

Oral History Interview with William Akin
Montauk Library Oral History Program
February 20, 2025

Virginia Garrison [00:00:00] Today is February 20th, 2025. My name is Virginia Garrison, and I am conducting an oral history interview with Bill Akin. This interview is part of the Montauk Library Oral History Program. We are conducting this interview from the sound studio at the Montauk Library in Montauk, New York. And I just want to confirm on tape your consent to participate and be recorded according to the Oral History Informed Consent and Release Agreement.

Bill Akin [00:00:32] I fully agree.

Virginia Garrison [00:00:35] I'm going to ask you some very basics and I'm hoping we'll get off on better tangents.

Bill Akin [00:00:38] I hope I can remember them.

Virginia Garrison [00:00:41] Can you please pronounce and spell your first and last name?

Bill Akin [00:00:50] William, W-I-L-L, I-A-M, Akin, A-K-I, N.

Virginia Garrison [00:00:55] Is there a story behind your name?

Bill Akin [00:00:57] Now, my father's family has been here quite a while, supposedly 17th century New Bedford. And they were, various factions were Nantucket whalers and so on and so forth. My mother, on the other hand, her father, came over from Scotland in the early 20th century. Late 19th century, I'm not sure exactly when, as a landscaper for Andrew Carnegie.

Virginia Garrison [00:01:34] Oh, really?

Bill Akin [00:01:35] In the Tarrytown area, because he had a house there.

Virginia Garrison [00:01:41] Um, and where were you born?

Bill Akin [00:01:43] I was born in what was called North Tarrytown, which is now called Sleepy Hollow, and we lived in a place called Sleepy Hollow Manor, which was really the stomping grounds of the Headless Horseman, and my father was born right up the road in Ossining, New York.

Virginia Garrison [00:02:02] And what year were you born?

Bill Akin [00:02:05] 1944, November 2nd.

Virginia Garrison [00:02:07] And what were your parents' names?

Bill Akin [00:02:09] My father was Robert, Robert M. Akin Jr. And my mother's name was Elizabeth Akin.

Virginia Garrison [00:02:18] Can you tell me a little bit you have already about some your family heritage where parents and grandparents came from now your mother? Her family was from?

Bill Akin [00:02:28] It was Scotland, was like they the father came father mother came over from Scotland.

Virginia Garrison [00:02:35] Have you ever been to Scotland?

Bill Akin [00:02:38] Once on a business trip, but it was extremely brief, and it was in the winter, so I don't think I ever saw the sun.

Virginia Garrison [00:02:46] And what were your parents' occupations?

Bill Akin [00:02:49] Um, my mother was primarily a housewife, home caregiver and whatnot, but, uh, my father, um, was, he was, I'll call him an electrical engineer, but his, it starts with his, his father, Robert M. Akin Sr. had founded a small wire company in Ossining, New York, in 1904. And that's when my father was actually the year my father was born. A company called Hudson Wire, and my father, later years, went to work there and actually worked at Hudson Wire in one capacity or another up to president and chairman for 65 years, including the day he passed away.

Virginia Garrison [00:03:36] Wow, right to the end. And what was the wire used for?

Bill Akin [00:03:41] Any company that's been around that long, the product changes and evolves. It was very basic wiring cable early on, but in later years, the product became much more sophisticated in that it was a small, by manufacturing standards, a small company, and was needed to specialize. So it ended up producing what we call high temperature, high strength, conductors, only conductors not insulated products. These are wires that were drawn down, plated with silver, nickel or tin, and then stranded together. You would use them largely in aerospace. They would sell them to companies that would put insulation, Teflon, PVC on these products. They would end up in aerospace, which required great flexibility. And temperature capabilities to go, a jet goes from a runway where it's 110 degrees up to 40,000 feet in a matter of seconds. And everything on that aircraft has to be adaptable to temperature changes and whatnot. Also, later on computers and medical cables.

Virginia Garrison [00:05:02] Interesting. And you, you had a brother?

Bill Akin [00:05:06] And my brother Bob was eight years older than I was uh... I am he he uh... He took over management of the company and was largely responsible for uh... Bringing it into the twenty-first century if you will he graduated from Columbia Business School my father had never he'd never gone to college. He had been accepted at Harvard, um, but he was in a place in New Jersey called Morristown Academy and he was probably an electrical genius. But at that time he wired a lot of the school together through the rooms, through the copper and the piping so that he could transmit by moral code, all the things that were on the tests and whatnot. They... Didn't just appreciate that. They kicked him out of the school and they, his, his application for Harvard was rejected, but he went on to have lots of inventions in electroplating and wiring cable, all sorts of things.

Virginia Garrison [00:06:10] Do you have any other siblings? What about, you want to talk a little bit about your parents' involvement with the Montauk community?

Bill Akin [00:06:24] My dad, his parents had a place for a while up in Cape Cod, South Yarmouth, and he had spent, as a child, he'd spent quite a bit of time up there. He was always a water person. He fished for striped bass in the Hudson River right out in front of where the company was centered in Ossining, and as a little boy, he would take the ferry to New York, change boats and then take the ferry up to Cape Cod, past Montauk in the middle of the night and whatnot. So he grew up fishing and, uh, after World War II, he started, he had already, he and my mother had a beach house in Westhampton during World War II, and then another place subsequent after the war, and that's when he started driving out to Montauk and charter, uh he chartered Ralph Pitts and the Tumas, and he got to know the real early charter boat captains out here. Um, and then, uh, he bought a, uh. Uh, let's call it a used charter boat from Buster Raynor in, uh in Shinnecock.

Virginia Garrison [00:07:36] Rayner R-A-Y-N-O-R

Bill Akin [00:07:38] Yeah, okay, and he he brought it out to Montauk and left it and put it at the Yacht Club. That was I believe 1950 and that's probably when I first came out here I know he was I know it the second year was 1951 and I remember standing in the cockpit of that boat in in us on a Labor Day weekend in September and and watching the, uh, the survivors of the Pelican be helped down the dock at the, uh, at the yacht club. These people were, I didn't know what was going on. They were all covered.

Virginia Garrison [00:08:21] About how old were you?

Bill Akin [00:08:22] Uh, what was I, about seven or eight, and, uh they're all wrapped in blankets and whatnot. The ones that didn't survive were taken over to Durye's ice house as a morgue, but the survivors were brought into the yacht club. Nobody told me what was going on.

Virginia Garrison [00:08:41] You had no idea.

Bill Akin [00:08:42] No, and they didn't, you know, people, it was different mores then, people didn't necessarily share things, sort of hid things from you.

Virginia Garrison [00:08:52] For children. But so where did you grow up?

Bill Akin [00:08:59] Well, as I say, the home, the house itself, where I grew up, was in Sleepy Hollow Manor, which is just north of North Tarrytown, south of Briarcliff and whatnot. And I went to school there, but we would drive out from many, many times from Sleepy Hollow, first to Westhampton, and then later on from Sleepy Hollow out to out here to Montauk. The benefit is that in all those years of driving out here, I probably explored every road that's coming east on Long Island, and so at any time there's a traffic jam, anywhere, I can just turn.

Virginia Garrison [00:09:38] You know all the back roads?

Bill Akin [00:09:39] I turn towards the south, because I know all of the roads on the south side, including what's now called Horse Block Road, which was then called the Farm to Market Road.

Virginia Garrison [00:09:50] Farm to Market, that's great.

Bill Akin [00:09:52] From Ronkonkoma over to Old 27.

Virginia Garrison [00:09:58] I like that name, Farm to Market. Were your parents drawn to Westhampton initially because of the water or?

Bill Akin [00:10:06] I, you know, we never, it was just nothing I don't think anybody ever talked about. They just didn't, Dad always wanted to be near the water and I don't know how they originally landed there, I really don't.

Virginia Garrison [00:10:20] And then there was the interest in Montauk for the fishing on your father's part, and then they bought the Carl Fisher.

Bill Akin [00:10:30] Well, in between, I had that old charter boat and that lasted two years and then he had commissioned a new boat, which is pictured in my book there on the cover, the Nika, a 40-foot sport fishing boat that was built at South Bay Boat Works in Patchogue. And that arrived in 1952. A lot of the customers for the wire products then were in supplying cable to the aerospace industry, which at the time was very substantial on Long Island. These were the people that put insulation on and whatever. So they were our customers. They loved to go fishing. They would drive out from Islip or wherever the factories were and they would come out. My father started inviting them out to go fishing. And, uh, there were 1952, '53, '54, there were not a lot of motels out here. And sometimes it was hard to find a room for these guys. Um, so at that time, uh we were still, the last the first, let me say it this way, the first summer we spent the whole summer in Montauk was 1953. Up until then had been commuting from Westhampton to go fishing, but in '53, Dad rented, uh, Frank Tuma Jr.'s house on South Fairview, still there with a red roof on it, um, in '53 and '54 and '55, he rented, Frank Tuma Sr.'s house, which is over on Fairview, it's a Tudor, which later was owned by Carl Darenberg. It's been sold since then. So that was for '54 and '55. And then in '56, that's when he bought what's now called the Carl Fisher house from Margaret Fisher, Fisher's widow. And that solved the problem of where the customers could stay on weekends. Because there were I don't know, was it 18 rooms? Because it's three houses. There's a caretaker's cottage. There's the garage with five rooms in it. And then the main house had three rooms on the second floor and five rooms on on the top floor. And yeah, that's about it. So we were able to fill that place.

Virginia Garrison [00:13:06] That's amazing. Two things I remember you saying. First of all, I wanted to ask you if was anybody using the house at the time that your parents bought it?

Bill Akin [00:13:17] It was absolutely empty, empty to a, to, there wasn't a stick of furniture in it because Margaret Fisher had said the caretakers was Walter Job and his wife. And I guess that she had said to them, don't leave anything for anybody. Cause she didn't want to sell, but the Lindsey Hopkins who had taken control of the Fisher Company, the Carl Fisher company, not the Beach Company, insisted. She said, you've got to divest. And so he more or less forced her and my father knew this guy. He had a house with

Virginia Garrison [00:13:59] Keep your father new, Lindsey Hopkins.

Bill Akin [00:14:01] Well, he had the house, um, on Fairview, which we call the Mary Gosman house, but the windmill house, that was Lindsey Hopkins. And he was an executive for Coca-Cola, but an old time friend of Fisher's. And he ended up as the executor of the estate, if you will.

Virginia Garrison [00:14:20] And where was Mrs. Fisher? This was, she was nowhere near Montauk then, right? No, I doubt it.

Bill Akin [00:14:26] I don't, she never came into the picture, certainly not my picture.

Virginia Garrison [00:14:29] So the house hadn't been, do you have any idea of how long it had not been used?

Bill Akin [00:14:36] I don't know, Fisher I think was last time he was in Montauk was probably around 1933-34. He died in '36. I don't know if Margaret came out after that. But then, you know, Montauks at that point went into what I call the dark ages. She did lease the house to the military during World War II, it became officer quarters.

Virginia Garrison [00:15:03] That's interesting.

Bill Akin [00:15:04] And I believe after World War II, she took back possession of the house. And it was, it was empty. I remember my father buying the house in March, and he told my mother, Bessie, he said, Bessie, we've got some customers coming out the 1st of July, I'd like to see if you can get the house ready. And that, according to my mother, she said, I didn't know what to do. But fortunately... The, uh, the, the man who was running, our dad had hired to run the new boat, the Nika, was Jimmy Sarno, who was married to Teresa Sarno or Teresa Harrington, Mary Gosman's sister. And Teresa and my mother just went on a tear getting that house ready.

Virginia Garrison [00:16:08] She helped her.

Bill Akin [00:16:10] Yeah. I went into Hildreth and bought 18 beds and they said, what are you opening?

Virginia Garrison [00:16:17] It's true, it's easy to forget that the hotels... You needed a place to stay, you know.

Bill Akin [00:16:24] I think the first one in town was 1950 was called the Maisonettes.

Virginia Garrison [00:16:28] It was, yeah, that was, um, Bea and Sam Cox, the ones who had, uh East Deck. So you would your family would come out for the summers at that point beginning in like the early '50s

Bill Akin [00:16:46] Well, we had the house, yes, yes. And I know my dad would commute back to Ossining and I know there were times when I had to commute, go back and go to school because I was trying to get into a better school that I really wasn't qualified for.

Virginia Garrison [00:17:00] Where were you going?

Bill Akin [00:17:02] Well, I was trying to get into a private school in Tarrytown called Hackley, and you know, they didn't tell me, actually no one ever told me until I figured it out after I graduated college. That I was pretty severely dyslexic. Yeah, still am. So, anyway, now I'm wrestling with dyslexia and dementia at the same time. It's kind of an interesting situation. Don't know which one comes first.

Virginia Garrison [00:17:29] Ugh.

Bill Akin [00:17:31] Anyway, no, but I had to get tutored in order to get into this private school. So you had to go back for the tutoring? Yeah, on weekends.

Virginia Garrison [00:17:39] Did you get in?

Bill Akin [00:17:39] Yeah. I went there for eight years.

Virginia Garrison [00:17:41] Oh, wow. Okay. Did you attend college?

Bill Akin [00:17:44] I went on from there to go to Colgate, like half the population of Montauk, with George Biondo and the Duryeas, and Chip.

Virginia Garrison [00:17:53] Rusty Drumm.

Bill Akin [00:17:53] Rusty and I were there at the same time.

Virginia Garrison [00:17:58] Is that right?

Bill Akin [00:17:58] Uh, he was a year or two behind me. I graduated.

Virginia Garrison [00:18:04] Toni Ross went there too.

Bill Akin [00:18:06] I graduated in '67 from Colgate, and he graduated, I think, '69, I'm not sure.

Virginia Garrison [00:18:13] That's a lot of people, Colgate. What'd you major in?

Bill Akin [00:18:15] Economics.

Virginia Garrison [00:18:15] So as a child in Montauk, you remember the Pelican, but you didn't really know what was going on at the time. And what else do you remember?

Bill Akin [00:18:31] Well, I was really into fishing, and I would go out on the boat. But then as soon as we got back or around the dock, if we didn't, I would fish off the dock for snappers or whatever I could catch off the dock, and then a couple of years later, my parents would drop me off down at Fort Pond or the little lake there on Industrial Road, and I'd fish for freshwater bass.

Virginia Garrison [00:19:04] You did freshwater fishing too, huh?

Bill Akin [00:19:05] Oh yeah, yeah. Because we had a little lake up in Sleepy Hollow called Fremont Pond, and before we started coming out for summer, I would be fishing for freshwater bass there.

Virginia Garrison [00:19:17] And did your father turn you on to that as well?

Bill Akin [00:19:22] I don't remember him freshwater fishing, that was me and a spinning rod and I just did it.

Virginia Garrison [00:19:30] So you would go out on on the boat with your father and then you would fish from the pier by by.

Bill Akin [00:19:37] The dock at the Yacht Club.

Virginia Garrison [00:19:38] At the Yacht Club.

Bill Akin [00:19:39] Yeah, the original dock, which is not there now.

Virginia Garrison [00:19:43] It sounds like you really remember sort of the culture and the social scene at the Yacht club very fondly.

Bill Akin [00:19:51] Oh, absolutely. There is a section in my book, The Golden Age of Montauk Sport Fishing, called the Montauk Yacht Club. I describe how the culture there was. It was Carl Fisher and the Great Gatsby. It really was.

Virginia Garrison [00:20:08] Can you elaborate a little bit more?

Bill Akin [00:20:11] The best example was they had an opening ceremony. Now the club was not officially, you just paid an annual fee to be part of the sport fishing tournament there. But they had officers, they had a commodore, a vice commodore. A fleet captain.

Virginia Garrison [00:20:33] There's that whole hierarchy, yeah.

Bill Akin [00:20:34] And the first, I think it was around the 20th of June, which was when people first started coming out. Memorial Day this place was empty. They had a flag raising ceremony with the officers each standing in white trousers with blue blazers and hoisting up their appropriate commodore flag or whatever out at the end of the dock while the dock master in his uniform stood there, fired a cannon as each flag went up And then he came back down to the lawn and had a... uh, champagne on the lawn and whatnot. It was.

Virginia Garrison [00:21:14] And everyone was totally dressing the part, I'm sure.

Bill Akin [00:21:18] Certainly the officers, their wives and whatnot, it was, you know, it was a coat and tie. And those, I remember those cannons, those little lawn cannons which shot blanks, the, this was a carryover from World War II to certain ceremonies about officers arriving and so on and so forth, and my, whenever a commodore, or a flag officer as they called it, whenever his boat came in from fishing and tied up, they'd fire off one of the cannons. And, and when, if someone arrived in the morning, they'd fire off one of the cannons. And I, sometimes there were people in the bar at the yacht club, they would just spill their drink because the damn thing was really loud. Seagulls would take off and every little dog on the dock would start barking.

Virginia Garrison [00:22:14] That's funny.

Bill Akin [00:22:14] That lasted, it didn't last too long, but it was a few years.

Virginia Garrison [00:22:29] In the more recent book, you talk, too, about just the Montauk landscape as a child, sort of just sort of being a part of it.

Bill Akin [00:22:40] My Equanimity of Fishes book, which has nothing to do with fishes, but everything to do equanimities. There's a story in there called "Summers for Sale," which is sort of my, this is the way I remember it as a kid and this is how I see it today.

Virginia Garrison [00:23:00] Can you describe that?

Bill Akin [00:23:02] Well, yeah, it was very exciting for me, because my brother being eight and a half years older than I was, we weren't as, you know, not close, I mean, in that same house, but we weren't that close. So I was very much an only child. I had friends at home that were in public school, and I was in private school, so we got along. We were on weekends we play stickball, but I didn't, they weren't that close. So I spent a lot of time alone. So coming out to Montauk, here with these Montauk with its rolling fields of tall grass, it's still almost pastureland. Not quite, but with patches of bayberry, patches of beach plum, but mostly tall extended fescue grasses of whatever was growing up here after the cattle left. I could wander those, those hills with a bow and arrow, trying to hunt for things and, uh, never successful, but with, there was quite, there were quail. Uh, very few deer, occasionally, lots of rabbits. Um, but I remember walking by one of my favorite hunting trips was to walk down Glenmore Avenue from where Foxboro meets it and I would walk all, it was, it was not paved. It was a dirt road. There were no houses on it. Walk all the way down there and I could walk all the way out to where it intersects with Gravesend. And so after a while, when my when I wanted to go to the Yacht Club, I just left home and walked to the yacht club down that street in the Gravesend across the road and up to the yacht club. And now nobody would let a kid do it. I mean, I was 11 years old just wandering around.

Virginia Garrison [00:24:55] Yeah, especially by yourself. Oh, yeah. You know.

Bill Akin [00:24:57] It was totally natural.

Virginia Garrison [00:25:00] So, but no success with the hunting, really?

Bill Akin [00:25:02] No, no, no. Somewhere in there I might have killed a quail, but I don't. No, I never got a quail.

Virginia Garrison [00:25:10] Yeah well in that story I know you time this is sort of jumping ahead a little bit but about the the place versus the thing you know.

Bill Akin [00:25:17] Well, you see, I, and this now we are leaping forward, but if you, and this actually, David Rattray just probably doesn't, isn't aware of it, but about three years ago, he wrote an editorial and in there, he just on a side comment said, and then of course out in Montauk, there's some, there is a thing happening and that's all he said, but everybody knew what he talking about and the more I think about it when I was young, and for many, many years, up until recently, the name Montauk was associated with what I call a place, the sense of place, Montauk Manor, the Montauk Lighthouse, Montauki fishing here and there, whatever. It had a sense of real place. Um, now... It has become this marketing success. Um, you have, this is a town with a year-round population, a little over 4,000 people. You have Montauk Pepperidge Farm cookies, you have Montaquilla, you have the Montauk scented candles, you have the Montauk Clothing Company, the Montauk Brewing Company. You have Montauk blueberry Whiskey. Uh, it goes on and on, Montauk Coffee Company. It has become a focus of a marketing product and a lot of times, and they helped along by the proliferation of celebrities that have come out here. Notoriety, Andy Warhol started with the Stones and Paul Simon and when even though nobody ever got really few people saw any of these people, it got to have this sort of panache, if you will. Uh... Fishing in the mean which in sort of boosted it for decades started to subside because of frankly because fishing wasn't as good because it was but meanwhile this thing started to happen and that's with the surfing craze that led to the Surf

Lodge crowd the night time crowd happy to take a picture of themselves saying that they've made it to Montauk and in fact, they have no idea what the place really is.

Virginia Garrison [00:27:57] The irony of the Surf Lodge being nowhere near the surf is, kind of, too, but it's true that in the sort of golden era of sport fishing, there were celebrities who came out here, but maybe I'm wrong, but I'm thinking maybe they were here for an activity, not to sort of part of a marketing proposition.

Bill Akin [00:28:28] They, you know, the, what we call the celebrities, they had no intention of that. And they, they deserve their privacy. I mean, and that, and, that's fine. I mean Ralph never appeared in public out here. And Ralph Lauren, although I do know him and my brother knew him pretty well. Um, uh, Andy Warhol stayed where he was in an occasional visit to the Shagwong or whatever. But they, that wasn't a big thing. It's just that it became known. And then you had the Jaws phenomena, even though it was, the movie was up in Martha's Vineyard, it wasn't, most people realized that Frank Mundus was the guy, and that shark fishing became super important, and Montauk made all the headlines for the shark fishing place.

Virginia Garrison [00:29:18] That was a marketing thing too. Yeah. Yeah, but I'm talking about like, um, Was it Kip Farrington?

Bill Akin [00:29:31] What about it.

Virginia Garrison [00:29:33] No, but I mean, there were people who were well-known in their fields. There were actresses and models.

Bill Akin [00:29:42] Well, Marilyn Monroe, Teresa Sarno Harrington remembered seeing Marilyn walk down the dock at the yacht club because Dan Topping, the owner of the Yankees, had a boat there. The Yankee Clipper, Joe DiMaggio, would visit it and Marilyn would come down there and whatnot. And there were, there were actresses and that, but that was, that sort of came very quickly and went away. In the last 15, 20 years, the stuff with the internet and social media, the notoriety sticks.

Virginia Garrison [00:30:27] So can we talk a little bit more about the sort of the glory days of sport fishing and your experience with that?

Bill Akin [00:30:41] Montauk, as most people realize, a lot of the early fishing was from Fort Pond Bay. You know, people coming out on the Fisherman's Special, going out on the open boats and whatnot. And then after the Pelican disaster, the train got canceled and most of the boats moved into what's now the harbor. And around that same time, right? The end of 1948, '47, '48, um, they discovered that they, you could catch giant bluefin tuna here. Uh, the famous picture of Kay Topping with a 600 pound bluefin tuna that made all the pictures everywhere. Um, that got, that caught people's attention everywhere. Sport fishing in terms of what we think of as big game fishing on the Atlantic side was largely centered in South Florida with a few people like Farrington and... And, uh... But certain guides were making trips up to Nova Scotia. I get a kick out of every week that the East Hampton Star comes out and they're promoting pictures from the star's heritage and whatnot and there's a picture of Chisie Barrington standing there with two giant bluefin tuna. That's in Nova Scotia. That wasn't Montauk.

Virginia Garrison [00:32:15] Is that right?

Bill Akin [00:32:16] No, it's not. That wasn't here. That was in Nova Scotia. That's where they were fishing. Why? They just...

Virginia Garrison [00:32:24] Why, they hadn't bluefin here?

Bill Akin [00:32:26] He had a house in East Hampton, Kip, very near Maidstone, and so he was embedded in the East Hampton community. He would come out to the yacht club and hitchhike a ride with the charter boat captains as being a famous author. They'd always let him come along, and Ralph Pitts has some very... Less than generous comments but uh... Uh... When you mentioned the name I started laughing

Virginia Garrison [00:33:00] It was like, yeah, it was something about not ever paying.

Bill Akin [00:33:04] So anyway, the fishing started to get attention other places, and then some of the boats and guides that had been pretty much Palm Beach, Bimini, that area, they started coming up. And the fleet, the nature of the fleet at the yacht club from 1952 to 1960 was a metamorphosis.

Virginia Garrison [00:33:27] Can you elaborate.

Bill Akin [00:33:29] Most of the boats in 1952 or so were local Downeaster boats. And all of a sudden by 1960, you had 44 foot Palm Beach built Ravoviches and Merritt boats and boats that average anywhere from 18 to 30 knots. Whereas before an average charter boat was 10 to 12 knots. Um, and they had not only a captain, but they had a mate. There was one boat, called the Finest Kind, owned by a woman by the name of, um, Dorothea Dean. I think she was the Church & Dwight baking soda. I'm not sure. She may have owned Warhol's place before that, but anyway, I may be wrong on that, but she had a boat and she was a light tackle fanatic, which meant that if the fish was close to the boat, you had to be really careful. She had a four man crew, captain and three mates.

Virginia Garrison [00:34:25] That's a lot of help.

Bill Akin [00:34:26] A lot of help and that boat came up here for two months and then it went down to Palm Beach and a lot of them did and my dad he started taking his boat down to West Palm Beach and we were able to fish over in Bimini in the late '50s and early '60s

Virginia Garrison [00:34:43] And you got to go.

Bill Akin [00:34:44] Oh, I loved it, and Bimini to me was the most exciting thing I'd ever done. I hadn't been out of the country as a 12-year-old or 11-year-old, and that's the main story in The Equanimity of Fishes. And here was this place where the water was 30 feet deep and as clear as your bathtub. I mean, you could just see everything. And the Gulf Stream came so close to Bimini on the west side of the island. That's all there is. It's only 300 yards wide, the whole island is about seven miles long, but there's a strip and the glove Gulf Stream comes in close and you stand on the west side of Bimini, which is you walk up the hill from the harbor. It's about 150 feet up, up. And, uh, I mean the top was about, I'd say 40 feet is probably the altitude. And you look out and the water changes color from crystal clear to aqua to darker blue. And then you can see the purple of the Gulf Stream right there. And the fishing was totally different, the vibration, the Calypso-moving music coming out of the clubs at night, old-fashioned Calypso music, it's just...

Virginia Garrison [00:36:10] Did you go there repeatedly, or...?

Bill Akin [00:36:13] We went I would say we went with the boat. I know I was there at least four or five times with the boat, probably mostly in March. And later years, I went back with a friend of mine, um, who had also grown up with me here in Montauk. His father is a Harry MacGrotty. Um, the, uh, he, uh he and our close friends still are. Um, but he moved to Florida. His father, by the way, was the guy who donated the first ambulance.

Virginia Garrison [00:36:44] Ambulance, yeah.

Bill Akin [00:36:47] Harry.

Virginia Garrison [00:36:48] To the fire department.

Bill Akin [00:36:49] He had moved to Florida and was still in touch with a lot of the people that were deeply into the fishing community. And I would, he would invite me to come along with another friend and we'd go over to Bimini on this guy's boat. Later, another guy invited me to come down to St. Thomas to go marlin fishing. Uh, and those were, you know, those were great, great fishing trips.

Virginia Garrison [00:37:16] This is sort of tangential, but I was trying to wrap my head around, and your father was a rod and reel swordfishing, as opposed to harpooning them, and I was actually talking to my, to Gary, my husband, last night, and was like, I don't really get why that's a big distinction, and he was saying that the swordfish basically sleep at the surface.

Bill Akin [00:37:44] They're a funny breed. Swordfish basically have huge eyes and they feed near the bottom. And a lot of people think they feed mostly at night. The trick here was that as a sport fish, we would go offshore and they would be sunning, they would, you could see the fins on the surface or just below the surface. Uh, and you, as a sport fisherman, you would try to get a bait somewhere close to them that they might be interested in. But these are, these fish are up there, like I did, you know, they're not, that not always hungry. Sometimes they went after a bait squid or whatever. Unlike tuna at the time, swordfish were very valuable. So a charter boat who had a pulpit or harpoon on the boat, he's not going to, he sees one. He's not gonna risk scaring the fish away by trying to put a bait in front of it. He's going to get up on the bow of the boat and harpoon the fish and sell it. And that's completely understandable. Um, but my father... Encouraged sport fishing of rod and reel fishing for swordfish and it didn't take very long that the charter boats realized that that was another thing that they could be, that people wanted to go out and charter a boat just to go swordfishing, not just to catch school tuna, but so they started getting these fish on rod and rail and it was a big success.

Virginia Garrison [00:39:28] There's more sport.

Bill Akin [00:39:31] Yeah, you've got the fish on the line, as opposed to sticking them with a harpoon, you know, like minis. One is a commercial application, the other is theoretically a sport application.

Virginia Garrison [00:39:43] That's the... Now the bluefin tuna.

Bill Akin [00:39:51] That is still, in my lifetime, one of the most amazing things to have witnessed in terms of change of attitude.

Virginia Garrison [00:39:59] You mean the value, the value as a food fish?

Bill Akin [00:40:00] When we would catch lots and lots of school tuna, anywhere from 15 to 25 pound fish. And I don't, still to this day, it just astonishes me. We'd bring them in and throw 30 of them up on the dock. And somebody might take one of them to take home and, and cook in a pressure cooker and can, and a lot of the other ones were just thrown away or, yeah, you know, there was amazing waste, um, because tuna were not valued as a, as a simply put sushi hadn't happened yet.

Virginia Garrison [00:40:46] That really was the...

Bill Akin [00:40:49] Yeah, that was the game changer, because my favorite story is that there was a very, very successful tuna tournament over at Point Judith, which is only 18 miles from Montauk. We would all go over there to the tuna tournament in August or September. And one year, '56, was very successful. We caught a lot of fish, like over 30 giants, average weight 600 pounds at least. Um, and they, they hung all those fish up on a huge, huge scale. Uh, I don't know, it must've been 40 yards long with these fish hanging off on separate ropes and whatever. They did this so they could take a picture at the end of the tournament with all the anglers and all the fish. Right. It's in the, it's in my book. The first day, the second day, even the third day, all those fish were put in trucks at the dock side. And for the first two days, they were left there during the day in the sun rotting away. And at the end of the tournament, after everybody went home, those trucks turned around and drove to a cat food factory.

Virginia Garrison [00:42:02] With it.

Bill Akin [00:42:02] With the tuna, there was enough value in today's market, probably to buy a house here in London.

Virginia Garrison [00:42:09] Isn't that amazing?

Bill Akin [00:42:11] It's just mind-blowing. I showed, I remember showing Joe Gaviola that picture that's in there and he looked at it and he says, he says that's the most astonishing fishing picture he's ever seen in his life. Just the fact that they all went to waste. At night with 30 of them hanging there. Down in the Bahamas, they had caught those before, really. I mean, Hemingway had done it, Tommy Gifford, a famous guide, fished for them, and the Merritts that ended up building Merritt boats, fish out of Bimini and Cat Key. They knew how to catch giant tuna.

Virginia Garrison [00:42:52] They value them?

Bill Akin [00:42:53] No. Some of them were brought in, the natives would eat them, but some of them was brought in, but then there was a point where they would just release them.

Virginia Garrison [00:43:01] Mm-hmm.

Bill Akin [00:43:01] Which was what I ended up doing the last few times I fished for giant tuna. But those guides were the ones that came up here and taught the locals how to catch these things.

Virginia Garrison [00:43:10] Oh.

Bill Akin [00:43:11] I mean, Carl Darenberg.

Virginia Garrison [00:43:12] Because they didn't know.

Bill Akin [00:43:14] Carl Darenberg tells a hysterical story about how the first time he took a client out to catch a giant tuna, it stripped all the line off of his reels and then he had to buy a fighting chair, which he didn't have in his boat, and he got the showroom model and he brought it out to Montauk and he nailed it into his deck and they hooked a big fish the next day and it ripped the chair right out of the deck.

Virginia Garrison [00:43:40] It's hard to imagine how powerful they are, you know.

Bill Akin [00:43:44] Yeah, you got good because he was taking that he was he had been hired by a guy named Al Whesnet who was a well Bimini Cat Hey guy and knew what he was doing.

Virginia Garrison [00:43:55] How do you spell his last name?

Bill Akin [00:43:58] I think it's W-H-E-S-N-E T, something like that. I think I have it correct in my book.

Virginia Garrison [00:44:05] I'll look for it there.

Bill Akin [00:44:06] Um, anyway.

Virginia Garrison [00:44:10] Um, and you, you, so you remember sort of the Pelican and then the Hurricane Carol, I know.

Bill Akin [00:44:20] Hurricane Carol 1954, we were at that tuna tournament.

Virginia Garrison [00:44:24] And this was in Rhode Island, right?

Bill Akin [00:44:26] We were there, I was there with my father and mother and my, we were staying at a hotel or a rooming house, Peterson's, in Narragansett, and my brother, Jimmy Sarno, Harry Clemenz, and a friend of my brother's were on the boat. Nobody had warning of Hurricane Carol; it came up and went right across the middle of Long Island and came across and went just, just south or just west of Point Judith, which meant that the strongest winds are on the right-hand side. And there were 85 boats packed into these finger piers that...

Virginia Garrison [00:45:08] But this was because of the tournament?

Virginia Garrison [00:45:10] Yeah, okay.

Bill Akin [00:45:11] And the damage was astronomical.

Virginia Garrison [00:45:14] We have some photos.

Bill Akin [00:45:15] Carried the boats up. Some of them were thrown up on top of the pilings. Um, I have movies, uh, from my brother took of, of people walking across the

parking lot in waist-deep water, trying to save people to take them to the local fish factory. Our boat was in a very bad position, way back in the deepest pocket of a finger pier with two boats in front of it on either side. And ropes were, the people had left their boats. They'd strung ropes across. Jimmy Sarno and Harry Clemenz knew enough to say that we can't stay here because we will lose the boat. And Harry jumped from one boat to another, cutting the lines. And, uh, I think he said that way we're able to maneuver the Nika out into the harbor and, and ride out the storm as three houses drifted by with people on the roof.

Virginia Garrison [00:46:16] And you were... like 10 years old or something?

Bill Akin [00:46:17] We were staying over in Narragansett and my father and mother took us to the local school, the brick schoolyard.

Virginia Garrison [00:46:25] For shelter.

Bill Akin [00:46:25] For shelter, and the storm cleared in the afternoon, it was clear, and somehow we got around to the bottom, the farthest-up point of the Point Judith Harbor, and there was an old commercial boat that had been washed up on the shore there. And my father jumped on board, was able to get the radio started. And was able to reach, he was able to reach the Nika and found out it was okay.

Virginia Garrison [00:46:56] And the damage was, it seemed like it was worse there, almost, than it was in Montauk.

Bill Akin [00:47:00] Well, it was probably worse because so many boats were packed in. One smart guy with what had been a commercial dragger with a low, low fantail had converted it with a fighting chair to a sport fishing boat and it was an old boat with a huge keel and this guy was smart. The water came up far enough. He drove the boat onto the parking lot tied up to a telephone pole. The next day, the next day a crane came by, picked up the boat, put it in the water and the guy drove away. Wow. The day after the storm, there were only 13 boats that could run under their own power out of 85.

Virginia Garrison [00:47:50] People say that was an underrated storm.

Bill Akin [00:47:52] I call it the Forgotten Storm. Montauk was an island. Chip Duryea remembers sitting up at his house by his, when he lived on Second, whatever that road is, it's just above Second House. He had a house there that Coby lives in now. And he remembers telling his mom, look Mom, the waves are washing over the dune, where the IGA is now. They didn't wash through but they did come over the dunes.

Virginia Garrison [00:48:22] That's amazing. Um... I should have asked you a little bit more about your family, your wife. So did you ever work at your father's?

Bill Akin [00:48:39] Into careers. Do the business side uh... My first career was uh... Twelve years in the advertising businesses as uh... account supervisor on package goods business such as Procter and Gamble and Lever Brothers. At some point the wire company was doing well, getting bigger, my brother by then was in charge and he said I need help. So he convinced me to leave the advertising business, come up and work with him, um, which I did. And, uh, I stayed working as, and call it vice president of marketing or executive vice president, family owned company, it didn't make much difference. And, uh, I worked there, uh another 13 years and eventually the company, we sold the company to

Phelps Dodge, another, uh Phelps Dodge was a mining company, but they're also in wire, wire business as well. Um, and, uh.

Virginia Garrison [00:49:41] Around when was that, the year?

Bill Akin [00:49:42] We sold, we sold, ironically, this is the funny thing, we sold the company, the closing of the date was November 3rd, 1989. My father died in September of that year.

Virginia Garrison [00:50:00] And he worked right until the end of his life.

Bill Akin [00:50:03] I I he worked there until the end of his life. He worked. He was in the office that came home and had a heart attack.

Virginia Garrison [00:50:09] How old was he?

Bill Akin [00:50:11] He was 85 and it was the, ironically, it was the night, I remember well because it was night that Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston. These are how you remember things. But anyway, I stayed on working for the corporate giant for four years and then I got sick and tired of it. And that's when I quote unquote retired and came out here.

Virginia Garrison [00:50:35] When you say the corporate giant, do you mean that the.

Bill Akin [00:50:37] Phelps Dodge.

Virginia Garrison [00:50:38] Oh, okay. That's okay. So you retired around what year?

Bill Akin [00:50:45] Ninety-three.

Virginia Garrison [00:50:47] And that's when you moved out here full-time?

Bill Akin [00:50:51] We had started building the house in '91, the house we're living in now.

Virginia Garrison [00:50:55] Now that was part of the original Carl Fisher estate, right, that property?

Bill Akin [00:50:59] The estate, the Fisher estate, was 27 acres, at least in one account. Around the early '80s, my father and my brother and I agreed to subdivide it. And, uh, my brother had three kids. Um, and I had no kids and I wanted nothing to do with managing what's now the Carl Fisher house. It's a big place. Uh, but instead, um, my wife and I took ownership of the caretaker cottage, which is a separate entrance, and three other lots, one of which is on the southwest corner of that estate and where I built our year-round house. Our driveway, which was once on a side or back entrance to the Carl Fisher house, it comes off of what's now called Flanders, right across the street from Emmett Gosman's house. So we're very close, but still separate from what we call the big house, the main house.

Virginia Garrison [00:52:09] So it was your brother who occupied the big house.

Bill Akin [00:52:12] He and his three kids, they had been coming out and staying in the little cottage at the bottom and the kids loved it and they were getting older and they all still

love it. They were the ones that were in charge when the town had to buy it, they're the ones that did the deal to sell it to the town.

Virginia Garrison [00:52:36] Oh, I see. Okay.

Bill Akin [00:52:37] I had nothing to do other than encouraging them and encouraging the town, I had nothing to do with ownership of that place.

Virginia Garrison [00:52:51] Gotch, interesting. And your brother kept it pretty much true.

Bill Akin [00:52:54] Yeah, maintenance of that house, uh, a huge amount of credit goes to the people that helped. I mean, there's a whole heritage of Montauk local folks that worked there.

Virginia Garrison [00:53:09] Doing what types of

Bill Akin [00:53:10] Oh everything from we needed a chef uh... With these big weekends and Anne Mead who was the mother of the Ceslow and Smyth clan was a great chef uh... Followed by Paulette Philippe uh whose husband was the manager of the.

Virginia Garrison [00:53:32] Oh, Dean!

Bill Akin [00:53:32] Dean Phillippe, yeah, and she was a great chef. Meanwhile... You had Teresa Sarno, which was helping with the house. And then you had Loretta Weldon for years, who was pretty much the manager. Uh, you had to have the, the, they're indispensable. Um, Tee Ceslow the last few years, ended up being the manager and she did a wonderful job making sure the place, the walls were restored, the woodwork was good.

Virginia Garrison [00:54:02] And this was when your brother had it.

Bill Akin [00:54:04] Yeah, I mean, well, the initial years, call it 1956 to '70, um, that was, uh, I guess Loretta was working there by '70, or thereabouts, but those initiatives, my parents were living there and I was actually, I was living there. I had a room upstairs there. Um, I, then I went off into the Navy briefly. Uh... And I got married in Hawaii, that marriage didn't last but when I came back to Montauk that's when we agreed that I would move to the cottage and my brother's family would move into the main house and that's the way things stayed until I built Monika and I, my second wife built the one at 10 Flanders Road.

Virginia Garrison [00:55:02] How did you and Monica meet?

Bill Akin [00:55:03] George Biondo.

Virginia Garrison [00:55:04] Really?

Bill Akin [00:55:04] Monika's? Well, George's, George's wife's mother was very good friends with Monika's aunt in Germany. Monika's Austrian, but there was a European connection that was very strong. So that when Monika came over here, uh, working for the Austrian trade commission in New York, George had invited her to go to St. Peter's, but they would go to the beach down at Clearwater and whatnot. So they got to know each other. And then after I was divorced George said listen, you gotta meet this person and Monika was too busy playing tennis in New York to come out for a weekend at George's. I

finally said George we're living ten blocks apart in Manhattan, can I maybe have her phone number? Yeah, he had to get approval for that well, so it was a blind date.

Virginia Garrison [00:56:08] In the city.

Bill Akin [00:56:08] In the city. May 6, 1982.

Virginia Garrison [00:56:13] And when did you get married?

Bill Akin [00:56:15] Um, October 26th, 1985.

Virginia Garrison [00:56:22] Now both of you were very athletic, right?

Bill Akin [00:56:25] Yeah, I was, I guess my athletic career could be characterized as perfecting mediocrity. I was pretty good at a lot of things.

Virginia Garrison [00:56:36] Well, you surf, you play golf now.

Bill Akin [00:56:39] That, we don't have to remember that. There was a time when I considered it playing golf and it's hard to imagine that now. Listen, it really goes to hell with age. I was a reasonably pretty good surfer. I put a lot of time into playing the guitar after I retired.

Virginia Garrison [00:56:58] Do you still play?

Bill Akin [00:57:01] No. I recorded some albums, I wrote a lot of songs, I did some performing, um, but I was, I was a pretty good guitar player, but it wasn't that good. Um, but after I hurt my, I, I blew my shoulder out surfing down in Mexico. Um, back in I don't know, it's about eight years ago now, and I had to have an operation on my shoulder and my arm ended up in a sling for six or seven weeks, and after that I couldn't hold the guitar comfortably for more than about 10 minutes.

Virginia Garrison [00:57:37] Ugh.

Bill Akin [00:57:38] It's hard. And I lost all the calluses in my left hand. And at the same time, I started writing that first book, The Golden Age of Montauk Sport Fishing. And part of it was like, okay, creative juices switched from music to the written word. And while I was writing that book, I was also studying, writing, reading just about everything I could put my hands on. The fiction, non-fiction? No, how to write books.

Virginia Garrison [00:58:09] Oh, how to write, gotcha.

Bill Akin [00:58:10] Several of which, and then looking at good examples. So as I was wandering through the, trying to write Golden Age, I'd end up going back to a page and say, Oh, this really sucks. I got to rewrite that. Um, and that's why, that's, why I feel that the second book is where I'm not just telling other people's stories, the Equanimity of Fishes. That's when I thought, okay, now I'm going to write some.

Virginia Garrison [00:58:37] Do you enjoy it writing?

Bill Akin [00:58:38] I do, but now I'm a bit stuck right now for a next project. But I really did enjoy that. And I enjoy it. There's several stories that are on my computer that are not in that book.

Virginia Garrison [00:58:53] So that gives you a start for the next one.

Bill Akin [00:58:55] But there's a reason why they're not in that book.

Virginia Garrison [00:58:59] I hear you. So what do you like to do now that you do try to get writing done?

Bill Akin [00:59:05] Yeah. And I like, you know, I stay in touch with the gang up at the Fisher House.

Virginia Garrison [00:59:13] The Montauk Historical Society.

Bill Akin [00:59:16] The historical society. They're doing a great job and they're not very far away. As I say, next weekend, I'm doing a talk up there. But in the meantime, something we haven't touched on, maybe you want to touch on it, was even before I came out here full time, while we're still working. I started Music for Montauk.

Virginia Garrison [00:59:37] Yeah, let's, I wanted to talk about that and also Concerned Citizens.

Bill Akin [00:59:42] Because they were going on and on. Are we okay there?

Virginia Garrison [00:59:50] Figure out how to turn this. So let's talk about Music for Montauk.

Bill Akin [00:59:53] All right. I was living in the city, um, but coming out on weekends and I had a couple of friends who were classical musicians. One of whom, uh, was the lead cello player for the American Ballet Company. Frederick Zlotkin, very excellent.

Virginia Garrison [01:00:10] What's the last name?

Bill Akin [01:00:11] Frederick Zlotkin.

Virginia Garrison [01:00:13] ZL.

Bill Akin [01:00:14] Z-L-O-T-K-I-N. His brother was Leonard Slatkin and he ended up being the conductor of the St. Louis Symphony. So they knew their music. And Fred came out visiting Montauk several times. He loved it. And I remember we were standing in the main, the big room, what they now call the great room at the Fisher House. That room with the high ceiling and a huge fireplace and whatnot and I I always was into music. I sang Glee Club and Octet in prep school and I said, listen to the acoustics in this room, Fred. And, you know, we did a sound thing. And I said boy, it'd be great to have a concert here. And he says, he said, very simply he says I can do that. I said what do you mean? He said, oh, you can get, I got enough friends. We can come out here and do a concert. So we did, and for three years.

Virginia Garrison [01:01:14] Is this like around the '80s?

Bill Akin [01:01:16] Yes, three years. I think the first one might've been '79, but '80, maybe '81, we had, pre-'81, we had private, private concerts in the great room and that those were spectacular. Well, it was the last week.

Virginia Garrison [01:01:33] That must've been very like intimate too.

Bill Akin [01:01:36] Last weekend in June, hundred dollars per person, champagne on the porch when you arrived, concert, and a catered dinner afterwards.

Virginia Garrison [01:01:48] For \$100?

Bill Akin [01:01:49] For a hundred dollars a person.

Virginia Garrison [01:01:50] Good deal.

Bill Akin [01:01:50] And we had as many as 80 people in there for the concert and the dinner and the champagne and clams on the front porch. And there are people that are around, even the Cortells, they remember it, Elaine Kahn still remembers those great concerts. Importantly, Ruth Widder was there and loved it. She knew more about music than pretty much everybody in the room except for maybe the musicians.

Virginia Garrison [01:02:18] Almost a neighbor, right?

Bill Akin [01:02:20] Yeah. And, um, we, uh, I got very involved in business and a divorce in the late middle eighties and gave up on those concerts. And then at a dinner at Ruth's house sometime in the late '80s I was sitting at a table and I remember Roberta Gosman was sitting across from me and Ruth was sitting next to her. And Roberta said, we go back with the Gosman family. Roberta says, Billy, you've got to do those concerts again. And I said, that's a lot. I don't know how to put that together. And Ruth goes, oh, well, I know how to put that together. And I'm going to think about it. And so the next day I called Ruth. I went home and I thought about it and I said, Ruth, I think we have three conditions. It probably turned out to be four. I said number one, we change the name to Music for Montauk. It had been officially, and it still is officially the Montauk Chamber Music Society. That's the incorporated name doing business as Music for MontauK. I said, we changed the name to Music for Montauk. We do free concerts in the off season for the locals at the school. And number three is we do not restrict ourselves solely to classical. And Ruth said, I have no problem with that whatsoever at all. So from then on. Ruth and I worked together. I did a lot of the fundraising. She took this on as a bulldog, really.

Virginia Garrison [01:04:10] The programming.

Bill Akin [01:04:11] Yeah, she got the musicians, she was on the board at, uh, the Lincoln chain. What is it, the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Orchestra, and she knew everybody in New York. Manhattan School for Music, so we could get good musicians. Fred Zlotkin was still involved the first couple of concerts that we had. And then we got musicians from Manhattan School of Music. And I still had friends that were musicians. I got a few classical musicians to come out for smaller concerts in the winter. Very intimate. And then as it evolved, Ruth was putting it together and then I was more or less like the producer on site. I had the school, I got the chairs, I've got the lighting set up, I get any kind of sound thing that was needed and fundraising events. But Ruth was putting together the concerts, the programs, paying the musicians and whatnot. Um, so then, you know, out of the blue, when Ruth passed away, um, I don't know, it must be eight years ago now, or it was a

shock and we already had a concert booked and I had to announce to be, we had the concert and I announced, you know, that this is, I, you now, for now, I have no other further plans and whatnot, and we went ahead with that concert and then I didn't do anything, but for... A year or so, I just filed tax returns, which were minimal, and I was getting ready to close it. Um, and Andy Harris came to me and said, we were talking and he's saying, by the way, Bill, you might like, you might like to know that Lilah Gosman's thinking of starting up a, an LL, I mean, a, a not-for-profit to have music out here. I said, Andy, tell her that I have one here. It's all we have to do is signs some papers and you're in charge. And that's when.

Virginia Garrison [01:06:25] Is that what happened?

Bill Akin [01:06:25] That's what, when Lilah took over. And so they're running it now. I'm not sure what's happening now because I haven't heard from her and I know she's extremely busy, the family, profession, and living in Philadelphia. So we'll see, but it, you know, we've had some great times in the last several years, concerts at the Fort Pond House and up at the lighthouse. Tents at Third House and whatnot.

Virginia Garrison [01:06:58] Nice, and at the school, too?

Bill Akin [01:07:00] Yeah, yeah, some of them. We're still at the school School. The school, that room has excellent acoustics believe it or not. So anyway, that was that was Music for Montauk, which I got a huge kick out of.

Virginia Garrison [01:07:16] Even if it was, um, what's the word.

Bill Akin [01:07:20] Gratifying.

Virginia Garrison [01:07:21] Gratifying, yes.

Bill Akin [01:07:23] To say the least.

Virginia Garrison [01:07:25] That's great. Now, Concerned Citizens.

Bill Akin [01:07:31] Concerned Citizens were, I didn't know who they were when I was, you know, Hilda Lindley started the organization in 1970 and it was pretty much, the goal was to try and thwart the overwhelming pressure for development out here. And uh... It's funny because I grew up and my parents were very conservative and they were, so were their friends. Who are these damn people trying to stop everything? Listen, I was fishing. I was surfing and I didn't pay much attention. But then as, through Music for Montauk, I met Richard Kahn, Richard and Elaine Kahn, and Richard was very involved in the environmental, he was on the board of directors of the Group for the East End, then it was the Group for the South Fork, and on the Board of the Concerned Citizens. He and Rav Friedel sort of lassoed me into becoming a member. And then I realized what the people were doing was very, very important.

Virginia Garrison [01:08:51] When was this about? '70s?

Bill Akin [01:08:54] No, no, no. no, much, much more reason. Probably. Late late '80s

Virginia Garrison [01:09:06] Oh, okay.

Bill Akin [01:09:07] Uh, because I ended up being president in the early '90s, um, and with certain fights that like, Stop the Ferry when the Cross Sound Ferry wanted to put in a terminal in Fort Pond Bay, uh, which would have just devastated Montauk in terms of traffic conditions. I mean you have seven they were thinking of seven back-and-forth trips a day with -- they said no, they're not car ferries they're passenger ferries, well, that's worse because at least with the car ferry when the car shows up it goes to the other side. The passenger ferry it comes and it stops there then you got huge parking problems and all sorts of things so but that was a that was an interesting time because we somehow or other it got misinterpreted that we were trying to put the Viking out of business. And there was a huge meeting at Town Hall where I had to show up and there were placards on the wall, Save the Viking, and on the lawn when I pulled in there was all 50, 60 people on the lawn and they had to move the meeting to the VFW.

Virginia Garrison [01:10:27] Oh, wow.

Bill Akin [01:10:28] And we're trying to say, no, what we're actually doing is keeping the competition out. And if you read behind the headlines, we're giving the Viking a monopoly on the ferry business. It was never ever seen that way.

Virginia Garrison [01:10:46] Interesting.

Bill Akin [01:10:47] But anyway, that's that's, that was one issue and then I thought the most gratifying was ... the, um, Shadmoor had been a fight forever. There were one effort or another to develop it. And then people were able to discover that somehow or other, this, the, the soil samples that were taken were not particularly accurate or had been tampered with and had been rigged, so to speak. And that shot that down and one thing or another went on for 15 years.

Virginia Garrison [01:11:26] I remember that. There wasn't, I was at the Star then, there was very little interest in preserving it initially on the part of the town.

Bill Akin [01:11:35] But then, in 1999, it looked like, although the town and the county had agreed to spend a certain amount of money, CPF money on the part of the town, a certain I'm out on the... county. But the state didn't feel that there was enough enthusiasm and we were getting close to close that was getting close to a closing that we're going to be three lots, three big houses, no access from town to Ditch Plains, that trail that everybody takes that there were, that was not going to happen. It was going to be blocked off. Um, and I was having a meeting on some other subject in, at the firehouse one day, the Montauk Firehouse. And, um, somebody said, I don't know how I got the word that, that the state didn't believe there was enough interest. And I said, well, let's show them that there's interest and let's hold, let's, hold a vigil up on the cliffs. And we had one week to do this. And there was a gal in the audience that lived out here who was part of the, I'm missing a name here, who owns Optimum.

Virginia Garrison [01:13:11] Dolan?

Bill Akin [01:13:13] Said, the woman that was there said I can get you some publicity.

Virginia Garrison [01:13:18] Cause he lived in Amagansett?

Bill Akin [01:13:19] And when she was at that whatever meeting we were having at the firehouse, she was there. And said, I can get you some publicity. And I said, OK, we're

going to do it. We're going have a next Sunday at 12 o'clock. We're gonna meet up on the cliffs and we're gonna, we printed up flyers and Jimmy Hewitt was great. He put them everywhere, even in Shagwong. But what I didn't know was that it was the same day as Field Day.

Virginia Garrison [01:13:46] Oh no.

Bill Akin [01:13:47] And so I go up there at noon, or I went up there 11:30 to the highest bluff. And I said,.

Virginia Garrison [01:13:55] That's a great photo op spot.

Bill Akin [01:13:58] Well, Peter Lowenstein had gotten, he was going to be in his plane with a camera, with some, with a photographer, you know, we're going to cover this thing. I didn't think anybody would come, but then they did come. And we had a wonderful... Somebody had written out... Save Shadmoor on huge individual pages. And they took that and we probably had well over 100 people up there on the bluff. We ended up with, um, it was then it was, uh, it's the Independent now or whatever the name of the newspaper was and we had front page picture. Um. I think Jay Schneiderman got Perry to say to the state, there is interest and they let the money go.

Virginia Garrison [01:14:57] I think it's used a lot, too. You see cars in the parking lot.

Bill Akin [01:15:09] Shadmoor is probably. Sure, um... It's probably more important to me. Probably more important than anything else I've done here.

Virginia Garrison [01:15:34] It's an incredibly beautiful spot.

Bill Akin [01:15:42] Sorry about that happens to me And so anyway, then CCOM, I eventually sort of, I was president for 11 years, that's enough, then Bob Stern took over and then Ed Braun took over. And somewhere in there we had to go, we had, we have to, we had to hire somebody because the issues in, in the '70s, '80s, and 90s, the issues were were land preservation and it's extremely easy to talk to people about the cause when you can say i got ninety acres here that's going to be developed and it should be a park, you could describe it in three sentences but when the issue is what's the right way to manage coastal geography geology, what's the, how do you, how do you measure water quality and what, what the bacteria level is in the lakes? And so this required that's somebody that's more professional. I can talk to these issues and that's when they hired, uh, we hired Jeremy Samuelson, which was absolutely the right move, because as you can see, coastal management is a huge topic and you've got to be you can't just go to town hall and talk You've got, to be able to talk to Washington.

Virginia Garrison [01:17:23] That's interesting. Yeah, so this this it's not that the stakes are higher. It's just that the it's like a mega and Washington vs. town hall.

Bill Akin [01:17:38] Yeah, yeah, I mean, you got it.

Virginia Garrison [01:17:42] What do you like to do out here?

Bill Akin [01:17:46] I like to play golf. I do a lot. Monika and I walk. Do a lot of walking.

Virginia Garrison [01:17:51] Trails like Shadmoor.

Bill Akin [01:17:52] I do Shadmoor a lot, and I think what they're doing up at the Third House Nature Center, I go up there, and Ed Johann's work up there and I go on the hikes with those guys up there.

Virginia Garrison [01:18:09] Yeah, there's one coming up, I think.

Bill Akin [01:18:11] Uh, there might be one Saturday, but I'm not, I'm going to be busy because the professor from Columbia is coming out for one day, a 24-hour tour de force in Montauk and I have to take her, shepherd her around.

Virginia Garrison [01:18:29] It should be fun.

Bill Akin [01:18:30] Yeah that could be good fun. So what else have we got?

Virginia Garrison [01:18:39] What do you, is there anything that you can, one thing that kind of intrigued me was that, it sounds it sounds, well, probably the historical society, we should talk a little bit about collaboration. I don't know if you work with them.

Bill Akin [01:18:58] Well, I'm not on the board of directors, but when they, I am sort of an advisor when they ever have meetings about the Fisher house, I go to all of those meetings and that's the planning of the events. And, uh, I have some responsibilities to take care of the grounds and whatnot, but not, not a whole hell of a lot.

Virginia Garrison [01:19:20] And the other thing I was kind of interested in was, I feel like your sort of philosophy about fishing, it sounds like it's changed.

Bill Akin [01:19:30] Oh, tremendously.

Bill Akin [01:19:31] Yeah, and that kind of intrigued me that there was the quote, the Ernest Hemingway quote at the end of the Golden Age book. We're, you know, talking about... The fish that's like thrashing and this ... and it's terrified.

Bill Akin [01:19:51] Well, that's not the story I tell in, um, in the equanimity of fishing. There's a story called "Night Fishing," which might be my favorite in that book. I don't know. It's pretty close to "Mr. Cooper and a Rum Goody." But, uh, that actually happened where I was fishing down in, uh, it was, wasn't Bimini, it was St. Thomas. Uh... With my friend Harry McGrotty and another guy and we have a blue marlin that didn't act right didn't they'd marlin are a surface fighting fish generally as opposed to a tuna goes down and runs whatever this fish, it took off right away once and almost went right almost went right away went deep and when a fish is deep in the you can't use the boat to go chase the fish because it's not moving, it's straight down. So you end up pulling very, very hard to get the fish up.

Bill Akin [01:20:55] And this thing, not to toot my horn, but Harry and I grew up, kids fishing, we were pretty damn good anglers. And we put a lot of pressure on that fish, right up to the breaking point of the line and the rod and everything else, you know, it wasn't moving. And then finally, after about 20 minutes, it started some activity. It took a little run here and then a little one there. And then I was able to start getting some line on the reel and, you know, after about 10 minutes of that, 15 minutes of that, that getting pumping this thing up, got close to the boat. And then it's when we realized, uh, the captain up at the, up at the bridge saw, could look down deep in the water and he saw this huge cloud of red

surrounding the fish. It turned out that the sharks had gotten to the fish and had taken huge chunks out of the side and near the pectoral fin and out near the tail. And the fish was bleeding.

Bill Akin [01:21:57] And so we all, you know, Oh damn. And I mean, instantaneously cut the line. Um, I mean we didn't have to say that, but it was like, damn. But that happens in sport fishing. And as a result of that, Harry and I, without talking and this is a guy that's one month younger than I am, grew up, his father's boat was right next to ours.

Bill Akin [01:22:26] We kind of went, I don't need to do this anymore. I mean, I've killed every kind of fish there is in this ocean. I mean by the time I, before I could drive a car, I'd caught every major game fish in the Atlantic Ocean, white marlin, sailfish, swordfish, giant tuna, blue marlin. Before I could drive. And, uh, you know, and you, you, you kind of have a, in retrospect, a respect for the, for the fish. And then later on, it was clear that the, that, that the um, stocks of fish were declining. So do I need to do this anymore? You know, I don't know.

Bill Akin [01:23:09] Um, I remember Harry and I, he lives in Lauderdale and the two of us took a trip this must be 20 years ago we drove over from Lauderdale to Everglade City in the boondocks, that's in this swamp that's really as far down on the west coast of Florida as you can get. And there's an old inn there and something out something out of the '30s, pine paneling and whatnot and we chartered a little outboard, a guide to take us out fishing the next day. And we go out through the mangroves in this area, and we start casting some lines and whatnot. And the guy realized we both knew what we were doing. He didn't have to show us anything. And I don't know if we caught anything for that.

Bill Akin [01:24:00] About a half hour later, Harry looks at me and says, I don't need to do this. I said, what do you want to do? He says, let's go look, see if we can find, go. And he looked at the guy and says you know where the Watson place is? This is the the, the farm, the homestead of the, of the planter, Watson from Peter Matthiessen's book, Killing Mr. Watson, it's back in the Everglades there from 1910 or whatnot. And I said, yeah, let's go do it. And the guy said, yeah, I know where the Watson place is. And so we spent the rest of the charter motoring through the back everglades. And we found this Watson place. We got out of the boat and walked around. And we came back and I said, Harry and I said, that was the best use of a charter I've ever had. And then the guy looked at it and said, you guys are different.

Virginia Garrison [01:25:03] Maybe, maybe the, I don't know, but maybe the appeal as you're, you're sort of learning and perfecting technique and things like that, and maybe just maybe plateau, I dunno.

Bill Akin [01:25:18] There's, there's a, there is an awful lot of ego involved in sport fishing. And, you know, as I've grown older and I've, I've spent a lot of time in meditation in the last 25 years, formally, uh, with first with Peter Matthiessen at his Zen Center in Sagaponack and that's all about, that's all about getting out of ego. And when you look at the, the pictures, proud people standing next to a dead fish. I don't want to do any more dead fish pictures. What is this? What is all about now? Certainly in the last several years, the last years that I fished and Harry fished, we released everything, but still there's a point in there, where the, a, the fish doesn't know he's being released. And, uh, he's just, trying to get away. Let me, that Golden Age is a wonderful quotation in there. Not my quote. And it's, it's very interesting to me that, um, when I found this, this, this, quote. Let's see if I can find the right place. Oh, where was it?

Virginia Garrison [01:26:49] It's not the Ernest Hemingway one, is it? Yeah. It's where the pencil is.

Bill Akin [01:26:53] Is that right?

Virginia Garrison [01:26:54] On the right hand.

Bill Akin [01:26:56] You're very good.

Virginia Garrison [01:26:58] That quote just really struck me.

Bill Akin [01:27:00] Well, in my library up at my house, I have an original printing of Kip Farrington's book, *Fishing the Atlantic*. I picked that book up before I wrote *Golden Age*, and I started reading the introduction, not paying much attention. And I'm reading the Introduction, I'm going, wow, this is a great introduction, isn't it? Oh, I thought, this really, really well written. And I finally turned the last page and it was written by Ernest Hemingway.

Virginia Garrison [01:27:33] Is that the one you're talking about?

Bill Akin [01:27:34] And then part of it was amazing, because you know Hemingway's got this crazy image of this macho, which is probably pretty well-earned, but there was another side to him. And this quote here, we said, we, it says, You know, this is me, I can no longer view the pictures of my prize winning fish or my collection of trophies without hearing Hemingway's cautionary words. This is him, he says, anglers have a way of romanticizing their battles with fish and forgetting that the fish has a hook in his mouth, his gullet, or his belly, and that his gameness is really the extreme panic in which he runs, leaps, and pulls to get away until he dies. This is Hemingway. Wow. And the older you get, to me, the more that hits home. And the other thing that's happened in sport fishing is the money has gotten into it.

Virginia Garrison [01:28:49] So many people say that, you know, so many people in the fishing business and, you know, the people who've seen it over the decades.

Bill Akin [01:28:58] It's, you know, there's a quote in here from Carl Darenberg, or no, Frank Tuma, where he says he had a guy in his store and the guy has a, you know, has a 45-foot, you know, \$600,000 sportfishing boat, this is the 1990s or whatever, and probably makes a million dollars a year in New York. Carl said, are you going out today? And the guy said, no, I think the price of tuna is down too far right now. And Frank goes, you've got to be kidding me. That's not what this is about. And those guys, all those guys that were interviewed in that book, they knew that. They saw it.

Virginia Garrison [01:29:47] They saw the change coming.

Bill Akin [01:29:48] Oh, they saw it, and it was with the price of fish, I understand. Charter boat, the guy's making his income off of fishing, but a guy with an extravagant sportfishing boat, and he chooses not to go fishing because the quota is closed or the price is too low. Hell, I'd charter a boat these days just to go out and ride around the ocean.

Virginia Garrison [01:30:14] Right? See the other wildlife and stuff.

Bill Akin [01:30:16] There is a lot of other wildlife out there. Every single day is different.

Virginia Garrison [01:30:24] Is there anything that you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked you about?

Bill Akin [01:30:32] Well, you know, we haven't touched much on the surfing.

Virginia Garrison [01:30:35] Let's do it.

Bill Akin [01:30:38] You know, I, uh, my parents had a cabana, one of the last ones at the surf club.

Virginia Garrison [01:30:44] Really?

Bill Akin [01:30:44] Right next to where Chip Duryea had his cabana. And the two of them, he, Chip all of a sudden appears with a surfboard one day. And then I realized that, this is like early '60s, maybe instead of riding rubber rafts, we can ride surfboards. And so then I got into surfing and then realized I never used to go to Ditch Plains and realized that there was a surf scene, but the, to me, one of the biggest impacts of Montauk literally was the popularity of surfing. If you think about Montauk today, the people that came out, call it the Endless Summer phenomenon. When the movie came out, the people that came out from up Island, from Massapequa and Bay Shore, what not, that had been surfing at Gilgo. Uh, you got commercial fishermen, friends of mine, Dave Marcley, Tony Caramanico, um, even Rusty, Rusty Drumm. Chuck Weimar, these families, and a lot more came out and became part of this community. Electricians, the plumbers, the commercial fishermen, so on and so forth. I think that that really did change the personality profile of Montauk. There'd been many longtime older families here, obviously, Forsbergs and Jobs and the Ceslows and whatnot, but then you had this infusion.

Virginia Garrison [01:32:32] And these are year-rounders. And they were year-rounders.

Bill Akin [01:32:37] Um, which was a wonderful thing, uh, and they've, they really helped put a foundation into the, into the community that was there as the, when it became more popular, they were sort of like the human infrastructure.

Virginia Garrison [01:32:57] Can you, what do you mean by that? Not in terms of surfing, but in terms of the community.

Bill Akin [01:33:06] You know, they came out here first to surf and they're working at night in the pizza parlor and then or the bakery before dawn or whatever, but very soon thereafter, they morphed into electricians, plumbers, you know, painters, commercial fishermen, and their families stayed here. And so as this was '60s, late '60s early '70s and Montauk hadn't really started to gather a tourist momentum until a little later, and they were here to provide trades and, as I say, human infrastructure to that expansion.

Virginia Garrison [01:33:54] So you're saying that's a big part of sort of a cultural thing.

Bill Akin [01:33:57] Cultural yeah in terms of Montauk's cultural history or sociological history I think that's, it can never be ignored.

Virginia Garrison [01:34:08] And, I don't know, like, do you want to talk about change or things that you miss that Montauk used to offer or may not any more?

Bill Akin [01:34:17] Well, you know, to start with the fact that when I first came out here, I could walk the fields of tall grass and now you've got heavy brush, tall stands of trees, and just the ecology has changed so much. It's shocking.

Virginia Garrison [01:34:30] That Concerned Citizens panoramic that that was taken from the Fisher house, is that right?

Bill Akin [01:34:38] My father took that. It was four separate pictures in 1957. It was folded up. I found that in the attic of the house in 28 Evergreen Way in Sleepy Hollow Manor about 30 or 40 years ago.

Virginia Garrison [01:35:00] It's a beautiful picture. But it shows you the landscape so well.

Bill Akin [01:35:03] And it was in rough shape, you know, four pictures folded out. And I took it to Jill Fleming when I was president of CCOM. And I said, can you computerize this? Can you make a picture out of this? And Jill did that. That's why, how you got that, how we got that poster. And then I sat down with Dick White, cause there is a informational panel that goes with that. That's a lot of people have to say. And Dick and I named everything that was in the picture. The Rheinstein house, to Loretta DeRosa's first motels, to some of the Fisher houses, and the original golf house.

Virginia Garrison [01:35:46] But the landscape is so different.

Bill Akin [01:35:48] You can't, people have come and said we'd like to take that picture again. They get up to the third floor and you can't see anything. Because the trees are so high.

Virginia Garrison [01:35:59] So anyway, but you were saying, so the vegetation has really changed from those days, obviously. And the culture we talked about a little bit with the Surf Lodge and so on.

Bill Akin [01:36:12] All right. We lost the pheasant and the quail because they like tall grasses and whatnot. We gained gray squirrels and turkeys and raccoons that, they weren't here when I, the first 20 years I was here. And the other thing people ask me, I don't know where I was speaking before and someone asked me, what are the changes you've seen? And I went through that and then I said, but, I said but here's one that most people don't think I said. I said for the first 25 years I was here, or 30 years, I never saw a dog on a leash. Why put them on a leash?

Virginia Garrison [01:36:53] When you really, and people used to ride horseback, too.

Bill Akin [01:36:57] Oh, well, Tee Ceslow still does, but she used to ride around and there was someone I remember seeing once in a while at the post office with a horse. That was always my dream, if I ever had a horse, to ride down to the post office.

Virginia Garrison [01:37:11] Specifically to the post office.

Bill Akin [01:37:12] A, didn't happen, and B, isn't going.

Virginia Garrison [01:37:15] It had to be the post office, it couldn't be like the I.G.A. Or something.

Bill Akin [01:37:18] No, no, post office. Where else would you go?

Virginia Garrison [01:37:23] That's funny.

Bill Akin [01:37:26] Well, I don't know, I think, I can't think of anything else for the time being.

Virginia Garrison [01:37:32] All right, well, um, let me You can always follow up at some point if you would like and that's it. Right.

Bill Akin [01:37:44] Thank you very much, Virginia. This has been a lot of fun.

Virginia Garrison [01:37:48] Thank you, I'm going to say.

Bill Akin [01:37:49] That's probably right.

Virginia Garrison [01:37:53] All right, so today is March 13th, 2025. We're continuing an oral history interview with Bill Akin at the Montauk Library. This is Virginia Garrison. And we're going to pick up again with the question that I asked Bill Akin at the end of the first interview, which was, what are you doing now? Yeah. Your turn.

Bill Akin [01:38:21] Yeah, well, yes. And I think the first time around, it caught me by surprise. And I realized, well I thought, what do I do now? I'm not running Music for Montauk or sort of a little active with CCOM. I'm more interested, more active with the historical society. But, you know, I thought well, my wife and I take some walks and occasionally I'll play golf, but I don't surf anymore and blah, blah, blah blah. And I neglected to mention, though, that I spend a great deal of time doing something that very few people do today, and that is reading. As in reading books,.

Virginia Garrison [01:39:02] Hardcover, physical, not online,.

Bill Akin [01:39:08] Kindle.

Virginia Garrison [01:39:10] Oh, Kindle too.

Bill Akin [01:39:11] Well, when you travel, and if you go to Mexico, like we do for three or four weeks, you can't carry the books. So the Kindle is really, to me, that's my operating system down there. At home, I like hardcover books, particularly if it's something I really... I read both fiction and nonfiction, but if it's something I think I really want to hold onto and go back to, I'll buy a hardcover book. Nonfiction, I tend to focus on a lot on the perils of social media and the oncoming situation with AI, artificial intelligence, those things kind of keep me grounded, but I can't, you can't spend too long looking at them. Um, oh, anything that Michael Pollan writes, uh, your mind.

Bill Akin [01:40:15] Michael Pollan?

Bill Akin [01:40:17] Yeah, he wrote The Omnivore's Dilemma, was his first big, big book, but he then went on and recently he wrote two books. One was Your Mind on Plants, which was the effect of caffeine and some other things. But before that he wrote a book

called *How to Change Your Mind*, and it was about the history and now research that's going into the use of psychedelic substances to help people with depression, PTSD, alcoholism, and it's wonderful, wonderful work. He describes in that book something that really struck a nerve with me, and I'm not even back in the 60s, I didn't use... LSD or anything like that, psilocybin. Um, I'd have to say I'm much more open to it now after reading this book. Uh, but, uh, he described a thing called a default mode network. And by that, he meant that at very young ages, everybody figures out how to relate to certain situations and they sort of you know, that we try different reactions to things. And after a while with almost unconsciously, we, we set a pattern for how we might react to different situations, threats, uh, or not necessarily threats, but just common everyday situations, what people, how people react and so on and so forth, but we're unaware of these and they become, as we grow older, they become what he calls default mode net of default mode network. This is the... this is the roadmap we operate on without knowing that it's so limited. And he went in the book, he describes how this research has shown that these substances allow people to open up and see a way, a way forward, a way of doing things, opportunities that they just didn't see before, and I found that. I said, yeah, I can really imagine that, that's it. That makes a lot of sense to me. So, but then that's just one, one area. The AI, social media, the deleterious effect social media is having on the younger generation, I think is just... literally criminal.

Bill Akin [01:43:05] Who do you read on that subject?

Bill Akin [01:43:07] I wish you hadn't asked me that. I got three books at home, and they all fall into that category.

Virginia Garrison [01:43:16] That's fine.

Bill Akin [01:43:17] Most of them I read six months ago or a year ago.

Virginia Garrison [01:43:22] But they're persuading you of the harm.

Bill Akin [01:43:26] I'm not on any social network. Zero. I mean, I have an email address. That's it. I don't have Instagram. I don't have Facebook. I don't even know what the rest of them are. I think the importance of face-to-face personal interaction is extremely important and is going very much unrecognized. The cyber community and the The digital age has left people thinking that they can find real life through their cell phone and I'm sorry that's, that's just not reality. That's a digital device with pixels.

Virginia Garrison [01:44:09] That, combined with the remote work, is kind of an interesting combination.

Bill Akin [01:44:13] All of it has its place, its function. I'm not denying that, but it's gone, the pendulum has gone so far without being checked. And the younger generation is so hooked on it all. And that's one of the books I read, by the way, it's called *Hooked*, and I find it disconcerting to say the least. But I also read, I don't have guilty pleasure books. There's things I want to read in the evening or at bedtime that I don't want to have to worry about trying to remember. Because I know the next time I pick that thing up, I'm going to have turn back two pages and start all over again. And that's your John Grisham and Balducci and Scott Turow. But, oh, I read everything that Carl Hiassen writes. Carl Hiassen, when you need to be picked up and have a laugh, Carl Hiassen is the place to go. It helps if you're familiar with South Florida, because he just shreds the society of South Florida. It's just absolutely hysterical. I look forward to that as a pick-me-up,

especially these and in fiction, I like historical fiction, to some extent. Nathaniel Philbrick, he wrote, I think it was called *Men Against the Sea*, about the real wreck of the whale ship Essex, which was the basis of *Moby-Dick*. It was hit by a whale, and these seamen were in three boats, and they had to survive. Some of them did survive, but there was not all and there was cannibalism and the record of this was, actually the record of it was something that Herman Melville got ahold of and was the basis for him writing *Moby-Dick*. And I did read *Moby-Dick* once in school and then once about 15 years ago, but, there's a wonderful book by Nathaniel Philbrick called, *Why Read Moby Dick?* And it's 120 pages at the most. It's extremely accessible and you read it and you just come away shaking your head. That's amazing. I mean, he talks about the American society profile back then and how the, the whale ship is a is a roadmap for what America looked like at that time. There's one, for example, one of the things he points out was that he was writing this living up in Lennox, Massachusetts, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was the hot author at the time, in the House of Seven Gables, *Scarlet Letter*, he moved in nearby. And they got to be friends. Melville was a little, Hawthorne wasn't necessarily the kind of guy that you'd come to and just opened his arms to you. He was a little offputting, but Melville was persistent. When he got to know him, he realized that there's a darkness in Hawthorne's writing that was not something that Melville had incorporated into his first volume of *Moby-Dick*. He wrote a complete book called *The Whale*, and it was missing one character, Ahab wasn't in the first. He rewrote the book because of his association. I find that kind of thing absolutely fascinating.

Virginia Garrison [01:48:21] That is really interesting.

Bill Akin [01:48:25] So anyway, that's my favorite authors, Richard Powers, who wrote *The Overstory* and a new book called *Playground*. This is a very, I mean, first of all, you realize he's an outrageously intelligent guy.

Virginia Garrison [01:48:43] Are these fiction?

Bill Akin [01:48:45] Yes.

Virginia Garrison [01:48:46] Historical fiction?

Bill Akin [01:48:48] No, *The Overstory* is basically a story of eight people, each of whom have a deep association in some way or another with trees. And he brings them all together in this wonderful, wonderful story. He won the. I think he won the Pulitzer Prize for that. And then *Playground* is his most recent, and that gets into AI, artificial intelligence. Another favorite is Richard Flanagan. He's an Australian and he wrote, he's written several books, one of which is called *A Narrow Road to the Far North*. And, uh, it is, I, I just found that book to be just so intriguing. He's a, it's a takeoff on the, on, on the small book by the poet, the Japanese poet Basho, his little book was called, almost exactly the same thing, the *Narrow Road to the Far North*. Um, and, uh, and uh, Flanagan's book is Australian, but it's World War, it's World War I and he's, no, World War II. And he's in the, he's a doctor and he gets assigned to troops in the he's captured and is trying to take care of the prisoners up in the jungle of Indonesia where they're building railroads and trying to break through the jungle. And it's, it's just a harrowing book, but it's very, but extreme. And there's a love story involved. It's great. And I don't know later, but very interesting is Geraldine Brooks, *Horse*. And yeah, I think she's wonderful. But the one I thought was the best was the *People of the Book* that traces this the discovery of a Jewish manuscript and it goes from here to well

Virginia Garrison [01:51:01] It's a very similar format to horse, too.

Bill Akin [01:51:03] Sort of. Yeah, well she's got a formula. I mean all of them seem to have some sort of a formula and then

Virginia Garrison [01:51:12] That was a sad book in terms of the persistence of anti-Semitism and stuff like that.

Bill Akin [01:51:19] Yes, it really was. But I thought it was great. And I always have sort of off to one side or another the sort of a continuous project of reading something that has to do with my Zen practice. It's, you know, I don't dive into it every single day, but I'm always, so I've always got something there and I have a substantial library probably 40 books on that that relate to that subject. Zen meditation or whatever.

Virginia Garrison [01:51:52] And you used to go to the Sagoaponack, the Peter Matthiessen.

Bill Akin [01:51:57] Peter had a wonderful little, you know, an old barn on his property. He had converted it to a very sort of authentic feeling Zendo meditation hall.

Virginia Garrison [01:52:08] Do you go somewhere now?

Bill Akin [01:52:10] Yeah, they at the UU church on the Bridgehampton Highway, Bridgehampton to Sag Harbor Highway, they allow us the continuation of that group or that sangha to meet there, well, Monday evenings at five o'clock and then they have an online, I think on Wednesday at eight in the morning and then Saturdays at eight o'clock for a two-hour sit and discussion. I go to them, I go the Monday night, whenever I can.

Virginia Garrison [01:52:42] This is at the Universal ..

Bill Akin [01:52:43] UU Church. Yeah. And, you know, Peter has passed, but he passed along his mantle as head of this particular group to Michel Dobbs, a wonderful guy who leads that group, Sag Harbor resident. So I, you know, I always, sometimes I just have one going or I'll go back and read one I read maybe six or seven years ago. Every time you read a book for the second or third time, you see things you didn't see the first time. It's like, how could I have missed that? You know, and then, uh, and that a night, a 2024, '25 project is I've decided every six months, I'm going to read a Shakespeare play and.

Virginia Garrison [01:53:34] Good for you.

Bill Akin [01:53:34] Yeah, I read the stuff in high school, and so the first one I went back to was The Merchant of Venice, which was the first one I was assigned to read back in high school. And I found that fascinating because high school, 1960s, the take on a book with a Jewish merchant who was in less than a favorable light in the book, and then rereading it today, I'm saying, well, there's a whole different take on this and everything. You know back then it was just we just kind of assumed that that would be that be the dark horse in the book you know now I'm reading it going. How do they what were they thinking? And so I did some research In England when when when Shakespeare was writing there was an extremely small population of Jewish people and Jewish much very minuscule two percent or one by one. I don't even want to put a percent very very small. So it was almost picking an oddity out of the group to talk about. He was talking, see, he's writing for England and the play is set in Venice. So it was just an interesting take on

society back then. And then in Mexico this year, I read King Lear, which was more challenging. What a messed up situation that ended up being, it wasn't, everybody died in that, which like, oh my, I get to the end of it, I'm going, who's left?

Virginia Garrison [01:55:24] Yeah right.

Bill Akin [01:55:28] But I probably won't get around anything until July or August or something like that.

Virginia Garrison [01:55:34] Do you prefer the tragedies or the comedies?

Bill Akin [01:55:38] I haven't gotten there yet. The one I want to go back to is The Tempest. I remember liking that when I read it in high school. And also the Shakespeare theater out here, Hampton Shakespeare Festival, they did a production of that in the open air back in behind Amagansett where in the part of the field where the farm is?

Virginia Garrison [01:56:09] Yeah.

Bill Akin [01:56:10] They put on a production of The Tempest there about, I don't know, five, six years ago and I thought it was wonderful. They had nymphs flying around the trees and it was just, you know, it was really, really cool.

Virginia Garrison [01:56:23] It was nice when they did them at a Third House.

Bill Akin [01:56:25] Oh, yeah. That was, it was, but they, they pushed, that was an unfortunate situation because they, when they had it, when they kept it simple at the beginning, the park could manage it, but then they, then they virtually took over the park. And the park, they don't have a lot of employees. They got poor Ronnie Glogg being asked to stick around till one, two o'clock in the morning in order to clean up after the actors had their dinners or whatever and yeah, and they took over all the housing and the county finally said, excuse me, we can't do this anymore. If they'd stayed simple like the beginning, first two or three performances, that was great. Anyway, so that's basically all I wanted to cover here because as I said, this the whole literary reading portion of my occupied mental capacity has accelerated as more obviously physical things have slipped away. So that's about it.

Virginia Garrison [01:57:37] Okay, well it's good to have time to read, right?

Bill Akin [01:57:40] Yeah, yeah. Every morning I've got something and then I've always got something to go to bed with but then sometimes I slip in some hours in the middle of the day.

Virginia Garrison [01:57:52] Thank you for sharing that.

Bill Akin [01:57:53] Well, Virginia, thanks for letting me edit the tape, if you will.

Virginia Garrison [01:57:59] That's fine. Okay, anything else or are we good?

Bill Akin [01:58:04] I promise no more

Virginia Garrison [01:58:06] Thank you for sharing, that's great. This is the end of the interview with Bill Akin. The interviewer was Virginia Garrison. This recording can be found in the archive collection of the Montauk Library. And thank you very, very much.