer.

Tye: For the summer.

Siggins: Pretty much, yep. I remember when Wessons owned McCourt's house, and we would do square dance there. We would have picnics there, and we would swim off their beach. No question asked.

Tye: No need to show who you were.

Siggins: No, I did not. Haha, uhm. And then there were people who were summer people but friends because of square dancing and the yacht club, who lived down on—what's that road—Oregon.

Male Speaker: Oh, you went to the Lloyd's?

Siggins: The Lloyds, we used to, we used to dance at the Lloyd's house. I used to sleep there on weekends. And, Peter Laqueer.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: Is he alive?

Male Speaker: He's alive. They don't, they don't own the house there anymore.

Siggins: I know. But he was.

Male Speaker: In Vermont I think.

Siggins: Yeah. Well, we used to be part of that gang.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: So we got to use all those beaches. And then when the Erickson's moved down there, we had access to their beach.

Male Speaker: Oh, really?

Siggins: Yeah, I knew Eric, uh, Kai, very well.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Siggins: I still am in touch with his wife.

Male Speaker: Oh, is that right?

Siggins: Yep.

Male Speaker: I taught his kids sailing.

Siggins: Yep.

Male Speaker: But that's all I know of them.

Siggins: She, uhm, Joe Erickson is coming to Jane's service.

Male Speaker: Oh, wow.

Tye: So question that I should know the answer to, and I don't, uhm. There was a guy who was a very powerful politician in Massachusetts, not that long ago, named Billy Bulger. Remember the Bulger? (*Siggins chuckles*). And everybody knew Billy Bulger. And he did, one of the more noble things that he did was, he thought that everybody ought to have a right to walk on beaches in the state. And so he did this, uhm, long, jaunt along various beaches that he thought oughta be public. And I can't remember what the law says. What does the law say about where you have a right to walk?

Siggins: In the water, up to.

Tye: High-tide, low-tide? What is the?

Male Speaker: I think in Massachusetts it's low-tide, but I'm not sure.

Tye: So the front row?

Male Speaker: Cause I know in Massachusetts, it's more restrictive than California, it's, you know, you can't own a beach basically.

Tye: But isn't that also something that you have a different right if they're carrying a fishing rod, that you?

Male Speaker: That's a good point, yeah. The fishermen and, and clammers can go...

Tye: Can be anywhere?

Male Speaker: ...anywhere, as can, as can (*muffled speech*).

Siggins: Well, but those, pe-. I mean, right next to Riley's beach are all those Portuguese folks who have come from Fall River, and park themselves and fish all-day long.

Tye: They can fish any-, I've always wondered whether they got kicked off or whether they have a right because they're fishing?

Siggins: They have a right.

Tye: They have a right.

Siggins: I know. I don't know about all their wives. Hahahah. Let me just check this.

Male Speaker: The loophole that's sometimes exploited is the guy with a fishing pole with his family's beach sitting on the beach.

Tye: Did you ever? Sorry, do need to?

Siggins: Uhm, I'm just looking for a second. I have to check on my partner in there. Let me do that.

Tye: Sure. Great.

Male Speaker: Good.

Tye: Great. So we're back on here. And you were, I can't remember what the last, we were talking about, uhm, fishing, and, and, uhm.

Male Speaker: Yeah, yeah.

Tye: And how to do. Oh, yeah, I was asking: Do you ever remember, either a time that you were living here or, more importantly, when you were in school, any Wampanoag being part of your classes or the community?

Siggins: No. The closest we got were, uhm, hang on, Portuguese because al-, because pretty much all the people in this town who were year-round and laborers were Portuguese. Like the Sousa family.

Tye: So for the same reasons that Bedford or Fall River have large Portuguese community, and the people who came in from Azores, or from wherever, and just ended up here, because of the jobs, or?

Siggins: Yep.

Tye: Huh, that's interesting. Okay.

Male Speaker: Was Pete Fells working at the...?

Siggins: Haha, yes.

Male Speaker: So, he was an interesting...

Siggins: Oh, yeah, that's true.

Male Speaker: Pete Junior working at the (*Siggins laughs and his speak is muffled*).

Siggins: Yeah, yeah.

Male Speaker: That's where my mind goes.

Siggins: Yeah.

Tye: So that seems to be the one that ended up in Jim Lee's book, and that ended up everywhere.

Male Speaker: Yeah.

Tye: But the, uhm, huh.

Male Speaker: And one of Betty's, he was one, he was one of Betty's interviews. I don't know if you were around for that one.

Siggins: I must have taken photograph, yeah, I think I did. And those old, that old real-estate woman, Helen McClellan.

Male Speaker: Yes.

Siggins: Is that your house?

Male Speaker: Uhh, she, I don't think she ever had that, she might have had it briefly. Her main place was out on the Point Made.

Siggins: Okay. All right. Because I photograph-. I remember photographing her.

Male Speaker: Yes, that was with Sally Sawyer.

Siggins: Yep.

Male Speaker: Yeah, that was out, but very close by, but that's not on the Point, that's downtown.

Siggins: Yep.

Tye: How important is she? So she's somebody who came up that Jane mentioned. How important was she in, uhm, the sales of homes in Cotuit, and helping shape what Cotuit looked like cause she was?

Siggins: Well, she was one of the first women in real estate, certainly in this town. She and Dudley, uhm. Oo, there's all these monarch butterflies. Anyway, uhm, so I think she was the head of a lot of women's interests, uhm.

Tye: And were other than some wonderful vestiges of, uhm, gender roles like you were describing, with your, uhm, father, were, did you feel in this town, uhm, growing up the girls could do anything the boys could do?

Siggins: Yeah.

Tye: Yeah.

Siggins: Yeah, and we did. Hahahaha.

Male Speaker: Certainly, in the summer community, there was a tradition of equality...

Siggins: Yeah, yeah.

Male Speaker: You know, with the early officers of the yacht club being predominantly girls.

Siggins: Right, right.

Tye: Was that accidental, or was that because, uhm, this place was more open and girls were more determined?

Siggins: I don't know. At the root might have been since Doctor Whitman had some tough girls in his family, haha, started the yacht club.

Tye: Are these, is that sea-worthy, the boat there? And does it go in the water?

Siggins: My son-in-law bought that two summers ago. And that's as far as it's gotten.

Male Speaker: Probably got it for a good price.

Siggins: He did. (*Male Speaker chuckles*). But I wish he had the time, it really needs to be totally refinished.

Male Speaker: A lot of work.

Siggins: And he's got a lot of work around this yard and.

Male Speaker: Right. Well, I just yeah, so we should, we should not take you much longer. But I started asking about characters and sort of got off on any level. Any other, you know, folks you know around town that is a particularly interesting person?

Siggins: Mmm. Well, there was Billy Landers, was a crazy guy.

Male Speaker: (*Muffled Speech*).

Siggins: Maybe. And Warren, what was his name? Warren, he was a little redheaded kid. And he was the classic kid who would put your braids in the inkwell, you know, right out of a book and make everybody craz-. Warren Carroll, I think, I think, uhm.

Male Speaker: You really paid more attention to classmates I'm thinking of old-timey, are drawn from connecting dots.

Siggins: There was a guy in the wheelchair.

Male Speaker: Yes, Foster.

Siggins: Foster Nickerson, yeah. Cause I lived across the street from the scho-, the grocery, and he would come to the grocery store almost daily, in his little motorized carriage.

Male Speaker: Uh, Birdie says, has it on good authority, that you're playing the numbers game (*muffled speech*).

Siggins: Hahaha, great.

Tye: Hahaha, I love that. Did any of your, so you knew everybody in the music world, did Joan Baez or any of the thousand other, uhm, music friends that you had ever come and hang out in Cotuit?

Siggins: Yeah, Maria Muldaur was here last week.

Tye: Ahh, hahaha.

Siggins: She was there. She was on the porch. We were whining about how we're getting old. And can she beat me at that game? Oh my God.

Male Speaker: There are a couple guys here who are (*Muffled Speech*).

Siggins: Well, yes. And I'm going to see Mavis Staples next Sunday night. She gave me tickets, which was very nice. Uhh.

Tye: At Passim?

Siggins: No, she's playing out at Payomet on Sunday night. Geoff Muldaur's been here many times, as he and I are like brother and sister, in all the good and bad ways that means. Ahaha. Chris Smither has been here to this house a long time ago. They live in Amherst now.

Tye: Oh.

Siggins: Uhhh, Bob Dylan has been in my house in Cambridge, a thousand years ago, I'll show you some of the photographs I have before you leave.

Tye: So I've got to get in a book-related question, which is, if you were thinking, so I think that, uhm, my book is, I'm not nearly smart enough about music to write about music or three people who have had as much written about them as guys like Ellington, Armstrong and Basie. But I'm interested in their lives off the bandstand. And everything from how they traveled the country, the venue, their side men and side women.

And the most central issue I'm interested in is how I think they, uhm, helped set the table for a lot that happened in the Civil Rights movement, because these were Black men going into white households when nobody else would. But the one thing I'm really interested in, I'm talking to all kinds of strange characters from various parts of the music world who were influenced by these jazz guys, are the people in folk that you think would say, "Jeez, yeah," uhm.

Siggins: Well, Geoff Muldaur would be somebody I would absolutely try to interview. He lives in Somerville now, uhm. And he's just finished an, an incredible piece that he worked in. And he was in Holland for off and on for the last 10 years, working on sort of a classic jazz feast that he composed, it's just gorgeous. And I can get you in touch with him.

Tye: That'd be great.

Siggins: Because he, you know, the other person, I don't know whether this is a real reach for you. But Bob Jones who worked at Newport for all those years. In the early days, he started out touring with all the jazz musicians in your, he was like their babysitter. Uhm, he lives in Danbury, Connecticut, uhm.

Tye: Would he got back far enough to have been any of the three that I'm talking about?

Siggins: Yes.

Tye: He would have?

Siggins: Yeah, he's 80-something, 82 or 83. Uhm, and he won't shut up. He's just fabulous, hahaha.

Tye: So how would you, given that they're probably a thousand Bob Jones's in Danbury, any other way of, any sense of how to get him there?

Siggins: Yeah, I.

Tye: Can you?

Siggins: Yeah.

Tye: Okay, great. I'll ask you, I'll send you an email reminding you, a note.

Siggins: Okay. Bob Jones is, he, he went, he has a wife from India, and his daughter, one of his two daughters, is the editor in chief of Vanity Fair. And, uhm, she's lived an incredible life in the music world, cause she grew up in Newport, both jazz and folk, and the New, New Orleans Jazz Festival.

Tye: So I should know who the editor in chief of Vanity Fair is.

Siggins: Radhika Jones.

Tye: Okay.

Siggins: Indian first name, American last name.

Tye: Great.

Siggins: Uh, anyway, so they were in India, visiting her family about, it's got to be 10 years ago. Can anything else land here? Good god. Hahaha. Anyway, on the trip home from India, he contracted Epstein-Barr Syndrome. He was in a coma for three months, and he still walks with a wheelchair. And it was touch and go for a long time. And that's one of the things that kind of backed him off being able to be as active with Newport. And Newport got taken over by a real hot shot, and Bob got moved out. But Bob is writing his memoirs now, by hand and very long.

Tye: Jeez.

Siggins: But he has those great stories. I mean, he worked for George for 35 years.

Tye: Incredible.

Siggins: Yeah!

Tye: Yeah. So was there, did you see other than creative, uh, people, did you see the, uhm, uh, a logical connection between jazz and folk? Or did they seem like different universes?

Siggins: Well, they were different universes. But it was the same headset that set the musicians together, uhm. Jeffrey really is, would be a wealth of information. My friend Joe Boyd, who lives in London, uhm. Joe Boyd's life's work is traveling around the world collecting music. A job I always wanted. Hahaha.

Tye: What people wouldn't want that job?

Siggins: Yeah, I mean, but he's written some amazing books about the, he's, was one of the people who founded, or found, the Richard Thompson. I'm coming up with it, it's slow. The first folk rock group in London. (*Brief pause*). Sorry, I can't.

Male Speaker: When?

Siggins: '60s. He first hired.

Male Speaker: Richard Johnson was it?

Siggins: No, no, no. He's like the best folk guitarist on the planet.

Male Speaker: So he was in the band?

Siggins: Yeah. I'm, I can't believe I can't do it. I look at their website every day.

Tye: So you know a lot of jazz musicians in the, from the '30s to late '50s, would go to Europe and find, "Geez, I can do all these things here that I can't do in America. And people actually like my music," and never came back. And I think that Louis Armstrong went over and stayed for, uhm, a year at one point. He was having tough times here. And the thought is he might never come back.

Male Speaker: Airport convention?

Tye: Ahh. Well we should evolve now.

Siggins: Yeah, well, I do, but I didn't. Hahahah. Yeah, I mean, he's like my favorite person on the planet, as far as male instrumentalists and writers. He's now living in New Jersey. Funny place for. But he plays all the time, everywhere. He's just, he never gets tired. It doesn't seem, uhm.

Tye: By the way, speaking of New Jersey, I just saw the paper yesterday that, uhm, Bruce Springsteen and Barack Obama have decided to write a book together.

Siggins: Yeah.

Male Speaker: Oh, wow.

Tye: It would be an outgrowth of their collaboration.

Siggins: Yeah.

Male Speaker: Oh, wow.

Tye: Really interesting. So I want to, uhm, thank you twice, once for talking to us. And the second time is for talking to us when, uhm, you're still not back to 100%. And we, and I hope that the recovery, uhh, goes fast.

Siggins: Yeah, I've got no more patience for this, so I'm better. Hahaha. Now it's just a pain in the ass.

Tye: So, uhm, we will be back in touch sometime, if you or anybody wants, uhm, so what we'll do is.