

Oscar Bunting Oral History  
Date of Interview: Unknown  
Location: Nantucket, Massachusetts  
Length of Interview: 54:19  
Interviewers: GC – Georgen Charnes  
Transcriber: NCC

Georgen Charnes: Thank you. This is Georgen Charnes. I am here with the students of the Nantucket Lighthouse Middle School, Dominic Costanzo and Henry Blackwell. We are speaking with Oscar Bunting at his home in Old South. Oscar Bunting is an experienced scalloper. We are here to hear a little bit about his experiences in Nantucket.

Gail Clark: Could they ask you the questions?

Oscar Bunting: Yes. I'm just reading this.

GC: [laughter] You want to get prepared.

Dominic Costanzo: Do you understand this interview is going to be part of NOAA's project and available to the public?

OB: Yes, I do. Wrote your answers write here.

DC: [laughter] You are cheating.

Henry Blackwell: So, what is your full name?

OB: My full name, Oscar Harold Bunting. See, we're from the (Fuljers?). I'm named after one of my grandfather's brothers. That was their name. There's a whole bunch of them that are Fuljers around.

DC: [laughter]

OB: My brother's name is Sylvester. That's his middle name. Then my other brother, he's Fuljer and so on.

HB: Where and when were you born?

OB: I was born in Bishop, Maryland in 1931. I have a conflict about [laughter] my birthday. I got two birthdays.

DC: [laughter]

GC: Now, how did that happen?

DC: What do you mean? Explain.

OB: I have no idea. But we had to go get a passport on a cruise. To get a passport, you had to have a birth certificate. Of course, I wasn't born here, so we had to call up Maryland. They had my birth certificate there. August 12th, that's when I was born. But I've always celebrated my birth date on August 5th.

GC: [laughter]

OB: Now, how that ever happened, I don't know. But every birthday I've had my whole life, is August 5th. So, we called Bishop again. We asked them, "You must have made a mistake." So, we went over and she said, "No, there it is, August 12th, 1931."

GC: [laughter]

GC: [laughter]

OB: Well, we're scratching our head. But I had some old cards from my family. On the Christmas card it said August 12th. So, how can that be? Well, I later found out the real day was 12th.

HB: Where did you grow up and maybe how did that influence your career?

OB: I was brought up in Wisconsin. You know where that is?

HB: Yes.

OB: Down below is what they call [inaudible]. That's in Wisconsin. That's one of the poorest sections that there was at that time. Now, it's worth a lot of money. But in those days, that's where all the poor people were. I'm a product of somebody that lived here over the (bag?). I made it all the way up the bag and over the top.

GC: Good for you.

HB: What would you say is your occupation?

OB: My occupation? I was a fisherman. I was 4 years in the Navy. Then after I got out of the Navy, I got a job down to the Straight Wharf Garage, which is down Straight Wharf now. I got tired of doing that. So, then I started going scalloping down there. That was in 1952, I think it was. I've been scalloping ever since. It's a nice way to live. Lot of hardware, but it's a challenge. Every day that you go scalloping, it's a challenge. It isn't like you go from here to a store and do your thing in the store room. Scalloping is a different ball game. You got to go out there and find the scallops first. Under the water, that's where they live, right?

HB: Yes.

OB: You guys know what a scallop is?

HB: Yes.

OB: Yes?

DC: Have you been scalloping?

HB: Yes.

OB: Do you open them up?

HB: I do not think open them. But I have been, but not opened.

OB: You never opened? Oh, you don't want to cut your hands?

GC: Well, what is it like to open them?

OB: Huh?

GC: What is it like to open them?

OB: Well, it's a lot of fun [laughter]. It's a lot of work too. The hardest part of scalloping is getting them open. Sometimes the easiest part is catching them. Because sometimes there's plenty of them. But the hardest part is getting them – especially small scallops, nobody likes to open the small ones, see. Because you get paid by the pound. So, the more you open in an hour, of course the more you make. Of course, the bigger the scallop, the more you can make. That adds up quicker.

GC: How much did they cost?

OB: How much did they cost?

GC: How much did they cost then a pound?

DC: A pound when you started?

OB: Let me see. I can't remember. I know we used to have open. They'd be around a dollar a pound. Somewhere around there. Because we used to open them in coffee cans. You know the old coffee cans? They held a pound. They'd just crown them up until they fell off the can. That was considered a pound. But most of the time it held a pound and a half. But we used to get 10 cents for that pound.

GC: 10 cents per pound.

OB: [laughter] 10 cents, yes.

DC: The openers?

OB: Yes.

DC: There were \$17 a pound last year.

OB: Yes. They work on a percentage basis now. It's 20 percent whatever the price of scallops

is. Say it \$10, then the opener gets 20 percent of that, which comes to \$2. So, that's how they do it. Of course, if the price goes up, the opener, his share goes up. If it goes down, well, it goes down with it [laughter]. But before they paid you the 10 cents. It didn't make any difference whether you were getting a dollar a pound or \$5 a pound. They were still making out.

HB: So, how long have you been scalloping?

OB: Well, since 1956. I was 44. In ten, it would be what? 54.

HB: 54.

OB: Yes, 54 years. It's not quite 54 because I haven't been scalloping for 4 years I guess now. I'm getting a little old. I'm slowing down [laughter].

HB: Where have you scalloped the most?

OB: I scallop mostly in the Nantucket area and Tuckernuck and Muskeget. But mostly in the Tuckernuck area. Yes. That's the area where the scallops you got the most per pound or a box. So, you get a lot of scallops. So, they got big scallops and big eyes and you got that small scallop with a big eye and a little eye. There are all kinds of things. But the best scallops were around Tuckernuck. Because there was a lot of colonies up there. The scallops that survive up there, they have to be good and strong. So, that's why you get more meat per pound from the ones up there. As you can see, scallops you get 10 pounds for a box at Tuckernuck. But you come down here in the harbor, get a box full of them and you only get 8 pounds. So, you lose 2 pounds. Then 2 pounds times ten boxes are 20 pounds. Then 20 pounds every day for 5 days, is a hundred pounds.

DC: It adds up. Yes.

OB: So, it adds up.

HB: Just a little bit – oh, go ahead.

DC: So, whereabouts on Tuckernuck? Just as you go in there on this side or where the current flows?

OB: We fish mostly on the north side of Tuckernuck.

DC: On the north side. That is what I am thinking.

OB: On the south side there's nothing but sand. You always fished over there at the north side like at East Pond, Massachusetts. You know where that is?

DC: Yes.

OB: Yes? We used to go right by that. From there, wait them out all the way into Bigelow's on

the west end. Up there they had the best stops on the north side. But the only problem up there was there are big boulders and stuff on the bottom, hundreds of them. We used to call it Flintstone Country [inaudible].

GC: [laughter]

DC: They do not know *The Flintstones* [laughter].

GC: [laughter]

HB: [laughter] No, we do not.

GC: You do not?

OB: Yes, that's right. That's Flintstone Country.

GC: So, what kind of boat then? Because you got off your boat and went in the water to scallop, right? Or did you do that in the boat?

OB: No.

DC: That is family push rig.

OB: That's some push rig.

GC: That is personal.

DC: There is family with the push rig. This is what we would do. But commercial –

GC: How did you do it commercially then?

OB: Commercially, they have a push rig on the end. You haven't seen one, right?

DC: Actually, I have seen one once, yes.

OB: It's like in a small frame about 2 feet by 16 inches. Then it's got a barb across it with a net. You put a net on it, and then you push it along on the bottom. That's how the civilians do it.

HB: Does the boat push it along?

OB: No, we don't push it. We pull it [laughter].

DC: You drag a commercial.

OB: Yes. We have these design frames and you tow eight of them behind your boat. You line them up and throw them over and then you drag and you make big circles, is what you do. Then

you fill it up and pull them in. That's the way you do it.

GC: So, you got a lot of other things in your net besides scallops.

OB: Yes. Everything under the sun [laughter]. So, whatever's in front of that dredge, usually you can pick it up.

HB: What do you do with those? What do you do with the other fish and stuff?

OB: Over the side you throw them backwards where they came from. Because there's little, dead scallops out there and conchs and lobsters sometimes you catch, and flounder.

DC: Could you keep a lobster?

OB: Yes. At Tuckernuck, we used to catch them every day. Yes, there we used to. Well, two or three a day you would catch. At Flintstone Country, that's where they hang out. After a while we get tired of eating lobsters [laughter].

DC: [laughter]

OB: The fish are just too many.

DC: About anything, I guess.

OB: Yes. It's like the kids up in Maine there, they go to school every day they remember what they have for sandwich. Lobster sandwich. Yes.

DC: Lobster sandwich.

OB: They're crying, "Why can't we have peanut butter and jelly?"

DC: [laughter]

HB: [laughter] So, was your family involved in fishing on Nantucket?

OB: Yes. My father, he was in the Coast Guard. He came out of the Coast Guard and he went scalloping. Matter of fact, he lost his leg. He went to Nantucket Harbor. He was going up to the west end. Whatever happened to him, I don't know and nobody knows. We never found him. I lost my father when I was a little kid.

GC: Did they find his boat?

OB: No, they never found anything. They don't know where he went.

HB: Have you always been an independent commercial scalloper or did you work for someone else?

OB: I was independent, yes. Today you have to go with somebody that's been. You have to go in their boat. Well, you have to go in the boat for a year before you can get a commercial license to run a boat.

GC: I did not know that.

OB: You can't really learn anything about a scalloping –

HB: Yes, and just being in somebody else's boat.

OB: Yes. It's like going to kindergarten is what it is really. But you really can't teach somebody how to do it. You got to just get up and do it.

DC: Do it, yes.

OB: You learn by your mistakes. You learn where to go and where not to go. It is just as important to know where not to go because some places out there, it's like going to a landfill. You throw your dredges over and you come up with all the junk that's in any place. But the scallops, they don't live every place out there. It's a big harbor. They only stay in certain places all the time. There are certain places they just don't live.

DC: That has to do with eelgrass?

OB: Huh?

DC: Does it have to do with eelgrasses?

OB: Eelgrass, yes. That's where they live. They don't live any other place. But they got to have grass.

GC: So, they are doing that to hide in the grass or they eat it? Is that what they do?

OB: No, they just hide in it.

GC: Hide in it. What do they eat? It is something.

DC: They have to eat something.

OB: Little tiny –

DC: Krill?

GC: Yes, krill.

OB: Krill, whatever it is, yes. They move too. They got like a jet. They got a hinge on one end.



They go like that.

HB: It is cool to see. How has selling your scallops changed over the years since you began?

OB: Well, when I first started scalloping, we used to haul by hand all these dredges that you tow them around. To get them back, you have to pull them over when you fill them up with scallops. You had to pull them in. But you did that with your back and some strong arms. That's the way it was for years and years and years. You didn't make too many mistakes when you were hauling by hand because [laughter] we couldn't stand it.

HB: This was good.

OB: Yes, it was just too much work for a lot of guys. Even the great, big, muscular guys, if they didn't know where to go, they would fill the dredges up with junk and they couldn't get them back in the boat.

DC: Sure.

OB: We had to help. [laughter] Somebody had to go over there and help them to get them in. But the next day they were still hauling them in. They were just, "Oh, I'll kill them."

GC: They could not get out of there.

OB: Yes.

GC: [laughter] their muscles.

OB: So, they either learned or they didn't. That's the way I learned, was I made that mistake. I can remember the day I did it up in the first bed in Nantucket Harbor. I had never been there before in my life. I looked at the water and I said, "Oh, it's a good place to start scalloping." So, I threw all six dredges over and I towed the boat. I was going and, oh, the next thing you know, the boat stopped. So, I give it more power [laughter].

DC: [laughter]

OB: I pulled the whole (stop engine towards it?). When I tried to put them back, there was nothing but junk in there. Oh, my, it took me hours to get all the dredges back in. I said to myself, "Oscar, why do you do that? Don't ever, ever throw six dredges if you don't know where they're going. Next time, you just throw one."

DC: Test the place out. Find out.

HB: Have you ever lost any equipment while you were scalloping?

OB: Yes, I have. But most of the time I find them again. Because now they have this polyethylene plastic. It's a plastic rope and it floats. Years ago, it used to be a cotton line. If

you cut it off or it broke for some reason, it would sink down to the bottom and you could never find it. But the new lines that are used are plastic and it floats. A lot of times if the tide's running, it'll be under the water where you can't see it. But if you go back there, it's slack water. When the water's not moving, it'll float right up. If you're lucky, you can see it. That's why you always see a fisherman, he's always looking for something.

GC: [laughter]

DC: [laughter]

OB: If there was something, everyone says, "Wait, that's mine."

GC: [laughter]

HB: What are the most scallops you have caught? Has the typical number changed?

OB: We always go out to catch our limit of scallops which is five boxes for each person. You allow two people on a boat. So, you get ten boxes every day, hopefully. Sometimes you slip a few of them under the common board [laughter].

HB: Has that limit changed?

OB: Yes. Let's see. What do we get? Five boxes I think now, which is a bushel.

DC: Bushels, that is right.

OB: Five bushels. That's what it is. But when I first started, the state limit was ten. That's what we used to catch, was the state limit. But then over the years, they kept cutting it down and cutting it down and cutting it down. Now, it's five bushels. People sometimes they had trouble doing that, catching five.

DC: I could not catch five if my life dependent on it.

GC: So, it used to be very plentiful?

HB: I would not know where to go.

OB: Oh, years ago, sometimes you could go up there and make one drag and you get your ten boxes, which is probably an hour because you needed time to cull them, fill them up in the boat. But then again, you got the other side where you could go all day and only catch two boxes.

HB: So, then how long does shucking them and all that take?

OB: Shucking is the hard part. A good shucker, he can open 12, 13, 14 pounds in an hour. Let's just say it's \$2 a pound, he's making \$10 an hour. Especially the last couple years, we were making \$15 a pound. That's a lot of money.

HB: \$15 a pound?

OB: Yes.

DC: It was 17 last year. I have heard stories of really fast scallop shuckers. They say Madaket Millie would have one in the air –

OB: [laughter] Yes.

DC: – while she was finishing opening the next one, it would go off.

OB: Well, she's not quite that bad [laughter].

DC: [laughter] That is the legend though.

OB: It was a little different.

DC: That is much better than the truth.

OB: Yes. But you only had to be fast. You do good when you're fast because the faster you go, the more you make. But the problem is you wear yourself out. After a while, you got to slow down. So, a good, steady opener is better than a fast opener. So, what happens to the fast opener, he just burns himself out. It's like the rabbit and the turtle. Who won the race? That's the way openers are. A good, steady opener.

DC: I am surprised at how many people opened. Scott opened in high school. So many people here in Nantucket.

OB: Well, I bought all my candy and all my ice cream, clothes, and my shoes and whatever when I was a kid.

DC: By many errands opening?

OB: Yes.

GC: So, you were opening as a kid then?

OB: Yes, I started opening when I was probably his age. It was fun. We could run down there after school and you had to wait in line to get into the bench so you could open. If we filled a bucket a day, we were great. It all depends on how quick you get there. If you get up there, say at 4:00 p.m., you could open, and in 3 hours, I could go home and go to supper at 5:00 p.m. If you weren't there to start with, by the time you get back from eating, the scallops were all gone and opened.

GC: So, you said you went to the candy shop with your money that you all made?

OB: Yes.

DC: Down in Wisconsin.

OB: Yes. I used to open for (Earl Coughlin?) and (Kenny Holgate Sr.?). They used to get the legal limit. They used to get 20 bushels. At that time, it was ten bushel per man. Each book would get –

DC: Twenty.

OB: – get twenty bushels.

DC: Kenny told me that a bushel would hold a lot more than a box or vice versa. That the old measure was a lot bigger.

OB: Well, not really. The boxes now, they hold a bushel. There's no question about that. But you got to shake them down. There was a difference that before they had bags.

DC: Bags, that is what it was.

OB: They had bags. You can always get more in there because what you did, you put your scallops in there. They grabbed the bag and you shake it and shake it and shake it.

DC: [laughter] Yes.

OB: Then you just keep all the bags stretched. Then the scallops you put in there.

HB: So, twenty bags a day.

OB: Yes, twenty of them. Some of them they changed. The bags changed over the years. We used to get three baskets with three half bushels in the bag. That's the way it was.

HB: So, what was your typical day like on the water?

OB: What was it like?

HB: Yes, just a typical day.

OB: Well, some days you had a good day and some days you got a bad day. But most of the time what I would say, any day when you're on the water, every day's a good day. Especially days like today, nice and calm, you go out there and you get wind burned. You are working like heck, build up an appetite, down the sandwiches, and then the coffee. Everybody had a thermos back then. That's what you brought with you. Then the thermos helps keep your water hot.

DC: So, you loved it, huh?

GC: So, you got up at what time?

OB: Got up?

GC: Did you get up early in the morning and go all day?

OB: Yes. We started at 6:30 a.m. We used to leave the same time. A steamboat left at 6:30 a.m. Of course you had to get up at 5:00 a.m., and grab a cup of coffee and brush your teeth and [laughter] all that stuff. But it usually such a long day because you are up by 5:00 a.m. and you got to go scalloping. But scalloping, sometimes you can spend 2 hours out there or you could spend 8 hours. But yes, you never sold the scallops until after supper, which was 5:00 p.m. Then he had to come home and eat. So, it was a long day. Some guys would open every one of their own scallops. I used to take my wife with me. See, we doubled up on the limit. Instead of just five boxes coming in the household, we got ten. That's where the money part comes in because you make good money that way. It really helped because we had six girls.

DC: Oh, you did?

OB: Yes. At Christmas time, they're all there [laughter].

DC: Oh, that is great. Could you give them a boat and make them go scalloping so you could [laughter] get more?

OB: At that time, we used to make them all open. They hated it. We made them open a dollar a day and paid them just to try to get them interested in it because there is good money in opening it. They hated it. But now, my Julie, she worked this year with the [inaudible]. She's asking her [inaudible] because she couldn't get paid this year. By next year, she paid her due. She's got a year in. So, next year, if they're still together, [laughter] she'll be going scalloping. That's the only one that's taking it out.

DC: Who is still doing it.

HB: Have you ever had any close calls on the water?

OB: I had a few. Matter of fact, I stopped one day until they took it out A.C.'s too. Luckily, there was another boat up there. He saw us and he said, "I saw two guys standing on the water up there." He said he couldn't figure out where they came from. He came over here when we were. The boat had sunk on her.

HB: Were you standing on your boat?

OB: Yes, I was standing right up in the bow.

GC: Put bows under the water?

OB: No, the bow was out the water, just the end of it. The two of us were standing up there.

DC: Oh, my.

GC: No wonder it looks like you were walking on water.

OB: [laughter]

GC: So, what happened? Was there a storm or you holed the boat or how did it sink?

OB: Well, in this particular boat, a bristle in the realm part of the boat. You know the well lives in the back, it's got holes in it. What they call limber holes. That's where your cables and everything hook up from inside. They hook up to your motor. But on this particular boat, the well is supposed to take the water and fill up the well, but it runs right back out. Understand?

GC: Yes.

HB: Yes.

OB: Well, with this hole that's in there, when the cables come a lot of this water doesn't run out, it runs in. It was quite rough that day. The water kept going in there. Every time you stopped to haul back to get these scallops, the water would come in the boat. But we didn't know that. The next thing you know, I was telling them like, "Boy, it's really calmed down quite a bit, hasn't it?" "Yes." Well, the next thing you know, both of us went to the back of the boat and the back end went, whew. Because all the water inside the boat kept running back. AC jumped up on the bow of the boat, which he did. I took all the treasures and I rolled them up there and I threw the windshield, everything. I got the boat back up. But let's see what happened after that. Well, I got it back up and I went back there and I started up the motor. The cast tank was in the water in the boat. We were going right towards the shore really slow. Guess what happened? The gas tank turned upside down and the motor quit. So, it ran out of gas. You think I could get that started again? It wouldn't start and then we went down. [laughter] That time she went down.

DC: How far off shore were you?

OB: About a half a mile.

DC: Oh, my.

OB: Yes, I remember that.

DC: What happened to the boat?

OB: We towed it over to Tuckernuck and I left it there that night. We went back the next day and pumped the oil out and everything and brought it home. We looked them over and boom, went scalloping the next day [laughter].

DC: That is great [laughter].

HB: So, can you tell us about some of the things that you liked and did not like about working on the water?

OB: You got to say that again.

HB: So, can you tell us about some of the things that you liked and did not like about working on the water?

OB: Well, when you get older, you're going to have to get a job. You know that?

HB: Yes.

OB: Oh, good. You're going to have to work for a living, especially if you're a man. Because then you're going to be the breadwinner. Years ago, that's the way it was. The wife stayed home, took care of the kids, and did the housework and everything. The man went to work and he made the money. Today it's different. Sometimes the wife makes more money than the man [laughter]. But it's nice to have it. You always had a job. If you wanted to go out there and make money, that's what you do. You go every day. You treat scalloping like a job. That's what it is. It's 5 days a week now, scalloping is. I used to go over to, and some you went 6 days right through Saturday.

DC: You cannot go six days anymore?

OB: No.

DC: Strange.

OB: But the reason they do that is they try to slow down the volume of scallops going to the market. It can get to a point where there's too many scallops on the market and the price drops.

HB: Oh, just like inflation of scallops.

OB: Yes.

DC: It is all right with me. Make them go 7 days [laughter].

OB: [laughter] But it got to a point where there's just too many scallops. But they sold just as many. If there were \$10 a pound, they were two. It was just a gimmick.

HB: What is the most difficult part about being a fisherman or a scalloper?

OB: What's the most difficult part?

HB: Yes.

OB: I think getting up at 5:00 a.m. every day.

DC: Oh, yeah [laughter]?

GC: Did you go rain or shine?

OB: Yes.

DC: You did? You would go rain or shine?

GC: Yes, ma'am. He went early.

OB: Scaloping you had to go every day in November and December, because back in the [19]50s – see, the climate changed now. See, in the [19]50s and [19]60s the ground was frozen at Thanksgiving Day. It was cold. 1st of December was deer hunting week and the ground was frozen. There was snow and every other thing. So, what happens after, the harbor would freeze up and Tuckernuck would freeze up. So, you couldn't go with the ice.

DC: Oh, right. So, you had to go before it all freezes up.

OB: Well, that's what I'm telling you. You go every day you can in November and December, because from January, February, March, you only get 1 or 2 days a week. It all depends on the weather.

DC: When did that change? When did that start changing?

GC: The weather.

OB: I don't know. I think 20 years ago things just started going along. Like this winter wasn't very cold. We had a couple of cold lights and there was no ice this winter there. I went there following week.

GC: Yes, it did not.

OB: Yes. Some of those years there'd be ice cleaning the hyenas.

HB: All of them.

OB: That's the only way you can make money. You got to go every day whether you want to or not. You tired.

HB: Cold [laughter].

OB: Cold [laughter]. You got to go because if you don't, you not going to make it.



HB: Well, a lot of people just do scalloping during scallop season, but might do other jobs other than scalloping. Have you done anything else besides scalloping or any other fishing?

OB: Well, I go bluefishing and I go bass fishing and I go cod fishing. The cod fish they're right off Wisconsin. You know where the lighthouse is?

HB: Yes.

OB: Sankaty? Yes, well right in front of Sankaty Light and go way out, a mile out there. I used to sell cod fish on Main Street. I had my little 19-footer. I used to go out there and catch twenty or thirty cod fish off the lighthouse. Come back in, go down Main Street with a [inaudible]. He was a vegetable man. He still lived there. But I used to park right alongside of him. He was selling the corn. I was selling the cod fish [laughter] \$2 apiece. You got a fish this big. The one that big was around \$2.

DC: Oh, \$2.

HB: \$2.

DC: I did not know cod fish got that big.

OB: Oh, yes. Well, they get up to 90 pounds. Yes, it's almost as much as you, huh [laughter]?

DC: I bet [laughter].

GC: So, can they do that anymore? Can they bring the fish in, fish, and come in and put it in the market like that and repackage it?

OB: No. They can't do that anymore. They used to, but I think Jack McDonald was the last guy who did it. You got to have a refrigerated truck and all that. Health department is just too involved.

DC: So, you just got so involved, you just did not –

OB: Well, I did it for years. Also, I rented boats down to Jetties Beach. There's some fish in South Beach. They used to tow water skiers around up there [laughter].

DC: Did they water ski in the harbor back then?

OB: Yes. They operated down to Jetties Beach.

HB: Do they do that in the summer still near Jetties Beach?

OB: Yes. But they don't operate out of there. They do it from I think down the Straight Wharf or some place. You have to make an appointment. But we stayed right at the beach every day with my wife. I had the largest, coolest sailboats on the island.

DC: Oh, you did?

OB: Yes, I had twenty sailboats.

DC: Were they all different sizes or were they catboats?

OB: No, they were mostly sunfish.

DC: Sunfish.

OB: I had four on what they call daysailers, *O'Day* and a *Rhodes*. I had two *Rhodes* and two *O'Days*. There was a lot of good money. I can remember it was Labor Day weekend. All the people used to come down. Everything would be booked. The whole island would be booked with people who go skiing and the stuff. Especially with us, they come down to make reservations. I'd have hundreds of dollars in my hand.

DC: [laughter]

OB: Oh, it's Labor Day weekend [laughter].

DC: [laughter]

HB: [laughter]

OB: But even then it would either rain or something, it would blow. I used to go down Main Street and give them all that money.

DC: For a rainy day.

OB: Yes [laughter].

GC: What was the name of your business? Was it just Oscar Buntings Boats or –

OB: We didn't have any name to tell you the truth, just Oscar. There were a couple other boats there with the – well, I could say, yes, we had a blue boat all the time. The other guy had a green boat and another guy had a black one.

HB: So, they just kind of rotated them?

OB: They just rotated and go over with the blue boat. He's faster than the green boat [laughter]. You get to know a lot of the people because they came every summer. Most of people they were from New Jersey or New York, Connecticut. But I knew a lot of the people. They all wanted me to go down to Alco Poco and Mexico during the winter, so I could rent some boats down there.

DC: Some boats down there. Oh, my.

HB: How is fishing and life at the docks different today?

OB: You got to say that again.

HB: How is fishing and life at the docks different today?

OB: How is it different today?

HB: Yes.

OB: Well, there's more regulations today than there was then. The law enforcement, they're pretty strict on checking each boat that comes in to make sure you don't have any seed, what they call knobblies. I have yet to not understand what a knobby is. But that's what they call them. In my boat, it's either a seed or there's an adult, one or the other. There's no in between.

GC: Oh, so you are talking size wise of fishes then [laughter]?

DC: Scallopers, yes. Size of scallops.

OB: Scalloping starts off like just little tiny grains of sand. Then what they do is they float. The scallop itself floats and he lays all the eggs. The eggs float along in the current. After a certain amount of days, they settle down from the bottom. That's where your eelgrass comes in.

DC: To protect them.

OB: They stick to the eelgrass on the little tiny line.

GC: How are are we doing?

DC: Great.

HB: Great.

GC: Did you learn anything?

HM: Yes.

DC: [laughter]

OB: [laughter]

GC: Then they just consume the calcium in the water. They grow their own shell?

OB: Yes. If you look at them underneath the microscope, they look just like a scallop, a little

one, as the big ones do just by the look of it. That's when they start growing. But usually, it all depends when they're born. Sometimes they're born in May or June. Then another batch will be born in the fall. So, you got two different batches going all the time.

GC: So, the regulations are they have to be a certain size.

OB: Yes. But they have to have what they call a growth mark on them. A lot of them don't. That's where you had knobbies are coming in. The shell on the back, there is supposed to be a little growth mark on that. It shows that it was a seed. Then the second year, the scallop will grow however he grows. What does he do? Oh, that's when they say either it's a scallop, an adult. If it's got a growth mark or if it's got a smooth shell, they call that a knobby. But usually when it's a seed, it's usually –

DC: It is small.

OB: – a dollar size or something like that.

HB: Do you have any interesting fishing stories?

OB: Fishing school?

HB: Fishing stories?

OB: No, not really. How do you do that?

HB: Just any fishing stories that you might have.

OB: Oh, fishing stories [laughter].

GC: Maybe your favorite catch or most traumatic catch.

OB: I don't know. It's hard to say. All I can say is every day is a new day scalloping. It's like catching a fish. You guys go fishing, do you?

HB: Yes.

OB: You catch a fish, you're happy, right? Well, it's the same thing with scalloping. It's the same thing when you are fishing. You are looking to catch them. That's the fun part of being a scalloper. You get a challenge on your back every day. If you don't want to work, you don't have to. If you work, you get rewarded for it. Very good. You make good money at it.

DC: You get out what you put into it.

HB: I know you are on several town committees concerned with the waterfront. What are they?

OB: Well, I'm not on any committee [laughter]. I stay out of politics.

HB: [laughter] What do you think is the most important serious issue affecting the fishing or scalloping industry?

OB: Well, there's something that has an effect on scallops. They call it the brown tide, which kills the scallop itself, the larvae, and everything. It started way back in the [19]60s. Started in Long Island. That's in New York. This brown tide, wherever it was, it killed the scallops. This brown tide crept all the way from Long Island along the whole coast, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts. Finally, it's catching up in Nantucket. Whatever happened, what this allergy is, that's what they call it, was a brown tie. That demonstrated them fishermen up there. They just lost every scallop there was. You couldn't get a scallop there.

GC: For this one year? Was it one year or a couple years?

OB: No.

GC: A couple of years.

OB: It lasted until, I don't know, 15, 20 years. I think now they're finally getting scallops back up there in Long Island.

HB: Was it man-caused or was it just natural?

OB: They don't know. The other thing is Codium. We call it Japanese moss.

HB: Yes, the green stuff.

OB: Yes, he knows it.

DC: He's a naturalist in training it with Guy Mitchell.

OB: Oh, yes?

DC: Yes.

HB: Yes.

OB: They grow. There's two ways of looking at it. One is good and one is bad. If it's a scalloper, it's bad. But what happens is this moss grows on the back of a shell. Then after it keeps on growing, it gets buoyant. What it does, it grows, but it'll lift it off the bottom and then it'll go with the tide. So, it would go to different spots.

GC: It may not be where the food is.

OB: Yes.

GC: So, that is bad.

OB: But that's the bad part because it has no conscience if it's the scallop or [inaudible], whatever is out there. But the other thing is that you take rocks and no dead shells and stuff and it sticks to them. Of course, they go away. In my book, that's nature's way of cleaning up that bottom.

GC: What is it called?

OB: Codium.

GC: Codium. You have heard of it?

OB: Japanese moss, right? (Nip on Knees, Cash on knees?) [laughter]. I started years ago, one little place. Now, it's everywhere. It spreads like the wind.

HB: Are you still fishing or scalloping? If not, why did you stop?

OB: I scallop in my mind [laughter]. Physically, I spend most of my time in my living room now. I'm just a little too old. I quit scalloping. I was 69 years when I quit. There's a picture of me right there. Look at that.

DC: [laughter] From Nancy Newhouse's book, I think.

OB: Yes, Newhouse. I was out there in the water. I enjoyed every minute of it [laughter]. If you want a good and strong life, make your living off of water. It's good for your head. Makes you a better man. Makes you strong. You get up in the morning and go to work [laughter], right? That's what you call your, be all you can be, right? Yes.

DC: Well, Case, you have any more questions?

HB: No, I don't think so.

OB: Now, you're going to go scalloping [laughter]?

HB: Oh, yes [laughter].

GC: I am.

GC: More like a study scallops next fall.

OB: Yes.

[end of transcript]