

Oral History Interview with Joan Taylor

August 16, 2023

Interviewed by Aimee Lusty for the Montauk Library Oral History Program.

Aimee Lusty [00:00:01] Today is Wednesday, August 16th, 2023. My name is Aimee Lusty. I'm the archivist at the Montauk Library, and I'm conducting an oral history interview with Joan Taylor. This interview is part of the Montauk Library Oral History Program, and we're conducting it from the sound studio at the Montauk Library in Montauk, New York. And we're joined today by Joan's oldest daughter, Joanne Taylor McCarthy. So, Joan, first, I'd just like to confirm on tape that you agreed to participate and to be recorded according to the oral history consent and release agreement.

Joan Taylor [00:00:32] Yes, I do.

Aimee Lusty [00:00:34] Would you mind pronouncing and spelling your first and last name?

Joan Taylor [00:00:39] J. O. A. N. T. A. Y. L. O. R.

Aimee Lusty [00:00:43] Thank you. And is there a story behind your first name? Is that a family name?

Joan Taylor [00:00:48] No, it isn't a family name.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:00:50] Your cousin Joan.

Joan Taylor [00:00:52] Oh yeah. Big Joan. Yeah, right. I have an older cousin, and I was named for her.

Aimee Lusty [00:00:58] And are you named after her?

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:01:00] I am. And my grandmother could never keep it straight. So answer to Joan as well as Joanne.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:07] And Joan. Where were you born?

Joan Taylor [00:01:09] I was born in the Bronx, New York.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:12] And what year?

Joan Taylor [00:01:13] 1931.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:15] What were your parents' names?

Joan Taylor [00:01:18] Evelyn and Stanley Sheppard.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:21] Can you tell me a little bit about your family heritage and where your parents and grandparents came from?

Joan Taylor [00:01:27] My grandparents came from England, both sides. Many, many years ago.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:01:34] And your father.

Joan Taylor [00:01:36] My father was born in England.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:38] Have you ever visited England?

Joan Taylor [00:01:39] No.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:41] And how long did you live in the Bronx?

Joan Taylor [00:01:46] Til I was a

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:01:52] Until you moved to Westchester, 1967.

Joan Taylor [00:01:57] Yes. Yeah. All right.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:59] So you attended elementary school and high school in the Bronx as well. And when did your family first come to Montauk?

Joan Taylor [00:02:09] I think my grandparents were the first ones who brought us and I was three years old and we camped at Hither Hills. And then when I was around seven, they bought the property, which is on Bryan Road now.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:30] And how would you travel here? By car or train?

Joan Taylor [00:02:33] By car. But it took forever because of those days that only you can only go 40 miles an hour. So it took at least five, six hours to get here.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:41] Yeah. And do you know when your grandparents first came to visit Montauk?

Joan Taylor [00:02:48] Again, when I was around three years old.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:51] And what were their names?

Joan Taylor [00:02:54] Charlotte and Joseph Rouse.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:58] What do you remember of the camp at Hither Hills State Park?

Joan Taylor [00:03:01] They had twin Dickey camps that hold maybe three people in each one. And that's when everyone else had all these little make-do camps.

Aimee Lusty [00:03:16] And they were canvas tents?

Joan Taylor [00:03:18] They were canvas.

Aimee Lusty [00:03:19] With a wooden platform?

Joan Taylor [00:03:22] No, not wooden platform. It was dirt.

Aimee Lusty [00:03:25] On the dirt.

Joan Taylor [00:03:26] Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [00:03:27] And who stayed at the camp with you?

Joan Taylor [00:03:30] My mom and my grandparents and my father would come out on weekends.

Aimee Lusty [00:03:36] And do you have any siblings?

Joan Taylor [00:03:38] No.

Aimee Lusty [00:03:40] What was the layout like of the two tents?

Joan Taylor [00:03:48] What do you mean by layout?

Aimee Lusty [00:03:50] Did you have a kind of where did you sleep? Where did you cook? Where did you bathe?

Joan Taylor [00:03:55] Oh, well, there was a facility where you could go, you know, to the john and stuff, and it was like a beach house that they had. But we slept in the in the tents, you know, And I really don't remember the bedding too much. And then they had the stove with Coleman Stove, where they had to somehow pump it to make the flame come. And they cooked in a Coleman stove and we had lanterns. You know.

Aimee Lusty [00:04:32] Do you remember where you would get groceries from?

Joan Taylor [00:04:38] There were farm stands along the way, and they had one place where they would go and get eggs because they had chickens. And you get fresh laying eggs. So that was pretty much. But there were farms along where you could buy stuff.

Aimee Lusty [00:04:54] And did anyone in your family fish?

Joan Taylor [00:04:59] My father. Yeah. That's why what he lived for is to come out there and fish.

Aimee Lusty [00:05:04] And were you here for the Long Island Express Hurricane in September of 1938?

Joan Taylor [00:05:09] No.

Aimee Lusty [00:05:09] Okay. Because you would be here from for the summer?

Joan Taylor [00:05:13] Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [00:05:15] When would you when would you start coming out? Like, after the school year.

Joan Taylor [00:05:17] We would only come out. It wouldn't be a long time because they had to go to work and everything. So I imagine it was like two weeks. Three weeks.

Aimee Lusty [00:05:28] And when did your grandparents decide to buy land in Montauk?

Joan Taylor [00:05:32] As I said, I was around seven when they they they saw an article in the Mirror and it was called The Mirror Development. And that's where you would buy a lot for \$100. And so they bought four lots, which was quite a bit of money in those days. And so and then they built on the four lots and the whole thing cost like \$3,000. And the house is there now.

Aimee Lusty [00:06:00] And was this the house that they designed or was it a kit home? Do you remember?

Joan Taylor [00:06:05] That I don't know.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:06:09] But it started as a very small house. And then the sides opened up and then they closed them in

Joan Taylor [00:06:15] Well, yeah. Yeah. It had flaps in the back which they later closed it and put windows in. That's the house. [Points to picture]

Aimee Lusty [00:06:28] And that's the house. Yeah.

Joan Taylor [00:06:31] It looks just like that now.

Aimee Lusty [00:06:32] Was it always that size or did they add kind of extensions on to it over time?

Joan Taylor [00:06:37] You know, that's what you.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:06:38] Said, that there were flaps like.

Joan Taylor [00:06:39] Well, the back to back and the back was flaps instead of windows, but it didn't change the circumference of the room.

Aimee Lusty [00:06:47] So in the summer it was just open air?

Joan Taylor [00:06:50] It was open air. Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [00:06:51] That's nice. Yeah. And when did your parents buy in Montauk?

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:06:58] When I was a baby.

Joan Taylor [00:06:58] When you were about one years old.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:07:01] 1958.

Joan Taylor [00:07:03] 1958.

Aimee Lusty [00:07:06] And were you visiting more regularly after that, after you had kind of these two homesteads to to visit?

Joan Taylor [00:07:12] Oh, yeah. We came out, you know, when I when, before I went back to work, I would be there for the summer.

Aimee Lusty [00:07:25] And is that home still in your family?

Joan Taylor [00:07:27] Yes.

Aimee Lusty [00:07:28] And where is that located?

Joan Taylor [00:07:30] You mean the one that I own?

Aimee Lusty [00:07:31] Yeah.

Joan Taylor [00:07:32] It's at the end of Bryan Road.

Aimee Lusty [00:07:34] Okay. So that was your grandparents or your parents?

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:07:38] It was your parents.

Aimee Lusty [00:07:39] My parents? Their parents home. And what would you do during the summers?

Joan Taylor [00:07:44] Well, we would come out and go to the beach.

Aimee Lusty [00:07:49] Hither Hills?

Joan Taylor [00:07:51] No, we had our own beach. I mean, that is is just the strip of land that where st go down. We're like three blocks from the ocean.

Aimee Lusty [00:08:01] Okay. Very nice.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:08:02] The Montauk Beach Owners Property Montauk Beach Property Owners Association was gifted the land, but they have to pay the taxes ever since. So it's a private beach.

Aimee Lusty [00:08:14] And what are your some memories from the beach?

Joan Taylor [00:08:19] Oh, just going down and having a good time. You know, setting up an umbrella and watching the children mainly to make sure that, you know, they didn't get in trouble.

Aimee Lusty [00:08:32] Now, what are your recollections of the neighborhood at the time when your parents first bought there?

Joan Taylor [00:08:38] Well, it was great because you could see the ocean from the cottage. And now, of course, you can. It's so, you know, developed.

Aimee Lusty [00:08:48] How have you seen the neighborhood change over time?

Joan Taylor [00:08:51] Just a lot of houses. And as I said, the view of the ocean is, you know, not good at all now.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:09:01] How about the vegetation?

Joan Taylor [00:09:04] Well, years ago, you had a whole bunch of blackberry bushes, and you can make jelly and all that. And now they're all gone because of this development.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:09:12] And the trees, though.

Joan Taylor [00:09:14] Oh, well, the trees were nondescript. You could see the ocean from anywhere. And now, of course, everything's grown up.

Aimee Lusty [00:09:22] Yeah, it was a lot more dune and shrubland vegetation and the forests matured. And did you spend any time with the children of any local families? Did you get to know?

Joan Taylor [00:09:34] Yes. We had a lot of friends out of here. And then, of course, my kids had a lot of friends.

Aimee Lusty [00:09:41] Do you remember any of the names, last names?

Joan Taylor [00:09:43] The Frows [sp].

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:09:45] Yeah. Well, how about the ones you grew up with first?

Joan Taylor [00:09:48] Oh, I grew up with the Knobblachs, Herbie Knoblach and Bruce Chandler and trying to think.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:10:05] Sharon, someone named Sharon Sharon Roses Sharon in the house across from Claras.

Joan Taylor [00:10:10] Yeah, I tried to think of their last name now. Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [00:10:17] If you can't remember that's okay. I'm asking you to go back pretty far. And did you did you venture into Amagansett or East Hampton at all?

Joan Taylor [00:10:28] Yes, we used to go in. Yes.

Aimee Lusty [00:10:31] And what do you remember of the village of Montauk? Of the town?

Joan Taylor [00:10:36] There was White's.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:10:39] I remember when White's was built.

Joan Taylor [00:10:41] The drugstore. Yeah. And then Shagwong was there. And just trying to think those were the two main.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:10:52] Right when I was a kid, the IGA was now it's a restaurant market kind of place, but it was an idea that little building near Martell's set apart from, well, they're probably all attached now, but that was the IGA. Then it became an appliance store and then it became multiple things.

Joan Taylor [00:11:12] Right.

Aimee Lusty [00:11:15] And you mentioned in your in your writing that you were a teenager in Montauk during World War II. What what do you remember of the military occupation here?

Joan Taylor [00:11:24] Well, there was Camp Hero and then there was the submarine base that was put in. And a lot of soldiers and sailors, you know, that you see, and my grandfather would always pick them up and take them wherever they they wanted to go into like East Hampton or whatever. He would pick them up. And I was I always sad that I was too young to date.

Aimee Lusty [00:11:54] Yeah. I've heard from other other people and older oral histories that that was like the highlight.

Joan Taylor [00:12:00] Oh it was, I thought it was wonderful to pick them up and everything and help them.

Aimee Lusty [00:12:04] And did anyone in your family serve in the military?

Joan Taylor [00:12:08] Yeah, My, my. I'm just trying to think. Uncle John. My uncle. Uncle John, mainly. I think Arthur didn't. My father didn't.

Aimee Lusty [00:12:23] And with their occupation here, did that kind of influence the areas that you could go or your recreational activities?

Joan Taylor [00:12:29] Well, over at the submarine base, they would show us movies. They would let you know civilians in to watch movies and stuff. And with Camp Hero, their main thing was, well, what I remember of them, they would do target practice and the house would shake with it. Yeah. And then that was when we had blackouts and everything. We had wardens coming around, you know, with flashlights to make sure that, no, no lights shown and everything.

Aimee Lusty [00:13:06] So that was part of a drill or?

Joan Taylor [00:13:08] No, it was when the the one we were with in fighting in Germany and Japan. And it was serious.

Aimee Lusty [00:13:26] So were you and your family kind of scared of any threats of invasion, a war that might make its way here?

Joan Taylor [00:13:32] Not really. But knowing that those people, the wardens were around, we knew that, you know, everyone would be kept safe.

Aimee Lusty [00:13:43] And what was it like with that kind of population boom, with all these people and these military men, navy and moving here? I don't know if they came with their families or not, but did that kind of change the dynamic in the town at all?

Joan Taylor [00:13:58] I don't think so. I don't think many of them brought anyone here to move in or anything was strictly they were assigned here and they stuck with their bases pretty much.

Aimee Lusty [00:14:16] And do you have any recollections of Hurricane Carol that came through Montauk in August 1954? So that would have been in the summer.

Joan Taylor [00:14:25] Oh.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:14:26] It wasn't here yet.

Aimee Lusty [00:14:28] What year were you born? '57. Okay.

Joan Taylor [00:14:32] No, I don't.

Aimee Lusty [00:14:36] And did you attend college or any continuing education schooling after high school?

Joan Taylor [00:14:40] I graduated high school. I didn't go to college. I became a secretary.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:14:46] But you went to school for that?

Joan Taylor [00:14:49] Well, that was part of my training in high school. Shorthand and typing and right out I got a job when I got out of high school.

Aimee Lusty [00:14:58] Great. And when you came out here, did you did you have any summer jobs or work out here at all?

Joan Taylor [00:15:03] Yeah, I chamber-maided. I'm trying to think of the name of the place.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:15:11] Is it Driftwood or was it like Briny Breezes?

Joan Taylor [00:15:14] It was when you first come down the hill and on the left. It's there now.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:15:20] On the old highway?

Joan Taylor [00:15:21] Yeah.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:15:25] I don't know.

Joan Taylor [00:15:27] I don't recall the name, but it's still there.

Aimee Lusty [00:15:35] And when did you start bringing your children to Montauk?

Joan Taylor [00:15:39] When Joanne was.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:15:42] In the womb.

Aimee Lusty [00:15:43] Yeah.

Joan Taylor [00:15:45] I was pregnant when I out here, um from the first summer, the first summer she was alive we came out.

Aimee Lusty [00:15:55] So you've been coming for 89 years? Did you ever miss a summer?

Joan Taylor [00:16:02] Not that I can recall. No.

Aimee Lusty [00:16:06] And do you come out any other time of year?

Joan Taylor [00:16:10] No. It's always summer.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:16:12] Why? We don't have any heat.

Aimee Lusty [00:16:20] It's a good answer.

Joan Taylor [00:16:21] Is hot.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:16:22] We don't have any heat in the house.

Joan Taylor [00:16:24] Oh, right. It's a summer house. No heat.

Aimee Lusty [00:16:28] Yeah. And do you have any involvement with any of the community organizations or churches here?

Joan Taylor [00:16:38] When we can we go to the what is it the Presbyterian church?

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:16:44] Yes, the Presbyterian Church and Community Church.

Joan Taylor [00:16:47] All right.

Aimee Lusty [00:16:49] And what are some of your favorite local establishments or the restaurants or stores or bakeries?

Joan Taylor [00:16:56] Well, we used to go to the Village Pizza.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:17:00] Yeah, we did when it was the original owners.

Joan Taylor [00:17:04] And John's for ice cream.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:17:05] I remember when that was built too.

Joan Taylor [00:17:06] Right.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:17:07] Yep.

Joan Taylor [00:17:08] And the children always liked the miniature golf.

Aimee Lusty [00:17:12] Oh, yeah. And so when you come now, what do you do for recreation? Is it similar to when you were younger?

Joan Taylor [00:17:25] Well, yeah, pretty much.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:17:27] Spend the day at the beach. The blackberries and blueberries are kind of built upon.

Aimee Lusty [00:17:34] And are you still friends with some of the people that you met summering here decades ago?

Joan Taylor [00:17:43] No. Most of them are, they're gone. So it's mainly my own family that I come in and we go, what's the name, Navy Road. That's where we go.

Aimee Lusty [00:17:59] Great beach.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:18:00] Tell her about the dinners we have on the lawn every year.

Joan Taylor [00:18:05] Oh, well, recently I started doing Thanksgiving in July, and we invited all the neighbors. And so. And it's generally around my birthday. And so we have Thanksgiving Day again.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:18:22] And our cousins own my great grandfather's house. And so when they're out, we all have a celebration.

Aimee Lusty [00:18:29] That's great. Yeah.

Joan Taylor [00:18:29] So and it's fun. They all seem to like to have turkey in July.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:18:34] We pray it doesn't rain because the two bedroom cottage are eating turkey and sitting on the bed.

Joan Taylor [00:18:39] Right.

Aimee Lusty [00:18:41] And are you active in kind of your your housing community like within the homeowner's association?

Joan Taylor [00:18:47] Oh, you mean out here?

Aimee Lusty [00:18:48] Yeah.

Joan Taylor [00:18:49] No, not really. When we come it's strictly just to have fun and, and see our family.

Aimee Lusty [00:19:00] And this is kind of a big question, but what have you seen change the most in Montauk over these 89 years?

Joan Taylor [00:19:08] Just how many people have found Montauk. And it's just amazing. And of course, all the beautiful houses that have come up and the money that's been invested and that the beach is still the way it was, it has been encroached on. At least I can still say that that remains the same.

Aimee Lusty [00:19:36] That was my next question was alternately, what have you seen stay the same over the years.

Joan Taylor [00:19:41] And just thank goodness the beach.

Aimee Lusty [00:19:44] And what what draws you back to Montauk each summer?

Joan Taylor [00:19:48] Because I love it, you know.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:19:52] Yeah. And I just had a friend just went home and she's been coming out off and on for her whole life. And we've known them since we were four. So we were lifetime best friends. And she says her parents are gone. She says this is the only place that she has a connection she feels like is home for her because it's been consistent in her life. And I feel the same way about it. I love it. I know when the flowers bloom, what they're going to smell like, what's where, you just love it. Think about it all year, it's the highlight of my life. Don't tell my husband.

Aimee Lusty [00:20:33] That's sweet. Well, I'm at the end of my questions or anything you want to ask your mother? Any memories that you have? A little more insight.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:20:42] Gee trying to think. Well, I remember once my friends at home were going to camp. I remember saying, I want to go to camp. I can't go. I can't. My mom's like, Why do you want to go to camp when you can go to Montauk? And that's true, you know, I still have lifelong friends. And we met when we were five. We were ten. And their families and their grandchildren are coming out. And it really is like having parallel lives. Like, I got a life here and I have a life here. It's great. Wonderful.

Joan Taylor [00:21:14] It's true.

Aimee Lusty [00:21:17] Well, I really enjoyed hearing about your your 89 years and how things have, you know, how you came out with your grandparents at first and how they kind of upgraded their living situation and you kind of stuck with it. The roots you have here.

Joan Taylor [00:21:34] And will keep coming out.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:21:37] Yes, absolutely.

Aimee Lusty [00:21:40] Well, unless there's anything else you'd like to add or clarify.

Joan Taylor [00:21:46] No. I think we covered it.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:21:49] You know, the war is really what I thought was so interesting. You know, the first time she told me about, I was like, I never thought that, you know, about that. That you were here, of course, during that time period.

Aimee Lusty [00:22:00] And also the interaction between the the folks that were stationed here and the people, summer visitors and locals. And that was all intertwined.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:22:13] When I was a kid, I went to P.S.102 in the Bronx, and people when they were going to go away, they went to the Rockaways, the Far Rockaways. No one had ever heard of Montauk. Now, it's on cookies, it's on chairs, it's on everything. I'm like, Yeah, I wish it hadn't been discovered, but not much you can do about it happens everywhere. No place is ever the same.

Aimee Lusty [00:22:38] Yeah. I'm curious about how your grandparents, you know, discovered it and heard about it, too.

Joan Taylor [00:22:45] But not sure how they found Hither Hills. But I know with the development where they bought the property, it was in the paper, in the Mirror, and it was called the Mirror Development. And when they saw \$100 a lot, they figured, Well, I think we're going to do it because they love coming to Hither Hills camping. I think it would be better to buy a house, you know, build a house.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:23:11] No air conditioning in the parks in the summer at that time. What'd you say your dad had to take, like, three showers during the night to cool off?

Joan Taylor [00:23:22] Oh, well, back in the Bronx. Yeah. Right. They didn't have a fan in those days, and you just, you know, suffered, but I was out in Montauk so I was okay.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:23:35] I had a light sweater on this morning.

Aimee Lusty [00:23:39] And would your parents travel back and forth for work?

Joan Taylor [00:23:43] My father would come out on weekends and. And he allowed me to be out of Montauk with Mom. She wasn't working then.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:23:52] On the train.

Joan Taylor [00:23:53] On the train and he'd go fishing. Then he had to go back again.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:24:02] Yeah. Lots of photos of him with huge striped bass.

Joan Taylor [00:24:04] Yeah, yeah, yeah. He was a good fisherman.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:24:10] He was. My grandmother can clean a fish better than anybody. Yeah.

Joan Taylor [00:24:16] Right.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:24:18] Yeah.

Joan Taylor [00:24:20] And that's pretty much it, I think.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:24:24] I think so.

Aimee Lusty [00:24:26] Well, thank you again for coming in and contributing your story.

Joanne Taylor McCarthy [00:24:31] Our pleasure.

Aimee Lusty [00:24:32] This is the end of the August 16th interview with Joan Taylor. The interviewer was Aimee Lusty, and this recording can be found in the archive collection of the Montauk Library.