

ECHO



Bridging the Generational Gap

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Dedication

To those who came before us, and to those who
will come after us.
This is for you.

Why We Did This Project

We started this project as a part of the Community Problem Solving (CmPS) portion of the Future Problem Solving Program International (FPSPI) competition. In this competition, we were tasked with identifying challenges within our community, as well as ways to solve those challenges.

We found that, in our town of Needham, Massachusetts, change was happening almost everywhere. However, the stories behind that change were slowly being lost to time. The town's history itself was being lost as its traditions died out and became nothing more than memories.

We realized that there is an incredible amount of information being held by our senior generation on various topics, such as the evolution of our town and its community. However, this knowledge is rarely preserved or shared before being inevitably lost to time.

We created this project because of exactly that realization.

To solve this, we decided to interview seniors within our community in order to preserve and share their knowledge and experiences for ourselves as well as the future generations. We wanted to preserve the knowledge of how people adapted to change, how their values changed, what they learned, etc. so that our generation can use that information to work through the stress of high school life through the form of mentorship.

By doing this, we are not only preserving history; we are also bridging the gap between our generation and theirs.

This book is our attempt to make sure those stories are heard, remembered, and carried forward.

How to Read This Book

This book is not made from lecture or essays or even a single story. It is made from real conversations between our members and seniors within our community. This book compiles the voices of people who lived through various eras of our town's history, and have different experiences to share.

You do not have to read this from beginning to end, and can instead read it by chapter or even open to a random page with a single quote. Each page includes a context paragraph to help you understand what a quote is referencing.

Moreover, these context paragraphs also give you some backstory into the senior at hand such that you can understand where their responses are coming from.

You may find that some statements are familiar, or that others may challenge what you expected. No matter which you find, these quotations preserve our town's history as well as the wisdom that comes with them.

This book does not give one answer.

It preserves many voices.

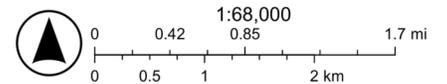
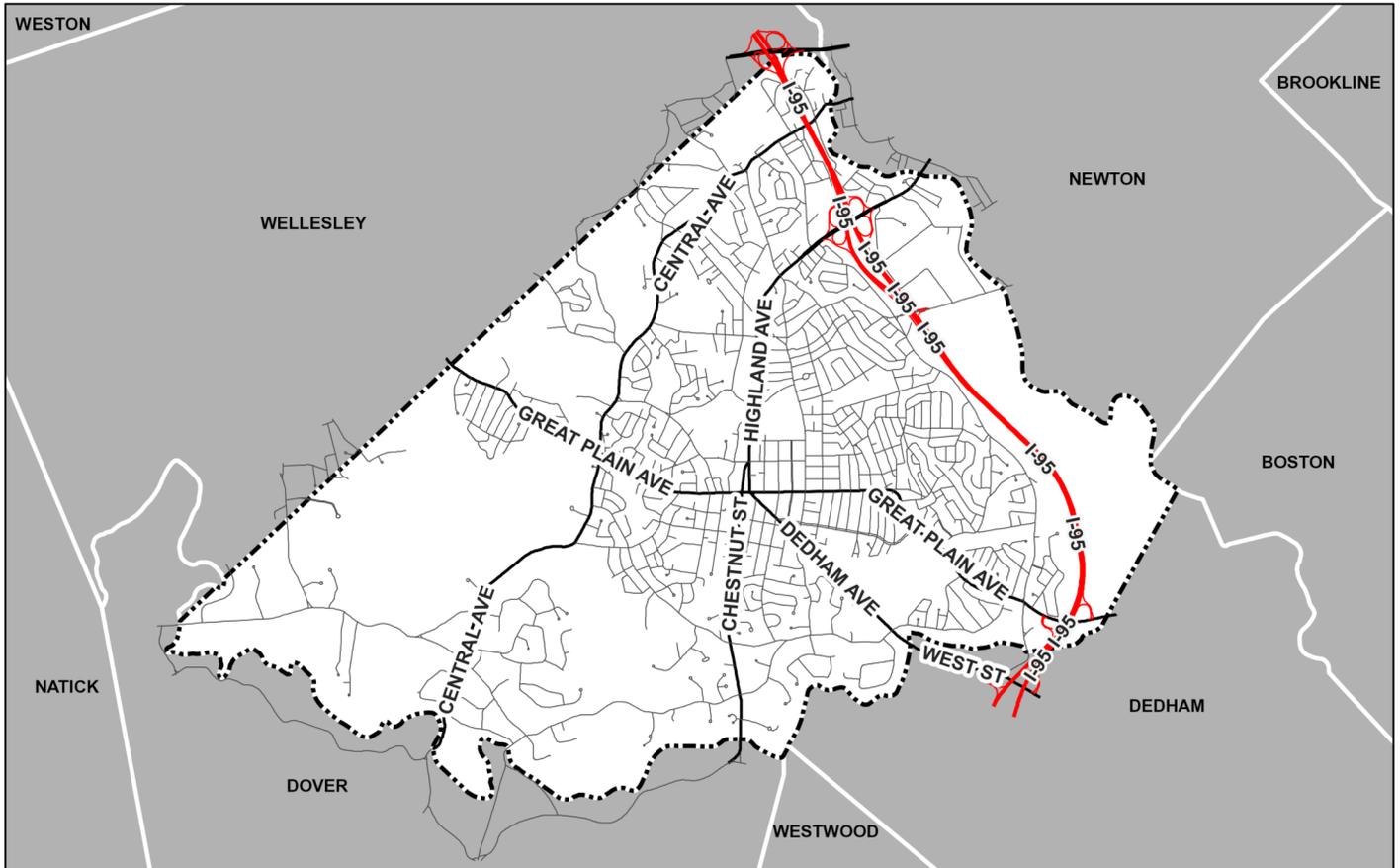
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Moreover, are specifically grateful to the following: the Center At The Heights, Wingate Residences at Needham, and Avita of Needham. Thank you for welcoming us, trusting us, and allowing us to conduct interviews with your seniors. Your willingness is what allowed these stories and experiences to be preserved and shared.

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ArcGIS Web Map



Echo Needham
Town of Needham GIS

Figure 1. Road map of Needham, MA. (Courtesy of Town of Needham GIS).

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Part I

Home & Change

“When I was younger, of course, it was less congestive. You know, there's a lot of development that's happened over the years.”

-Martha C

Home & Change

A town is more than just its streets and buildings. It holds memories, experiences, and relationships specific to that place. When towns change and traditions fade, communities tend to shift, allowing memories to be lost as change occurs.

Indeed, we are witnessing the effects that time itself moving forward can have. We can see, by listening to how individuals describe what their town once was, how change (both physical and social) affects a town's identity, connections, and stability. Trying to understand these shifts can help younger generations see that the places they take for granted can be lost as fast as they appeared.

Home & Change

Mary uses this phrase to describe the landscape of the Needham Reservoir during her childhood. She remembered a time when "there was no field there, just trees".

“There was no field
there, just trees
and woods.”

-Mary

Home & Change

Martha talks about how the buildings in Needham changed from a less populated town to a more populated and modernized town. For her, the change of building style is more than just new buildings, and instead signifies a fundamental change in the town's character.

“What’s changed
the most is
probably housing
developments.”

-Martha C

Home & Change

Roland talks about how the town's former abundance of wildlife. Noting that Rosemary Lake was loaded with fish, he talks about the rich wildlife when he was young. He compares this to the new housing development that replaced the beautiful wildlife.

“Rosemary Lake was loaded with so-called fish called pickerel. They were probably maybe about a foot and a half long on average.”

-Roland Johnson

Home & Change

David discusses the decline of church attendance. He points out that while the town still has over a dozen churches, many are now empty buildings. He contrasts this with when he was younger, when many more people attended church.

“There are what 12 or 13 or 14 churches in town? We've had three or four of them go broke and they're just empty buildings because people don't go. When I was younger, parents and kids, probably 50% of America was in church on Sunday. Today in Needham, probably less than 10 or 15% of Needham is in church on Sunday. I mean, that's a huge difference. And look at all these beautiful buildings with seating for 500 to 1,000 people. And sitting in the church up front every Sunday are 20, 30, 40 people or less.”

-David Sarusdale

Home & Change

Carol talks about how people in neighborhoods where more friendly and spend much more time with each other. She states that people nowadays aren't spending much time with their neighbors anymore.

“I knew my neighbors across the street. I knew the neighbors on my right and then on my left side.”

-Carol Cox

Home & Change

Barbara believes that back in the day, children were more independent, going off to play by themselves. She states that their time spent playing or going on playdates is way too closely monitored by parents.

“They had buses that would drive you from one playground to the other playground to play either softball, soccer, baseball...”

-Barbara

Home & Change

Renate complains that current parents are too nervous about their child as they play. She notes that decades ago, children were expected to always be out of the house, compared to now, where kids have to ask their parents to go play and see their friends.

“...the parents are more nervous
now.”

-Renate

Home & Change

Roland recalls Tillotson Rubber Company, which once stood right alongside Rosemary Lake. He complains about the town's transition from a working-class industrial hub to a suburban landscape.

“Also, there’s a place down there [Rosemary Lake] called Tillotson Rubber Company right alongside where the lake is now. But now it’s all houses.”

-Roland Johnson

Home & Change

Bob talks about how his former elementary school transformed from an elementary school to an old age home, showing the immense change happening in Needham.

“I went to the elementary school, which is Stephen Palmer. The building is still there. It’s an old age home now.”

-Bob Saint Germain

The Stephen Palmer School was constructed in 1914 and converted to apartments in 1977 (Morsenberger 2025).

Home & Change

Mary discusses the architectural shift in Needham. She highlights how the townhomes switched from affordable ranch houses to massive, expensive McMansions.

“...now they have taken away a lot of the ranch houses that used to be down in the Needham Heights area, and have made them into McMansions, big houses.”

-Mary

Home & Change

David is very upset that even though the price of his house has increased by 8 times, it is the reason that younger people are being cut off from being able to live in Needham.

“Cost of real estate went up...in my 42 years here, it’s gone up 8 times. So I bought a house for under \$100,000. I sold it for just about \$800,000. That should never happen...which means we’re cutting young people out of being able to live here.”

-David Sarusdale

Home & Change

Elaine remembers a time when Needham had more affordable and middle-class homes available, compared to the house prices and actual homes themselves.

“Needham had a lot of housing that was kind of in the middle, more affordable.”

-Elaine Belkin

Home & Change

David believes that land in Needham is more desirable than actual homes since the buyers will instead build bigger, more expensive homes.

“90% of all the houses that have gone up in Needham in the last 5 years have been teardowns. Often a pretty nice house and somebody buys it, tears it down, and builds a bigger house. Or a builder buys a house and tears it down and builds a much more expensive house...land in Needham is always worth more than the house.”

-David Sarusdale

Home & Change

Carol addresses the issue of things in Needham being way too expensive, such as house prices, property taxes, utilities, as well as the cost of goods and services.

“...if you tell somebody [you’re] from Needham, they’ll say you’re rich.”

-Carol Cox

Home & Change

Elaine shows a time when Needham had a strong industrial tax base. This base served as a financial shield for Needham's residents, especially in times of economic hardship.

“Taxes were great. They had a lot of industry in Needham, so the industry kind of took care of the taxes...homeowners didn't have to pay that much.”

-Elaine Belkin

Home & Change

Barbara talks about how stores like Calvert's, being family-owned, are now being replaced with large chains across the country.

“I used to work at Calvert's, which is now where the Trader Joe's area is, up there, and CVS...People would come from different states to buy their school clothes, their underwear, their baby clothes.”

-Barbara

Home & Change

Mary highlights the change from children going outside and learning from it to kids now staying inside, where they are learning maybe even less, while not getting fresh air.

“We were outside a lot. I think a lot more than the kids today are outside...you can learn just as much outside of the house.”

-Mary

Home & Change

Dede states that Needham used to be an “open playground,” but now parents are shielding their children from doing things that kids should be doing, such as going outside.

“...come home for lunch or dinner and just play. But now we don't really let kids be out on their own.”

-Dede

Home & Change

Barbara remembers when children were able to visit their friends freely just by walking over. Comparing this fact to now, there is an immense difference, as parents are now monitoring everything that their child does instead of dropping off their kids to promote social interactions.

“...you could go to one another’s house freely, you know. You didn’t have be dropped off all the time and have scheduled... with the parents to make sure what was going on.”

-Barbara

Home & Change

Dede talks about the rapid increase in business in banks and restaurants.

“We have more restaurants and banks.”

-Dede

Renate remembers when Needham had more family-owned stores where people could do primary shopping, whereas now it has transformed to stores meant for dining and wellness.

“Now we have restaurants, banks, nail places, exercise places.”

-Renate

Home & Change

Dede notes that while Needham has gained an abundance of modern amenities, it has lost its core retail variety.

“But we have to shop elsewhere
for clothes...”

-Dede

Home & Change

Dede remembers when her neighborhood was filled with kids before many of them grew up and moved away. Nowadays, however, she noticed more kids returning to the community, bringing the neighborhoods closer to what she remembers.

“When we first moved in like 68 years ago, tons of kids. Then they all left and there was nobody. Now it's all getting kids again, which is nice.”

-Dede

Home & Change

Dede talks through the decline of religious institutions within Needham, including the losses of the Lutheran, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches.

“But here the churches are closing. The Lutheran Church closed and the Baptist Church closed... Presbyterian[as well].”

-Dede

Home & Change

David explains the changes in acceptable behaviors since his youth. Specifically, he describes a time when smoking was not only tolerated, but encouraged.

“...when I was younger and I was 11 years old, 90% of male children in America were smoking. They didn't wait until 21...socially it made you much more mature than you were. Cigarettes were cheap. They were 30 cents a pack...If you were a boy and you smoked, it was like you were mature...today you don't quite feel like that.”

-David Sarusdale

Home & Change

David explains that the shift in workforce lifestyle was a harsh change from work life in the mid-20th century.

“When my father was working, he went to work for a company at 23 and he retired at 65 and that was it. People don’t do that now. Very seldom.”

-David Sarusdale

Home & Change

David views this increase in housing as a departure from Needham's roots as a middle-class town. Generally, he says this contributes to higher taxes, more traffic, and many more changes.

“...in the 40 years I've been here, Needham has doubled its population in terms of housing.”

-David Sarusdale

Home & Change

Carol explains that Needham feels more like a city now and has lost its small town 'charm'. Specifically, she says that the rise of apartment housing and population density are the reason for this change.

“Needham has changed. It almost feels like a city to me now...It doesn't feel like a town.”

-Carol Cox

Home & Change

Tom shows the change in Needham's identity over the past decades. Specifically, he mentions the economic shift, as well as the change in diversity within the community. What he means by this is that, while the town is more exclusive from a financial perspective, it is more inclusive in terms of people's backgrounds.

“...it was...very middle class. What it is now is upper middle class. It's very much more diverse.”

-Tom

Home & Change

One thing we noticed that stayed the same was public transportation. The bus 59 was extended to include Needham in the 1970s and 80s following the MBTA's acquisition of suburban bus routes. The commuter rail is much older, having been extended to Needham all the way back in 1853.

“...public transportation is great actually even here because we have the commuter rail, but we also have the bus that runs from Needham down near McDonalds, goes all the way to Watertown. The bus 59. I'll take that a lot.”

-Martha C

Part II

Town Traditions

“It needs to be publicized that Needham has changed dramatically over the years.”

-Nancy

Town Traditions

Traditions are the shared experiences that turn a place into a community. Traditions can come in the form of parades, local events, volunteer groups, seasonal celebrations, and even everyday rituals that usually bring people together and give extra meaning to where they live. These traditions are one of a few things helping generations connect not just through stories, but through repeated moments of gathering.

When traditions change, so do the people involved in those traditions. We can better understand what holds a community together by preserving memories of these shared practices.

Town Traditions

One event that Mary mentioned specifically was the annual Blue Tree Lighting, which she remembers from her past and is still continuing today. However, other parts of Needham have changed (either been modernized or disappeared) according to her. This continued tradition gives her a sense of stability due to the fact that it remains the same despite its environment.

“And also the Christmas blue tree lighting is also something that continues on today.”

-Mary

Town Traditions

The Exchange Club of Needham was established in 1947, and is a community service organization responsible for supporting local youth, seniors, and civic improvements(Exchange Club of Needham n.d.).

“I belong to the Needham Exchange Club, and we do the 4th of July festivities with the fireworks at the high school, and that’s something we always look forward to. It’s a wonderful organization...they give scholarships...they do a lot of good things.”

-Elaine Belkin

Town Traditions

Another tradition that has stayed the same is Memorial Day. Carol says it is one of the few remaining traditions that make Needham feel like a real community to her. Specifically, she points out the parade and high school activities, which have not changed.

“...in Memorial Day...they have things going on up by the high school, you know, all kinds of activities.”

-Carol Cox

Town Traditions

The Needham Women's Club (NWC) was established in 1935. It serves as a networking and fundraising organization, and promotes civic and social activities. It has over 60 members and provides over \$20,000 in donations to benefit Needham's residents and community(Needham Women's Club n.d.).

“I used to be in the Junior Women's Club...we had all kinds of things going on. We did that breakfast with Santa, and visit with Santa, and then we used to support some kids in Guatemala...we did a lot.”

-Renate

Town Traditions

One thing Carol is pleased with in Needham is the accessibility of our local government. While she had concerns over the town's shift to closer resembling a city, she points how the Town Hall is still a place where individual voices can create impact.

“...say you have a gripe about something in Needham, I mean you can write it down and bring it to the down hall, and they'll look at it.”

-Carol Cox

Town Traditions

Elliot Frank says that the Center At The Heights is a learning hub on top of being a senior center.

“I’m here because I take classes in the senior citizen center[The Center at the Heights].”

-Elliot Frank

Town Traditions

Martha shows the difference is social connection within Needham, including the replacement of communal care with formal or distant interactions, making Needham feel less like the small town that it used to be.

“Back in the day...somebody died in the family, there’d be food brought over to their house.”

-Martha C

Town Traditions

Martha again shows the change in communal support and care, this time in a professional setting. She remembers a time when co-workers seemed more like extended family, especially during difficult times.

“When I was younger, teaching, somebody had a baby, we’d all chip in and you know buy turkey dinners or stuff like that.”

-Martha C

Part III

Technology

**“You have to adapt to it,
that’s for sure. You have
to recognize it.”**

-Tom

Technology

Due to the differences in the technologies that each generation grew up with, what seems normal to us can seem nearly alien to our seniors. We see how human character changes with innovation by listening to how people describe their experiences with new technologies.

Moreover, technology influences how communities connect among many other things. Our generation can recognize that today's tools can become outdated as quickly as they can become the 'next best thing' by reflecting on the changes witnessed by past generations.

Technology

Many of the seniors we interviewed lived through the technological booms of the 20th century, including the introduction of the internet. And from this, many, like Elaine, had to adapt.

“I was on the board at the pool [Needham Pool & Racquet Club], and I had to learn how to use a computer to send emails to everyone.”

-Elaine Belkin

Technology

Renate explains how technology (specifically mobile phones) separates people from one another. She follows up this claim with an example in the form of a scene from a restaurant, which resonated with our younger interviewers.

“...it seems like everybody is on the phone, you know, it’s kind of a little too much...it’s funny because you go to a restaurant and-”

-Renate

Dede also shows how phones disconnect people from each other, this time explaining how almost everyone has one, making their impact much less noticeable.

“-they’ve all got the phones.”

-Dede

Technology

Like Elaine, Elliot also had to adapt to the advent of computers and the internet. He, however, was better versed with the technology, and used computers from their beginning.

“...I bought one of the first generic PCs...which was so primitive I can't tell you...So I've been using computers since DOS...Yeah, I was using DOS.”

-Elliot Frank

Technology

Tom emphasizes that residents must find a way to coexist with modern advancements and social shifts.

“You have to adapt to it, that’s for sure. You have to recognize it.”

-Tom

Technology

Tom shows that platforms such as Facebook have allowed for the spread of misinformation faster than ever before.

He also explains that digital content can be extremely easily faked.

“...the misinformation on certain Facebook pages...you can fake anything, you can also misinform.”

-Tom

Part IV

Advice to the Future Generations

**“People take societal problems
very personally and they blame
the people...”**

-Elliot Frank

Advice to the Future Generations

A person's experience gives them perspective that cannot be found in any other way. Some of these perspectives include how priorities change over time and other things. Our generation can benefit immensely from the perspectives of the older generation's guidance and past experiences.

Additionally, our generation can use that advice to help their decision-making skills, especially in a time as stressful and important as high school. The knowledge of the older generation can remind our generation that challenges, even those which seem new, can be helped or even explained.

Advice to the Future Generations

Elliot says that students should view truth as a temporary state based on current evidence. Moreover, he explains that this is also the core of scientific and critical thinking.

“But what I did like to teach people was, what do I mean when I say true? And what I explained to them was, that that meant that I had no evidence to the contrary ...or if I say that something is untrue...that if I have no evidence, okay, of an objective nature, at a certain point, I am entitled to say this is false, this is untrue. Now what that means, is that is that means that it is highly unlikely to be true.”

-Elliot Frank

Advice to the Future Generations

Otis says that the teenage years are the best time to experiment to find out what you are good at and what you truly love doing. Not only that, but to continue to do it and not to let others stop your passion.

“Figure out why you are here. What are you good at?...You are going to have to figure it out. Your number one job is to figure out who you are and what you are doing here. What are you good at? And in order to do that, you are going to try a lot of things. Once you figure that out, you do it, and do not let anybody stop you from trying to do it.”

-Otis

Advice to the Future Generations

Nancy suggests that people try to manage their anger in difficult situations, but she knows from experience that it is difficult.

“Be careful, be thoughtful, and if you can, and you can’t always, but if you can, think before you speak if you are angry.”

-Nancy

Advice to the Future Generations

Aubrey advocates for younger people to travel more because it is the easiest time to do so. This is because, later, they will have fewer opportunities to do so.

“Traveling is wonderful, personally, and traveling when you are young is a lot easier than when you are older.”

-Aubrey

Advice to the Future Generations

Patricia advises children to do what's right, but also to have a balance of fun and risk-taking.

“Stay out of trouble. Study hard.
Go to college. Pick good friends.
Listen to your parents. Enjoy life.
Be risk takers, but not too much.”

-Patricia

Advice to the Future Generations

David remembers when he first got interested in history. Even though for most of the time he was a lousy student, he began to focus not just on history but also on other aspects of school. Even to this day, he still has his passion for history.

“I was a lousy student. I was at the bottom of the class right through grade school and halfway through high school. But I loved history, so I focused on that. So by the time I was a junior in high school, I became a pretty good student...I still read history-related novels and books every month, and I’ve been doing that for 70 years.”

-David Sarusdale

Advice to the Future Generations

Mary advocates for more children to spend more time outside rather than sitting indoors, where they are not getting the benefit of fresh air.

“Especially the fresh air is really good for you.”

-Mary

Advice to the Future Generations

Harry talks about how he uses ChatGPT, but makes sure not to reveal any of his personal information, for his digital safety.

“...not to reveal personal information to AI. So I try to use AI in a way where I get information without revealing anything about myself.”

-Harry Cohen

Advice to the Future Generations

Martha talks about her experience from the age of 20 to 40. She remembers how many things she experienced during those years, compared to how quickly her years from 40 to 60 were.

“...this is how I look at life...from 20 to 40, is a lifetime. It’s multiple lifetimes. You’re going to do so much from 20 to 40. From 40 to 60, goes by very fast.”

-Martha C

Advice to the Future Generations

When asked for her best piece of advice for the younger generation,
Elaine said the following:

“Be a good person. That’s the
bottom line.”

-Elaine Belkin

Advice to the Future Generations

Elaine believes that going to college is not just about career preparation, but also about continuing to keep learning even after school.

“Keep up with your education, you know, make sure you go to college.”

-Elaine Belkin

Advice to the Future Generations

Tom advocates for young people to get involved with the town community and to join clubs to not only get to know people, but to make the sense of community stronger.

“I say get involved in the community. Get to know people. Don’t just use it to sleep in. Get involved and to join clubs.”

-Tom

Advice to the Future Generations

Tom advocates for civic connection through knowing the situation within your community (in this case, Needham).

“Get to know what’s happening in town and get to know what other people are thinking.”

-Tom

Advice to the Future Generations

Roland explains that security is not granted, meaning you have to exercise at least some level of carefulness when going about your life. He draws this conclusion from his time in the military, where he retired as an E9 (the highest rank he could have possibly been as an Enlistman).

“...try to be very careful because you never know what’s going to happen, you know.”

-Roland Johnson

Advice to the Future Generations

Barbara mentions the extreme costs that come with modern education, and says that she directs her donations, when applicable, toward scholarships to help lighten the load on our generation.

“...I always put it for the scholarships...you need that...tuition break.”

-Barbara

Advice to the Future Generations

Mary says that, while starting a business can be an extremely successful venture, you need to invest lots of time and energy in order to get something out of it. She says this from experience, as she herself ran a bait and tackle shop for over 13 years.

“...so if you’re going to commit yourself to being an entrepreneur and doing your own business, you have to put a lot of time into it to get the rewards back.”

-Mary

Advice to the Future Generations

Mary claims that intentionality and purpose in what you do is extremely important in your early adulthood, especially in your professional development.

“Just be sure that what you choose in life is something that you want to commit to. If it’s just something that you’re picking up out of the air, that may not work for you...at least have some kind of an idea. What do you want to do in the future?”

-Mary

Advice to the Future Generations

Mary advocates towards people using their hobbies to their advantage in a professional context. What she means by this is that basing your work on a hobby or interest means that you will not only enjoy your work more, but will also put more effort in than otherwise.

“And if it is your hobby, that is a good start because you will want to put more effort into it.”

-Mary

Advice to the Future Generations

Harry describes his personal definition of success, which is in the form of relationships instead of a tangible achievement.

“Success comes primarily in the form of interpersonal relationships. It’s all people related. No matter what you do for a living.”

-Harry Cohen

Advice to the Future Generations

David remembers the mostly impersonal nature of teacher mentorship. Moreover, he remembers that this mentorship was also extremely profound despite its impersonality.

“Teachers had a lot of effect, not necessarily that you knew them for a long time, but certain teachers taught something and it stayed with you in a way of life and style, and you know, later on, and maybe you didn’t even much care for them, but they really knew stuff and they passed stuff onto you.”

-David Sarusdale

Advice to the Future Generations

Carol suggests that Needham as a community is becoming more disconnected. Specifically, she says that the differences in financial wealth are causing divisions between neighborhoods and the people in them.

“...the more money you have, you know, you feel like you’re high class and you don’t have to talk to low class people.”

-Carol Cox

Advice to the Future Generations

Elaine says that her definition of success does not revolve around professional achievements, and instead around the legacy of the future generations. Specifically, she believes that true success is helping the younger generation find their own path.

“Success to me is raising a great family...good kids...giving them an education...let them find their own path...that to me is good success. Mostly through the kids.”

-Elaine Belkin

Advice to the Future Generations

Elaine claims that schooling goes beyond career preparation, but also makes you a better person, as well as generally more knowledgeable. However, she admits that education is also important for its financial aspect.

“Education is very important. You really need education. Not only for the financial aspect, but just to become a better person...you become knowledgeable...a little more worldly.”

-Elaine Belkin

Advice to the Future Generations

Barbara advocates for more community service, as the impact it can cause is far greater than the time and commitment it takes to accomplish.

“It’s just a couple of hours of commitment...in one weekend it’s all done.”

-Barbara

Advice to the Future Generations

Elaine shows her views of wealth. Specifically, she says that having money is important, but not a main priority.

“...having money is important because then you can do what you want to do. But that shouldn't be your main focus.”

-Elaine Belkin

Advice to the Future Generations

Barbara emphasizes the low barrier for entry for civic engagement within Needham.

“Anybody in town is welcome to volunteer and do it. It’s a short commitment of time.”

-Barbara

Advice to the Future Generations

Elliot advocates for media literacy through objective information. Specifically, he advocates for people's use of The Guardian (an independent news source similar to PBS) due to the fact that it is not a commercial venture and thus is less susceptible to pressure.

“Here’s a good newspaper to read. It’s called The Guardian...It’s a British newspaper originally and its like PBS. It’s run by a foundation.”

-Elliot Frank

Advice to the Future Generations

Mary explains that the success of small businesses is directly linked to the success of its owner or owners.

Moreover, while her bait and tackle business was successful, she explains that her health was vital to the success of this business.

“...my husband and I had a fishing business. We sold fishing bait and tackle, and we did it for 13 years, and it was successful. But then, you get to the point in your life where people start not feeling well, and then it puts a lot of strain on one person to do it all themselves. And it got more difficult and we had to finally close it down.”

-Mary

Advice to the Future Generations

Elliot talks through the defensive nature of politics and social debate. Moreover, he explains that people do not want to own up to their problems, and just blame others.

“People take societal problems
very personally and they blame
the people...”

-Elliot Frank

Advice to the Future Generations

Lynne describes how her definition of success changed as time (and, by extension, life) goes on.

“When you have children...part of what you would call success is helping them be successful.”

-Lynne A. Mooney

Advice to the Future Generations

David explains that the strict and linear expectation of his youth are extremely different to the expectations in the 21st century.

“Coming out of school, was, success is getting a good education that finds you into a good job level, make a lot of money, get married, have kids, be sure you can afford to send to school so they can do what you did...that’s not the way it is now.”

-David Sarusdale

Advice to the Future Generations

Elliot says that, while contingency planning may seem useless, it is done to build ‘muscle memory’ for the unlikely event that it is necessary.

“...we do these things even though it’s highly unlikely because we have to know what to do.”

-Elliot Frank

Advice to the Future Generations

David explains that the rigid career pipeline of his life is almost completely different from the skill-based economy present today.

“...if you happen to be particularly bright in computers and statistics and that stuff right now, you can forget college if you want.”

-David Sarusdale

What We Learned

Before we started our interviews, we believed that we were just preserving stories for the betterment of our community. However, we later realize just how much these stories changed the way we saw our own lives.

One of the biggest things we saw in these interviews is that time goes by faster than you would expect. However, the meaning of that time comes from how you spend it. Moreover, we repeatedly saw our seniors telling us that the relationships in our lives are more important than things like achievements or that moments that seem ordinary can become the ones you cherish the most.

Additionally, we learned that change in various aspects of ones life is not only inevitable, but also constant. Our seniors lived through the evolution of their neighborhoods, careers, and even ways of living. Many of our seniors also learned not to resist these changes, and instead try to adapt to them while they still can.

Moreover, we learned the value of listening to someone without interrupting them. Specifically, this allowed for the most genuine and respectful conversations, which further allowed us to understand that everyone's life contains struggle in different forms. Because of this, every story is worth hearing and learning from.

Lastly, we learned that knowledge does not announce itself, and instead shows up in advice, both simple and complicated. While the knowledge of our seniors may, in some cases, seem familiar, the decades of experience that these seniors have had means that their advice (and knowledge) has worked through time.

This project helped us understand that history can be found not only in things that happened long ago, but also in our community through the people that have lived through it. Moreover, this project taught us that simply listening can allow us to learn not only about the past, but also how to live more thoughtfully in the present.

Methodology

This project was created from a series of in-person conversations with seniors in Needham. From these conversations, our goal was to preserve not only the conversations themselves, but also the knowledge found in them. In order to do this, we created several procedures for things like outreach, interviews, and others.

First, we started by researching senior centers in Needham. This research included location, hours of operation, and program director contact information (if possible). We then emailed the program directors to request permission to come in and conduct interviews with whichever seniors were interested. This did not always work, however, so we decided to visit whichever centers did not respond to introduce our project and schedule interviews if the senior center at hand found our project interesting.

Next, we did not require participation in our interviews. Before beginning a recording, anyone interested had to sign our consent and privacy form, which explained what interviews would be used for. If anyone did not feel comfortable being recorded and later publicized, they could simply refuse.

We conducted our interviews in quiet spaces within each senior center. To record these interviews, we used a simple setup consisting of a phone (mounted on a tripod for stability) and a microphone or microphones, depending on the type. Additionally, we each had a printed sheet of baseline questions that we wanted to ask our seniors. However, these questions were intentionally made to be open-ended so that the seniors had room to elaborate.

Throughout this project, our goal was to create an environment where seniors felt respected and heard. Because of that, this book explains those conversations as faithfully as possible.

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David Sarusdale

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Tom

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Roland Johnson

Renate

Dede

Otis

Aubrey

Harry Cohen

Martha C

Nancy

Lynne A. Mooney

Patricia

Bob Saint Germain

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