Roland Clark Oral History
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Interviewer: NS – Nancy Solomon
Transcriber: NCC

Nancy Solomon: Okay. This is Nancy Solomon talking with Roland Clark on September 11th, 1997. This is Tape 1, side 1. We are going to be talking about Shelter Island, shell fishing, and fin fishing, and changes in the Peconic Estuary. Okay. You started to say that here on Shelter Island, there used to be a number of different factories in the [19]90s.

Roland Clark: The baymen worked on the moss bunker for fertilizer and fish oil, and that was their big spring fishery. Those baymen made up the life of many different clamming, scalloping, haul seining, or gill netting, and dragging. You can't depend on just one thing. That's why the brown tide really impacted the East End fishermen a lot, is they lost the haul seining for striped bass for a few years, and then the brown tide destroyed the scallops. So, it put more pressure on other fisheries. A lot of guys went, more and more people went into dragging. So, it put more pressure on those fisheries rather than being spread out over a variety of seasonal fisheries. You need the whole combination to make a living. You just can't depend on the five or six months of one type of fishing to make a living. You need the bay scallops and 100 clams, and it's like the seasons of the year. We need four good seasons, and that makes a year.

NS: What has been your own experience in working on the water?

RC: I lived and worked on the water all my life. I'm fifty-eight years old. I went to school on the island. When I was a kid, I fished with my father and grandfather, and went clamming and bay scalloping, haul seining, hand lining, blue fishing, sword fishing once in a while, which was like a pleasure trip. After high school, I went to my Coast Guard. So, I was on the water on a buoy tender on Long Island Sound, running a patrol boat in New York Harbor. As I was getting out of the Coast Guard, my brother and I had a boat built to go charter fishing. We were both in the Coast Guard in 1960, when I got out of it. I had a 45-foot boat that I went charter fishing for twelve years. But I'd go scalloping in the fall, along with charter fishing. Hard to win or I'd be scalloping. Then later in the winter when I was single, I'd go to Florida and work on yachts. Come back in the spring and start getting a charter boat ready. After I got married, I fished in Montauk for five years. Well, I started for six years, I guess.

NS: What was the name of your boat?

RC: *Wahoo*. I fished for a shack offshore and swordfish. Prior to Jaws, I was like the understudy of Mundus, the guy that made Jaws famous. [laughter] I had the same kind of boat. He had overflow business, and that was like an underutilized sport fish at the time. Nobody was really involved in it. He built that business up in the [19]60s. He started to get so many extra charters. He talked me into coming down to Montauk and taking his excess business, which he got a commission from every charter he gave me. But we did that for quite a few years, and I had this land on a creek. After I was married and my children got to be school age, we wanted to be back on the island. We built the house here, and so we tried it one year of moving back and forth and commuting and all that kind of stuff. But to really run a business out of Montauk, you have got to be right at the dock and spend a lot of time there. So, I sold the boat and bought a dragger, called it *Jenny and Jesse*. I named it after my two daughters, and that way, I could be based on Shelter Island. I still fished around Long (Talk?), and mostly Gardiners Bay, but in Long Island Sound and on the backside of Long Island. But I did fish off of Block Island like that.

NS: What were you fishing for on the dragger boat?

RC: Flounder, fluke, yellowtail, squid, butterfish. Each season had different type of fish that would be working on them. Early [19]70s like that, the competition was from the Russians. We had a lot of Russian –

NS: The factory boats. Yes.

RC: There was still a lot of fish, but we used to actually have so much fish that the prices wouldn't be any good on something. Yellowtail would maybe be 5 or 6 cents, and jumbo fluke would be going for 25 cents. But when they were a dollar, we'd be looking for them and they'd make – he was always looking for fish that you could catch a certain amount of volume and get a good price for them. A lot of times, you could catch all kinds of squid, and New York wouldn't even pay us for it. I have returns that say no value dumped. Now, that stuff is selling for a dollar, and it's very scarce. Sometimes I'd fish 10,000 pounds in a day, fishing by myself. That's a lot of work for one man. But as it's gotten a lot popular in the last few years, it's kind of – people that have come from the Mediterranean area, and it got just very popular about ten, twelve years ago. I think it started with the Falkland wars. There was a worldwide scarcity of squid at that time because that was a major supplier, and a lot of the foreign buyers knew that we had squid, and all of a sudden, they started buying it and giving us good money. So, we didn't have to depend on just New York market to get rid of the product. So, the prices went up and everybody started chasing that. Let's see, about five or six years, seven years, I had the *Jenny and Jesse*, and then I built the boat I have now, is the Petrel. It's a 40-foot fiberglass boat, and I fish it by myself in Gardiners Bay. With all the bores and closures and everything, I basically have about a six-month season when the fish are here. I have about six months to make a living out of the bay. I'm looking forward to a few scallops coming back this year. I've got a small fiberglass boat that I fish in the creeks and around the bay northwest and right around the island close. But that's one of the missing links of life around here, is to not have the bay scallops. You couldn't live on just bay scallops either. You need the guys that go lobster, and it was like a common bond between – there were a lot of people that went farming or was in recreational tourist business that they went scalloping in the winter. It was like the offseason gold mine. A farmer could have his crops in and everything, and he could go scalloping in the winter. A guy that worked in a restaurant or some kind of tourist business the whole summer, that was only a part of a year's work too. So, everybody was out there scalloping in the fall because it was the perfect offseason cash crop to the local economy. The people have been here for quite a few generations. It's missed. Somebody that didn't know anything about it can come from some other part of the country and now living here wouldn't know anything about it, really, I guess. There's nothing I can compare it to, I think. It's part of our life cycle.

NS: Growing up, what were some of the things you learned from your father and your grandfather about fishing and shell fishing?

RC: Probably safety around the water.

NS: For instance.

RC: Yeah. If you acted reckless and taken a chance to fall overboard in the wrong place, that was pretty well – got certain punishment for it, if you didn't mind the advice sometimes. But I learned about navigation, I'd say, went a lot of places. Most of it was – depended on instinct. You developed a sixth sense because you didn't have the electronics. All we got on the boat was a compass, and a pocket watch, and a beat-up chart. If you didn't have a chart, you knew it in your mind. But we always had a chart on the boat that we fished around Plum Gut and the race and like that back in the [19]40s. I was only a little kid, but my father trusted me to run the boat, and he'd go take a nap while we'd run down a bay in the middle of night. Yeah. My father had a lot of [laughter] – I had a lot of responsibility at like ten, eleven years old to be good enough to run a boat.

NS: Yes. What were you fishing for at Plum race?

RC: At that time, we fished for bluefish.

NS: Okay.

RC: It's hard to believe bluefish brought good money then. It was a few boats hand lining, and they would bring like 25 cents – 15 to 25 cents when swordfish would only bring in maybe 50 cents, which is top shelf type of fish. We did hand lines. It was a tarred line. It was done just kind of like the dory fishermen. We knew all the rips and pigeon rip, and the race and bloody ground in these places where people write – It's written up in every sport fishing magazine now on how to do this and how to do that. But we went by visual signs. You could tell where rip was. Sometimes, if it was foggy, we knew exactly where it was just by the shape of the rip. Each riptide makes up a little bit different. We didn't have the fathometers just to tell you the bottom depth or anything like that. We depended on seeing the gulls working on the bait. We'd run up tide, get just a certain position on that rip. If it was a clear day, we would use ranges on Plum Island and Connecticut, and different islands and stuff like that. We depended on and plumed up like that. We caught fish on that drift. It was always looking at land and taking ranges of the way you hook the fish because you'd want to run back up tide and drift right back through that same area.

NS: Did your father and grandfather – what were their names?

RC: Albertus Clark, my grandfather, and Ed Clark Sr., my father.

NS: Okay. Did they do much shell fishing?

RC: Yeah. We'd go scalloping in the fall and clamming during winter and spring. My father – both of them had jobs off and on. My grandfather was caretaker of Mashomack for forty years. So, he had a steady job, but it was a job where he didn't really have to answer to anybody. He just had to take – oversee the place and keep an eye on it. But he had plenty of time to go clamming and fishing.

NS: When was the Preserve created?

RC: In the mid-[19]70s.

NS: Okay.

RC: That's what he came to Shelter Island as he got the job of being a caretaker at Mashomack. But he was a clammer.

NS: What kind of clamming did he do?

RC: Mostly hard clams, but soft clams were plentiful around here too. Was a good at springtime. Scalloping wasn't always as good. The period of mid-[19]50s through the mid-[19]70s, so that was the best scallop, really than anybody. There were a few years back in the [19]30s when they were almost extinct too. They were very scarce during the [19]30s and up until early [19]50s. There wasn't very many of them, and you can't blame it out on the water quality. I don't think the water quality was –

NS: Do you know what may have caused it?

RC: It might have been just a natural cycle. At the same time, there were piles of oysters, and there were lots of clams, up until the brown tide, there was still one oyster company operating out of Greenport. But during the [19]40s and [19]50s, there were probably as many as five oyster companies. Those boats would bring in six hundred or seven hundred bushel a day of oyster.

NS: Did he go oystering, your grandfather?

RC: Just as a very small amount. There was so much competition from the oyster companies. They could produce so much volume that the few oysters that were around locally had no market because they weren't as cultivated. The wild oysters are a little bit irregular in shapes. The cultivated ones were nice, perfect shapes to them, because they broke them up so they wasn't in clusters and like that. But he did oyster when he was a young man out of Smithtown in Centerport. They oystered out in Long Island Sound on Stratford shoals. There was a tremendous oyster bid there. Supposedly, they were like 10-foot deep on a bottom. They were very plentiful there.

NS: Where would he go scalloping?

RC: Peconic Bay was one of the bigger. That's one of the – my grandfather come out to the bay here in 1919 or something like that just to go scallop. He had about a 50-foot sloop, and they would go sail. They had to sail the scallops. There was no power. It was illegal to use power. So, he had a 50-foot sloop and towed maybe 20 dredges. There was no limit on how many scallops you could catch at that time. You could put one hundred bushel on deck and then they'd go on a green pull up and people would come down and open the scallops right on deck with kerosene lanterns. They'd set up tables on the deck and open the scallops right at the dock there. It was quite a few boats that did that then. They sailed middle ground, and Peconic Bay was a

real good ground.

NS: What years are we talking about?

RC: That's back in the [19]20s, early [19]20s. Then sometime in the [19]30s, the scallops disappeared.

NS: Do you remember specific parts of Peconic Bay that he would go scalloping in, that were his favorite spots?

RC: Yeah.

NS: What were some of those spots?

RC: It varied from year to year, but up and around Rose's Grove was a good spot for young scallops. We called them bugs. When they get to a certain size, we could take them legally, the first-year set, for the Hog Creek area. Probably, I spent more time in northwest or right in Coecle's Harbor. I live on Coecle's Harbor here. Each little spot, the scallop is hard to catch. You can look down over the side and you'd think – some people just can't catch them. You have to know the ranges and how to adjust the dredges and get your gear working. I was a kid, but up until 1960, we still had to sail, so it was not a novice type of fishery. When it got so everybody could use a power boat, a lot of people got into it. But before, when you had to sail, you had to know how to sail for one thing, and you had to know how to work operation, and that's being with my father and grandfather. They were good at sailing scallops and probably best of anybody around here. [laughter]

NS: Where did they get the boat?

RC: Pardon me?

NS: Where did the boat come from?

RC: My father built one boat. Another boat, the old Meg he had was like 1910, and he rebuilt it back in the [19]40s. But he used that to go sword fishing and hand lining and gut in a race and go scalloping.

NS: What about the dredges? Who built the dredges?

RC: Most of them were built by Paul, a blacksmith in Greenport in my generation. He just died.

NS: Do you know his last name? Do you know Paul's last name?

RC: Nope.

NS: Okay.

RC: Yeah. I know that he fought in the German army in World War I, and he immigrated to this country. But he had the traditional blacksmith shop in Greenport. He did everything by forge. There was no – his welds were done by forge and not by electronic.

NS: Yes, or by arc welding or anything.

RC: Yeah. So, he really knew how to work with iron. He built beautiful dredges and anchors. I had a sea scallop dredge built by him. He did all our steel work. Now, we have Norfolk welding or some other outfit that they copy this stuff, but I don't think that this is – there's some people around that build dredges that are imitations of Paul's, but they're not the same kind of a dredge. It's funny. It was Scarlet Dredge. One dredge, you might have six dredges on a boat, and there'll be one or two dredges that'll catch more scallops than another. They look exactly the same. It's just the way the bag is put on there, and the way the blade may be shaped or something. It's kind of funny that one – they look like they're clones. They look like they come right out of the same mold. [laughter] But one will catch. Now, you get your favorite dredge. You always put it in a good spot too.

NS: How often would you have to replace a dredge? Did they last? How long did they last?

RC: I've got some dredges down there I've had for thirty years. We replaced the chain bags on the bottom of the – a steel ring bag. It's half twine and half steel rings. The bottom chafe is out. That's why we put the steel rings in there. Some guys will put just twine all the way around the bag, and that'll work. If you're scalloping on Shelly bottom, that'll wear out in a month or something like that. Maybe even faster. So, the chain bag, I usually get up – lately, get a couple years out of because we haven't had that many scallops. But when the scalloping was real good, I'd have to replace the twine bags once a year sometimes during the season after I replace it. The blades on the dredges, after maybe five or six years. There's a half oval bar on – we call it a scraper blade, and that digs into the bottom. So, if you work in a place where there's sand and a lot of shells, that blade will wear out. So, it doesn't flip the scallop up into the dredge, and that bar will have to be replaced.

NS: How many dredges would be on a boat?

RC: I usually work with like four dredges, but sometimes where there's a lot of grass, you have to double up them. One dredge actually catches the grass ahead and makes the bottom a little clearer for the scallops. The grass will lay over top of a scallop and the dredge will just follow that grass right over top of the scallop so you won't catch it. Sometimes we'll double and triple up. So, the first couple of dredges are actually sacrificed to get that scallop that jumps up into the dredge.

NS: Had that always been the case that there was a lot of yellowtails?

RC: When the bay was healthy, there was a lot of grass all over the place. It was a blight to us, really. We'd wait until a certain time of year. The grasses die off and moves later on.

NS: When would that start to happen?

RC: Usually when it got into late fall, early winter, the grasses would start dying off and then you could get at scallops. Good northwest winds or good northeast would clean bottom up. Now, scallops would be laying right there clean as corn. There'd be just dredges of scallops on the bottom. Dredges would come up and just clean the scallops. Some rocks on like that. But early in the season, you have a lot of grass in the net, and it fills a bag up to the point where water doesn't flow through the dredge and scallops will go in there and there's like a back pressure and it pushes the scallops out. When the water was clear before brown tide, you could look down there and see this happening. When we scalloped in the creeks and stuff like that, you could look down and see that these dredges are full of grass. That was causing a negative flow through the dredge, and it would push the scallops right out because they – early in the season, they'd swim pretty good anyway. But all I have to do is open and close a few times and they'd go right out of the dredge. Sometimes that's why we double up or triple up the dredges, so they were in tandem. The scallop would flow out of the first dredge because it had too much grass, and it would go over top of the bar on the dredge and into the second dredge, which was clean and would hold them. So, it's something you learn from trial and error and doing a lot of it. If you want to make a living on the water, you have to produce. You just can't buy the equipment and go out there, and say, "I'm a fisherman or I'm a scalloper." You're a fisherman or a scalloper if you put ten bushel of scallops or twenty bushel on a deck every day. That makes a difference between a lot of baymen, is how you stay at it and determination. It's hard work, it's not easy.

NS: Before the brown tide, did you use a motorboat for scalloping or –

RC: Yeah.

NS: When did the change begin between sailboats and motorboats, roughly?

RC: The size of the boat?

NS: No. When did people switch from going scalloping in a sailboat to using a motorboat?

RC: The law was changed in like 1960. So, I think [19]61 was the first year you could use outboard or motorboat. Before then, you had to have a sail, and everybody had a motor on the boat. What you'd do is make drifts run up tasked with a bed of scallops. You'd run up to the up-wind side of the bed of scallops, throw the dredges over, and then shut the engine off, and your boat would drift down with the sail. That was very critical of trimming your dredges and having them just so they clicked the bottom just right. If they dug in too much, they would anchor up and the boat wouldn't move. So, constantly as the tide would rise and fall, there's certain areas where you could catch scallops at one part of tide, and when the tide changes, you wouldn't even know there's a scallop on a bottom. From years and years of experience and going to these places, you might learn some of this from my father and grandfather. It takes a long time. A lot of people don't catch on to it and then they give up. But I think that sometimes, there were no other options. On Shelter Island, people didn't have – when I was a kid, my father didn't have any alternative to pursue to make a living. You could go out on a bay, and you could work making a living scalloping and clamming. If you wanted to have food on the table and everything, you had to work hard and had to know what you were doing. Otherwise, you'd go

broke and sore, I guess. But people have options now. There are other jobs around. So, you can go to work for the governor. There's a lot of different trades and stuff like that. So, a lot of people would give up on struggling to make every day a payday and working on the bay.

NS: When you go soft clamming and hard clamming, what were the most?

RC: Well, soft clams, the best tides would be in the winter, like the late winter, springtime. That's when the clams were their fullest there really, and that would be the time when the scalloping would pretty much be over with. It would be before you could go for any fin fish. There was no trapping or haul seining or gill netting or dragging. The flounders were up in the bay, so you didn't have – they were scattered out. So, there was nobody. It was like February, March. Towards end of March, you'd start catching flounders and traps would be set for bunkers and those other fisheries to go into. Most everybody would follow the different seasons because it's – you like to change. Some people stay just clamming all year long.

NS: Where were some of those people? Were they people who lived here on the island or?

RC: Yeah. Well, for shell fishing, you have to be a resident of a township. So, to fish in a town's waters, you have to be a resident of that town, and the state waters, which are just outside the harbors, you have to be a state resident. So, each little town had a certain amount of baymen depending on just shell fishing. So, they live in each year. But a lot of people did it as a side one like I said.

NS: When you think about those that would do nothing but clamming, who comes to mind?

RC: Well, my nephew is the only one, but he does still net and then trout fishing and rod and reel fishing too.

NS: What about a few years ago, were there any baymen?

RC: There really hasn't been anybody on the island that depended on clamming since back in the [19]50s. I would say that was the –

NS: Okay. Well, who did nothing but clamming before that time?

RC: I can't think of anybody in my lifetime that depended on just clamming tweve months of the year.

NS: Okay. That is what I was wondering. It seems like there is usually a combination.

RC: I would say when I was a kid and after the war, from [19]45 until say [19]53 or so, there were quite a few people on Shelter Island that went clamming for three or four months of the year. There was a local trucker, Dawson, was trucking.

NS: Okay. This is Tape 1, side 2. We are talking about –

RC: The clammers would bring that catch home and grade it, put in Bushel baskets on certain days of the week. Everybody who was a clammer would have five or six or seven bushels of clams sitting out in front of the house in the morning, and a truck would come by and pick up the clams. There were probably maybe two dozen people on Shelter Island that did that for those years. Before, in the [19]20s and [19]30s, there were a lot more people that did that.

NS: Again, if you remember any of the names, the real serious clammers.

RC: Lennox, Pollywater, Clarks, Tuthills. There's a few, Griffins. Lennox, I guess. Did I say that?

NS: Yes.

RC: There was Edwards. There were five or six family names, but they were usually some fathers and sons and brothers and like that, two or three brothers that would be in it.

NS: Which of the Tuthills? Because I've heard a little bit about the Tuthills, but I don't know exactly which.

RC: But Tuthills were one of the settling families on Shelter Island. They owned probably most of the island at one time, about half of it anyway.

NS: Right. I know. What were some of the baymen's names from the Tuthills family?

RC: Well, Alfred Tuthill was – he's the only one that I knew of. He was a family friend. He was a hard-working bayman. The family had a boatyard in Menantic Creek, and some of – his father had the boatyard, which he later took over. So, he would work as a bayman a good part of the year, but they still had boats that they had to haul and store and work and wasn't as active a business as it is now. It's not the mariner thing. They stored the boats for the winter, and then they had to paint them up in the spring. So, come early part of summer, they'd have a lot of free time on their hands, and then they'd go haul seining, and then go clamming, and work on a bay. In the fall, they hauled the boats out and they'd go scalloping at the same time. Scalloping kept cash money around Shelter Island when a lot of people didn't have any. Even the contract isn't like that at the time would work for people during the winter and there wouldn't be that much cash flow on Shelter Island. Maybe they get paid in the spring when some of the people come back out to their house is when they get paid for the work they did in the winter. But scalloping, you got paid every day.

NS: Yes. Were there scallop beds close to Shelter Harbor – to Shelter Island?

RC: Well, my nephew's clamming right there now. You can see a little gray boat. Several years, we had scallops right here where I left the dock and only went a couple hundred feet from where I tied a boat up, and I was scalloping. I'd get my ten bushels right there, the biggest kind of scallops. But for about six or seven years, there were maybe eight boats clamming in here part-time, getting four or five bushels of clams a day. Little nets. It's one of the best clamming spots on the island. It's handy to live right close to where you're catching the – [laughter] but

Coecle's Harbor is – the name is for shellfish, and it's a good producing area. Actually, old Everett Tuthill was supervisor of the island that he had the boatyard. I can remember as a little kid, he says he was a Republican. He says Shelter Islanders don't need any pork barrel projects around here. We got Coecle's Harbor. [laughter] Anybody who wanted to work could go out in Coecle's Harbor and go clamming any time they wanted to and make a day's pay. Or they could go scalloping. Or if they knew how to go fishing, they could go hand lining, or haul seining, or gill netting or something like that. It was pretty true. I made enough money in [19]60s or so to buy the land just from scalloping. It's kind of hard to believe that you could go out and work one fall, buy a piece of land, waterfront land. Now, you'd have to rob a bank, I guess, to be able to do that.

NS: [laughter] Oh, boy. Were there particular kinds of boats that they used for clamming say forty years ago when you were a child? Do you remember what kinds of boats they used?

RC: Before fiberglass come along, most of us built the boats, or at least rebuilt our boats. You had to maintain a wood boat. But when I was a kid, we did build a few boats, and I built my dragger out of fiberglass. I built a 40-foot dragger, and I built a scallop boat. I bought the blank haul and then built the decks and cabins and hooked up all the machinery and built dragging gear. So, you don't really make enough money on fishing to go and have somebody else do everything for you, you have to learn how to do it. I build my own nets. There's quite a few of them, anyway. All the maintenance on the boat, except for electronics and some engine work. I mean, basic stuff, painting, and fiberglass, and then building something out of wood is no big deal. Just get the material and do it.

NS: I want to talk about both the sailboat and your clamming boat. What was the sailboat made of? What kind of wood was it made of? Do you know, like your grandfather's boat?

RC: Some of them were built with cedar, white cedars. But a lot of boats were built with longleaf. Yellow pine was a good wood to build.

NS: Were those trees that you would find here, or would you go to a lumber mill and find?

RC: Alfred Tuthill, my father and my uncle-built boats with plywood cheesing on them, but they'd cut all the white off of Shelter Island and had it milled. That's back in the [19]50s. They built those boats, but all the framing was nice local white oak, and they would cut it in the winter when the sack would be out of it, and let it sit for a year and aged it and took it off island altogether on a big farm truck and had it milled. I think East Hampton was a sawmill at the time. But most everything we buy now is to go to a specialty lumber place. When I built the *Petrol 19* years ago, I got lumber from bay shore, and some of the oak had been milled on Long – the white oak had come from Long Island, even though it was a fiberglass boat. I had to put deck beams in it, and build things out of wood, like mahogany and oak. I think the oak come from Long Island. Long Island was a good supplier of shipbuilding materials at one time.

NS: Wow. That is pretty interesting. What about the clamming boat? What kind of boat was that?

RC: Most everybody used about a 16-foot or 18-foot wood boat with a flat bottom. It was the same boat they used for scalloping. The one we had was about an 18-foot boat, had a center board in it, and you could use it for clamming, sailing scallops. It was a design that was used around Nissequogue River for oyster. They sailed oysters in Long Island Sound and go shed fishing. It was a good sailing boat because when it was built, they didn't have very much power to put in a boat. [laughter] They didn't have any for a long time. I guess we had a three-horse outboard that we used early part of scallop seasoning, and it wasn't allowed to sail. You had to go get the scallops by hand, and we called it warping. You'd set an anchor out and then put out about 500 or 600 foot of anchor line, throw the dredges over, and then go up in the bow and hole in the anchor line. That would drag the dredges along the bottom. After you got the anchor holes in, you had to tie it off, go back, haul the dredges up, throw them on the culling board, and use the engine to back the anchor line back out on your range. Some of the creeks and stuff, there'd be twenty or thirty boats anchored up in little narrow areas. Would be almost fights. It'd be a lot of competition, but a lot of –

NS: How close did boats get to each other?

RC: So, you could bang into each other.

NS: Really? That close.

RC: In narrow creeks and like that, there would be just super amount of scallops. You wouldn't believe there'd be that many on the bottom. If it was a nice, clean area with no grass, you'd be just cleaning scallops there. So, the early part, the first couple weeks or month of the season, you had to do this warping. In the beginning, the first week or so of the season, everybody be on these real good spots of scallops where they're the most concentrated.

NS: What would consider the really good spots?

RC: Well, Menantic Creek, West Neck, and Coecle's Harbor too. But that was the town law that you could sail the 15th of September when scallop season opened up. You could sail on state waters, but this was just a town law, which most of the towns had. So, the bigger boats that had sailed on gave the little guys an opportunity. Some people didn't have sailboats. They just had a smaller rowboat that wasn't equipped with sailing like that. But you weren't allowed to go scalloping on Sunday with sail or walking, but we'd go scything. We'd take bunker oil and go out on a calm day in the fall, nice Indian summer day, and put a couple of drops of bunker oil on a boat and drift along and look at the scallops on the bottom. That's something you couldn't do during the brown tide, even if they were there. It would be in like mostly areas where there was like three, four, five foot of water.

NS: So, scalloping doing research to find out where you were going to go the next day?

RC: It was recreational scallop. It was easy to do, and it was like hunting.

NS: Well, how would you harvest it after you sprinkled the bunker oil?

RC: It was recreational scalloping at best, but it was done commercially. My brother and father and three of us would be in a boat and we'd just drift along, two or three of us, sometimes by ourselves, and pick the scallops up in a little scallop net bag that may be used. Like a landing net. The hoop would only be maybe 10 inches in diameter. The bag would be maybe a foot deep. You would scoop up until you got maybe eight or ten scallops in it, and then just flip them into a basket in the boat somewhere on a corn board. Since they were picked up, there was no grass or shells or anything there. That way of scalloping, you couldn't really catch as many, but you could go out and catch two or three or four bushel like that. That was a little more fun than hauling dredges and doing a back break, and thinking of what you did during a week. You couldn't do it on a rough day. You could only do it on a fairly calm day. But like in early September or early October, you'd get some nice Indian summer days and just a way of being out on the water.

NS: I am surprised that there were boats that were so close to each other during the regular scalloping season. I mean, would you have a boat 20 feet from you?

RC: Oh, yeah. Sometimes it would be right almost, so shake hands with each other or shrug one another if you wanted to. But basically, everybody would spread out a little bit. But sometimes, it would be a real good concentration of scallops. Maybe 100 yards wide or something like that, and it'd just be for a radius of 100 yards. It'd be just thick scallops. Yeah. So, everybody was scalloping twenty, thirty, forty boats. Everybody wanted to work in that same area. In sailing, you had to go up tide, up wind, and sail down across that bed. So, it was like a rotation thing. Now, without boards and everything, everybody can cut around and go back, zigzag back and forth and it doesn't have this cycle. Before, sailing was more – I still go scalloping because I did sail on it. I still make drifts a lot of times. Even if I don't have an outboard, I'll haul the dredges up, run up to a point where I want to throw the dredges back overboard. That way, I keep cleaning up an area of grass and get the scallop – get the bed so it's clean of the grass and you can catch the scallops there. Sometimes the grass is very heavy. It used to be. They're coming back.

NS: I am guessing that because you had such a large number of dredges, what kind of water would you be in? Deep water or shallow water?

RC: No. Most of the areas where the scallops are, you're probably six foot of water or less. Sometimes I've scalloped in areas where when it's low tide, the outboard would be hitting bottom, and at the top of the dredge, two foot of water, a foot and a half of water or something like that. But at high tide, you would be in 4 feet of water.

NS: So, is it better to go during high tide or low tide?

RC: Most times, there's some areas where you wouldn't even know there was a scallop there during a flood tide, but on an ebb tide, you'd catch good scallops there. But there's some places where the scallops are in 20 or 30 foot of water. But most of the time, you're scalloping in seven, eight, 10 foot of water. Like northwest, it's eight foot of water, or six foot of water, even shore on that, three or four foot of water. That's where the grass beds are and the scallops set in the grass, and that's their habitat, if you want to call it that. That's a big word now. But the scallops

have protection in there. That's where they live. The grasses start to die off in the fall, and scallops are exposed.

NS: What causes that? Do you know?

RC: It's natural cycle. It's just like the leaves falling off the trees. So, there's some grasses. The rubber grass, which we call Sputnik, was brought here by the oyster companies in the [19]50s or something like that to help protect the oyster beds from starfish. That stuff is not native to here. It comes from Japan. So, it has a different life cycle than the grasses that we have around here. But that was very heavy in some areas, and it seems to get greener and healthier during the winter. It's actually thriving in the winter, I think. Then it dies off in the summer. But that stuff appeared when Sputnik was put off the Russian oyster. So, we call them Sputnik grass. [laughter]

NS: That is very funny.

RC: That's coincidental. It happened at the same time. So, what the hell are you going to name this grass? It's very rubbery and it was called rubber grass and Sputnik. That's the history of that. My older brother, my grandfather.

NS: If you can describe to me how your father would go scalloping and clamming, what were his tools and his methods like?

RC: Well, most of the time, baymen are out on the water at daybreak. You get up early in the morning and have breakfast and make up a few sandwiches. In the wintertime, scallops, and I can remember just being almost frozen. We didn't have the clothes then as you have now, the bulky rubber gloves to keep your hands from freezing. There'd be ice all over the place. The engines weren't that dependable, but we made it back and forth and never broke down before.

NS: How far would you travel?

RC: We kept the boat right here in a creek and would go northwest. That was a big trip in the wintertime.

NS: How long would that take you?

RC: About an hour. We didn't have no speed boats then. A lot of times, we'd scallop in Coecle's Harbor. Sailing in the wintertime: January and February, December, it was pretty cold sometimes when the bay would – the Creek would finally freeze up so you couldn't go out, and that was the end of the season for a while. But up until at that point, we'd still keep going. They would pretty much freeze up by Christmas time, a lot of times. But someone is – it would just be off and on cold, and it wouldn't be any – they wouldn't freeze up enough to worry to go out. But you used manila line, there wasn't any nylon around. It was all natural fibers. But I know that line would freeze up stiff because it holds so much water. It'd be so cold that when you took it out of the water, by the time you put the dredge back in the water, the line would be stiff. It would freeze that fast. Scallops would – sometimes they'd freeze right on a corn board. When

you dumped them on the corn board, they'd be what we call porridge ice. The ice would be like a slush ice and the grass and stuff. You had rubber gloves with liners in them. Now, we have neoprene gloves with thermal lining in there. Tremendous improvement in them. Yeah. Comfort level was really up there. [laughter] No, it was pretty cold, and then when you brought the scallops in at night to open, the scallops would be frozen inside. We'd have to pour hot water, set them in a scallop shop and have a fire going. Even when you were opening them, they'd still be full of ice. Then your hands would get cold. You couldn't wear gloves to open, maybe wear a glove on the hand you held a scallop, but every once in a while, you'd have to take a break because you couldn't hold that many ice cubes in your hands. But out scalloping, you'd have to beat your arms a lot to keep your circulation and wave along back and forth and slap it back. That kept you from freezing up totally. There weren't coats and stuff like that. You got just the right amount of clothes on to keep so you don't get sweated up, but you have enough clothes on to keep from freezing to death. We never had a stove or anything on our boat.

NS: How long would you be out there?

RC: That was once scalloping wasn't that plentiful. My father would stay out all day long. He'd come in like 3:00 p.m., 4:00 p.m.

NS: What time would he leave? About 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m.? What time would he leave in the morning?

RC: Leave in the morning, 5:30 a.m., 6:00 a.m. I'm on the Daylight-Saving Times and all that. But, I mean, basically, you'd be out on the water as the sun comes up. You'd be either at your destination or headed there or pretty close. It's the same way everybody's scalloping now. You're going out, see a lot of sunrises. It's against the law to really scallop before sunrise. But usually, it was right there to get started as soon as the sun came up.

NS: Yes. How many full-time baymen were out there with him when he was scalloping?

RC: Well, last good scalloping –

NS: Yes, when you were a child.

RC: I would say there were probably thirty or so that really depended on it. Just like now, there's only a few people that really depend on scalloping. It's a major part of their income, as opposed to – there's been consistently about 150 diggers licenses on the island when the scallop season is good, the first few weeks of the season. All those people will be out there during that first few weeks of the season, but after the first month, it'll be down to the guys that are self-employed, that have no other – mostly clerks now. But they do some type of lawn maintenance and stuff like that during the summer, and then they go golfing in the winter when we have it. But there's only my nephew and myself that really work full-time on the water. There are a couple other guys that do it for a year and then they go back and do some other job or something like that. There's not as many people that depend on the water now.

NS: None of your other brothers work full-time on the water anymore?

RC: Pardon me?

NS: Do any of your other brothers work full-time?

RC: No. They just do it part-time.

NS: Are you the oldest in your –

RC: No. I'm the middle. I have a younger and older brother. I say in the [19]70s and [19]60s, both my parents, my father and mother would be out scalloping, my brothers and their wives, and my wife would be out scalloping altogether. Early part of the season, you're allowed ten bushel a person, twenty bushel in a boat. For that first month, when the scalloping was real good, had Daylight Savings Time in effect. We could put in a long day, and we'd get our twenty bushel every day for six days a week. We opened – we had a scallop shop in a cellar. Our daughters, when they were five, six, seven years old, they would open a little bit of scallop. By the time they were ten, they were good openers and I guess it wasn't child labor or something like that. But, I mean, it was all part of the family. We spend a lot of time together.

NS: Were there any women who worked on the water full-time, just out of curiosity?

RC: Not really.

NS: Okay. I figured, but sometimes.

RC: I'd say myself, I've depended on the water as long as anybody around here. I've been working since 1960 on the water, commercial fishing, scalloping, whatever I have to do. I've taken jobs on a ferry and go carpentry during the brown tide to supplement my poor income on the water because there were really some bad years during the brown tide. It was nip and tough to make a living. But other than that, I've worked on a water study and my nephew, he does the same thing as – I don't think – Kenny's been out of high school probably fifteen years, and he's never worked for anybody. He worked with me on a dragger as a crew member when he was a kid, but he gills nets, clams, scallops, trap fish. So, we're really the only two on the island that have done it full-time in the last fifty years. I think most of the baymen back even thirty or forty years ago had some other kind of job for a few months and did it maybe for four or five or ten years in their life cycle. They worked as just a straight bayman, but as of – I mean, you see light eventually where that bayman's life is not as easy as a job comes up working for the town highway or somebody needs a cat taken care of. My father worked as a yacht captain for quite a few years, but that gave him – that was the perfect way of living, I guess. You could go sport fishing and take care of a boat and have a year-round job, but you still got enough time to go scalloping and do it for fun. But it was supplementing your income real good. That's the way I think most everybody treated the bag around here. The old timers had it – they said it was like Long Islanders had one foot on land and one foot in the sea. I think that's kind of like a tradition that the farmers were fishermen, and the people that worked mowing lawns now still want to be out on the bay. I mean, you live here, it's part of the territories. It's one of the assets of living here, to be able to use the bay. That's why we're here. Most of us had a chance to go – My

father studied to be an engineer. He could have gone off and been an engineer some ways in the country, but he chose to come back to Shelter Island, and this is where you want to live. I mean, wouldn't you want to live here?

NS: [laughter] The jobs are not – yes.

RC: You have to go with what the land lets you do. It's a certain area, you have to go with that territory, I think.

NS: I am looking for your nephew.

RC: Figure out whether you work to live or live to work. [laughter] That's the way. I'd say most of the guys that are on the bay are because they like to be on the water. You accept the fact that it's not going to be as easy as a job that has full benefit package and retirement and social security, and all the fringe benefits that you have. All benefits is we're out on the water doing what we want to do. We can work real hard and make a good living. The brown tide years were the hardest. Guys on the south side that lost stripe and bass through legislation were hardest hit because they lost two lucrative ways of making a living at the same time. Some of them just didn't survive.

NS: When you say on the south side, what do you mean?

RC: Well, like East Hampton.

NS: Yes.

RC: Mostly East Hampton guys.

NS: Okay. Guys around here did not have that much of a problem?

RC: Well, they're the ones – there's some guys, the haul seiners, Southampton, but not too many. But most of the haul seiners were in East Hampton.

NS: East Hampton. Okay. I did not realize that.

RC: But the trap fishermen at Orient and around the bay lost –

NS: Okay. This is Tape 2, side 1.

RC: There were quite a few people from the island that worked on the bunker boats too, that they fished during the summer. Then in the wintertime, had off, so they would go scallop. They made good money working on the bunker boats in the summer. But it was such a short season, and someone would go bay scalloping in the winter.

NS: I want to talk about some of the things that were happening on the different parts of the estuary over the years that may have really affected some of this. I am not trying to draw a link,

I am just trying to gather information right now. You were talking about this fish factory that was right here on Shelter Island?

RC: Yeah.

NS: Where was it on the island? How big was it? What do you remember about it?

RC: Well, I don't remember the fish factory. It's just by nowhere. Location. It was probably active up until in the [19]20s. It was at – we call it Bunker City, which is the causeway going out to Ram Island, and actually down where Coecle's Harbor Marina is, that little town. We call it Cartwright Town or Eel Town because most of the people that lived there were like a little hamlet. They were mostly clam diggers and baymen that lived there, because they were really close to the water. They just lived up the street from where they kept their boats. I could row their boats over to the causeway and had a fish factory right where they caught the fish and traps or all signs of how ever they caught them. But those factories over on Orient, there were several of them around the bay. It wasn't just –

NS: How big were they?

RC: It probably wasn't more than just open structure where they had a big fire. Tri works is what they called it. Some of them, they probably could do it portable. It was just a big pot where they built a fire under it, and then they had to have barrels to put oil in, and wagons and barrels and stuff to store the meal that was used to fertilize, something like that. So, it was probably mostly just an open area that just had a big giant fireplace and must have had loading platforms and places to get in with wagons or trucks or whatever to – it was probably done mostly in times of horse and wagons. Not so much trucks, but there was a lot of like Tarkettle Road on Shelter Island, was an area where the student fishermen lived, and they used to tar their nets there. That's how it got to be called Tarkettle Road. Bunker City is a town landing there called Menhaden Lane now. A lot of the names that are on the charts, on the maps of Shelter Island, are fishing names, like Shanty Ben is named for the fishing shanty that was on the point that the flake fishermen used to go and live in that in the spring because it was quite a distance from the center of the island. They had to live right down there where they fished and to be close to their job because you didn't have motorboats to run back and forth, you had dories and road to where your flights were or sailed. So, there were several places where there were fish shanties around Shelter Island. You want to know about environmental changes around the bay?

NS: Yes. Maybe we can start with some of the eel grass. What have you seen happen in your lifetime?

RC: Well, the slow development of wetlands. In the beginning, wetlands were considered wasteland when I bought this land, which is half of wetland area. This was called wasteland. Nobody wanted it. It was just mud and mosquitoes, and nobody really put a figure on the wetlands as what its impact was to the fisheries. In colonial times, it was valuable because they could take the hay off for their animals. So, this was valued. Wetland area that produced good sea hay was more valuable than good agricultural land. But when that phased out, it really didn't have any value. A lot of people started developing marinas and dredging creeks and filling in

wetlands. There's probably been projects by the county over the last fifty years that ended up destroying probably 50 percent of the wetlands on Long Island.

NS: What about right here on Shelter Island? What were some of the things that they did there?

RC: There's been quite a few small wetlands. Collectively, you put them all together, there's been a lot of wetlands destroyed on Shelter Island.

NS: What have they put there?

RC: Mostly bulkheaded it and made for boat slips, private yards, a few marinas, but not as extensive as in Brookhaven. Some of the townships did a lot of – even back in the times of – jump around on you. But in the 1870s or so, in Brookhaven, Patchogue area, they rewarded baymen with lease sites in the bay for oysters by how much land they would reclaim from wetlands. They would bulkhead and fill in land, and then they were rewarded by giving bottom land to grow oysters. Aquaculture was –

NS: When did they do this? In the 1870s?

RC: At that time, there was – I've got books of town meeting records from Brookhaven and Huntington and some other towns on Long Island. That was the main topic of discussion at town meetings back then, was the leases on oyster sites around. Everybody was entitled to lease a small segment around sea talk at Fort Jefferson and places like that because oysters was the economy around here on Long Island, and it was good money. That's a lot of the area around Patchogue and that was developed.

NS: Did they do that here?

RC: No.

NS: Okay.

RC: Around 1910, 1918, I suppose. We have a patent for this town called the Nichols Patent, which colonial – the town owns the bottom and things like that. There were such arguments about who owned what on the bottom that they auctioned off the lands. The bay bottoms were sold to the highest bidder at that time. So, a lot of the oyster companies were based in Greenport, bought oyster lands around Shelter Island town waters. Town waters was the land out to the deepest part of the channel going around the island. So, it's very irregular. Just as irregular as Shelter Island is. But Shelter Island had a lot of bay bottom that was oyster grounds. That oyster companies paid taxes, and that money went right directly into the school budget of Shelter Island school, and that changed. Sometime in the [19]50s, the state took that money away from us. They wanted to share it with the rest of New York state, which wouldn't mean nothing in Albany. But at one time in the [19]50s and [19]40s, what taxes Shelter Island was getting for the bay bottom was a good chunk of the school budget and did something for us.

NS: So, they started leasing the underwater lands to the oyster companies in the 1920s? Does

that sound about right if you had to put a number?

RC: Up until that point, people were arguing over the land, and it was like a wild fishery. Those natural set of voices on the bottom and Peconic Bay and like that, and people just went out and harvested them like they're doing in Chesapeake. Then they started cultivating the bottom. They would get the sea oysters out of Bridgeport, New Haven, like that. Sometimes they got them originally from Virginia.

NS: Who did this?

RC: So, they leased the bottom. They would bring in the seed oysters from these other areas and put it on their bottom.

NS: Who were they? The oyster companies?

RC: The oyster companies.

NS: Was Brown around then?

RC: Paul Brown was not that big of an oyster company. I guess the Shelter Island Greenport Oyster Company was one of the biggest ones. They had maybe four or five boats that worked around, big power boats that brought in hundreds of bushels a day when the season was on. I mean, in the [19]50s – [19]40s, [19]50s, even the [19]60s, I mean, the oyster boat was coming around the point, it was like a local joke around here. There's always a boat coming around the point. The guys working on the ferry, the oyster boats went out in the morning, and they'd come back in the afternoon. They went up and worked in Peconic Bay somewhere, or on the south side of Shelter Island. All through south ferry and up towards Saig Harbor was good oyster grounds. When I was charter fishing, we'd like to go flounder fishing on an oyster ground that had been worked the day before, like when the flounders would be coming down through the bay. Any area where the oyster boats had worked the day before, that bottom would be all churned up and broken shellfish, and the flounders would feed on that. This is one of the things that's kind of missing out of the bay, is this natural feed that comes from man's activity. There were a lot more flounders then because there was a lot more feed. From the dying scallops that were left over from the seasons, flounders fed on those. They would come in – well, in the spring, we'd work in areas where the scallops were dying, and the meat would just fall right out of the shell, and the flounders would just come in and pig out on them. Yeah, they fed on that stuff. There are some areas out in the bay now, I go out and work there with my dragnet where there's quarter decks, and the quarter decks have died during the winter. By me going there with the net, that stuff is all riled up. The flounders I start catching. If I work there a couple days and disturb that bottom, the flounders will congregate there. So, I catch – I'm chumming the flounders up by working there more or less. That's part of the ecosystem, that man's work, it's like we're part of the system. It's not –

NS: Do the oysters tend to be in deeper water or shallow water? I am just saying that in terms of where scalloping happened, where did oystering happen?

RC: That was a big conflict. Sometimes there would be good sets of scallops on oyster ground, and we were allowed to go and scallop on oyster ground, but we weren't allowed to take any oysters while we were there. We got to push the oysters.

NS: Unless you worked for the company.

RC: A lot of guys, they had oyster watchmen, and there was a lot of people that did push the oysters back over and got the name of being a pirate. [laughter] There's certain guys that would keep a few bushel oysters to sell on the side land. That's why they had to have oyster watchmen. They weren't checking the oysters, they were just checking to make sure the right people took them.

NS: Does that still happen?

RC: There are no oyster grounds left active. All oyster grounds are on map, and somebody owns them. Maybe every once in a while, you're seeing a paper where they come up with tax liens, where they go for years and not pay the taxes on them, and somebody ends up paying the taxes, or they auction a land off. It's usually on a delinquent tax roll every year. There are a few oyster lands that haven't been paid up. But a lot of times, we had – there would be scallops right up along the edge of oyster grounds. They cultivated the set after there was no natural set in the bay. The oysters all were brought here from New Haven, and they put them – they had the bay bottom marked out. Each company had its own flags and seed of stakes on each property line. They'd keep an eye on you if you scalloped pretty close to their property lines. Very seldom, we ever caught many scallops on the grounds because it would tear our dredges up too much. Sharp oyster shells would tear the dredges up. So, you didn't really mess around too much. But along North Haven, usually, the scallops would be in between the oyster ground and the beach, and there were very good scallops along there.

NS: Were there baymen who would use something besides the scallop thread just to go scalloping? Full-time baymen. Or is that pretty much what –?

RC: A few guys tried aqua long in and stuff like that when I first came out, but that was more of a sporty thing to do. You'd have to go by yourself. So, it wouldn't get riled up. But basically, the dredges and scalp nets were the way of taking scallops.

NS: For oystering, what kinds of tools would they use? How would they harvest the oysters?

RC: Well, not many people tonged them because there wasn't that much natural set around here to worry about. But tonging is one way of getting them. But most of the big boats that were power boats, 60-, 70-footers, mostly like 60-foot boats with a good heavy-duty diesel in it, and they dredged – they had big dredges that were folding mechanically. At one time, they just hauled the dredge in and dumped it on deck, and then there was a lot of manual labor and culling the scalp, the oysters out, and shoveling them up into a heap on deck. By the end, mechanization and everything that was brought in in the [19]60s and early [19]70s, they made it so that dredges hauled up hydraulic booms that swung over containers on deck like dump truck bodies. They would fill up these containers on deck. When they went into the oyster company, they just

dumped the containers into a conveyor. I would take the oysters right into the factory to where they'd be stored in open shop. But in the [19]40s and [19]50s, it was a lot of – It was like being a coal miner almost. They had to be shoveled and put in baskets, and there was a lot of manual labor.

NS: They would shovel from the deck into the basket.

RC: Yeah. After they dumped the dredge on deck, they had to call them out. Then they shoveled them up into a heap. Then when they come into the dock, they had to shovel them into buckets and baskets, so it'd be lifted out by a boom to swing them into a conveyor. All oyster companies were, even years ago, had conveyors and a lot of machinery to handle.

NS: What happened to the oyster shells?

RC: The oysters died out. They were having a shell disease problem called MX or something like that, that was doing a lot of damage. Made the oyster company so they weren't too viable. By the time the brown tide come along, that just finished them right off because they couldn't –

NS: No, no. After the oysters were brought to the shocking houses, what did they do with the shells?

RC: The shells went on a conveyor right out the building, and they stored them until the next summer. In Greenport, there used to be giant heaps of shells, and three or four different places. The village of Greenport, there was heaps of shells on the waterfront. You can still probably see it in some places where the – in between Claudio's and where the new park is, Mitchell's, there were just giant heaps of shells in the ground. There are still probably solid shells there. But those shells – in June or July, they'd start hauling those shells back up to Sound to New Haven and Bridgeport and put them on the grounds that they owned up there to catch a set. That's when the oysters would set. There are still some guys around Greenport that – remember when they were doing that shelling, that they would run the oyster boats day and night. That they just come to Greenport, load on shell, and run up to Sound, dump the shells overboard, run back to Greenport. They would do that for thirty, sixty days straight without – the engine would just keep running all the time. If they saw their family while they were loading on shells, they'd get a chance for a couple hours to go up and see their family and keep in touch with everybody.

NS: Did they ever dump the shells around here?

RC: Yeah. I think they did to a certain degree. But the best areas were the Thames River in New London. They would catch us up there, and probably the Connecticut River, I don't know.

NS: What made this area not so good for dumping the shells?

RC: The freshwater runoff that was in Bridgeport. The rivers where – that seems to be the best place, even in Virginia, where the –

NS: Okay. So, here is because of the salt water –?

RC: Yeah. We didn't have as much fresh water from a little river, like the Peconic River might have had. There was natural set in Peconic Bay, those oysters that were native to here, and there was natural set. Even around here, there's still some natural set. It's not man-induced aquaculture or whatever. But not as plentiful as what they did by cultivating. They were catching a wild set up there on the shells. Then they brought them down here and put them on the ground. So, the flavor of the oysters was superior to anything that comes out of like the Carolinas and Louisiana, and even the Chesapeake. Were nice, hard bottom and deep water that the scallops and oysters would have a very definite flavor to them. You don't want to take oysters from a muddy bottom area where they'd have that muddy taste to them.

NS: Right. Now, with the eel grass, if you can describe how the vegetation in the bay have changed in your lifetime.

RC: Well, up until the time in the brown tide, we had rubber grass, which was brought here by somebody. A wasteland company, probably. But the eel grass and the Irish moss, the native grasses are plentiful, like some beds of this Irish moss, which is a red woolly grass. There would be five or six foot on the bottom at low tide, it would be almost right to the water's surface, and it would just be full of scallops. That's where a lot of your fin fish hide out, eels and flounders and everything hibernate into that little blackfish and shrimp. Just when you scalloped in this stuff, you never knew he was going to get in there. You'd get blackfish or eels or flounders.

NS: Or scallops. [laughter]

RC: You couldn't work on a very big area of it. You had to put a buoy out and just work one little section and clean this grass out so you could get down to the bottom. Sometimes there'd be scallops actually laying on top of this grass. They'd be up on the surface of the grass, and the grass might be three foot deep. But that stuff started to die a little bit before the brown tide showed up. We started to see problems with – grasses were disappearing a little bit. But when the brown tide, the heavy years of the brown tide, there was almost no grass in the bay whatsoever. That was when we did the first reseeding thing for scallops. A professor from Rutgers told me, he says, "Go back to the last place you had scallops, where there were still some beds of grass." He told me what to look for, for places to reseed the scallops, and I knew of a couple places where this red grass was that was still surviving, and that's where I put the – I was on a town board and we started the reseeding. I guess the first year into the brown tide, we started the reseeding program, and that's been helpful, I think. It's kept some brood stock going in the bay even as the brown tide has come and gone a little bit. We've had something there to come back with, but it looked like in the beginning, that there wasn't a scallop left in this day that anybody caught.

NS: That was always – where scallops used to be, there used to be a lot of eel grass? Was that pretty much –

RC: Pardon me?

NS: Was there always eel grass where there were scallops before the brown tide?

RC: Yeah. They seemed to go together. When that grass died off, that was when the scallops – the first year of the brown tide, we had scallops, but they were from the previous years. So, when they are gone, those stuff put – we'll see a few of the fish. The juvenile fish, we'll see some of them, even though we're using a bigger mesh to get rid of them, what we call discard now. But there was none of that recruitment. There were no juvenile fish in the bay whatsoever for five years of brown tide. It was just like you were looking at the end of the bay. You're just catching what was dependent on spawning somewhere else, like butterfish and stuff. Spawned a lot of different areas, or squid, but the flounders and porgies, weak fish, the things that really depended on going up into Flanders Bay and Peconic Bay and spawning out up there disappeared as soon as the brown tide. They disappeared with the oysters, the eel grass, and the scallops. They're very vulnerable to – they need that clean water. They may have been spawning stuff there, but it died. The brown tide starved it out or killed it. One way or another, it died. It didn't survive.

NS: One of the things I am trying to understand is some of the baymen, I am thinking, I want to say Ed Warner down in Southampton. Do you know Ed? He was a trustee on the Southampton board, was a full-time bayman.

RC: Yeah. I don't know him. I know some of the baymen over there.

NS: Okay. Well, he said that where there used to be scallops, now is much more eel grass. Does that sound right?

RC: Some places.

NS: Yes. The reverse has happened?

RC: I think eel grass around Hay Beach, I think there's just certain amount of nutrients, excess nutrients in the bay, and eel grass is burning that up. That's just nutrients in there, just like fertilizer, and it's working in the bay. Right now, we're seeing a red, slimy grass that's not normal. It's in three or four different places out in the Gardiners Bay right now. It seems to be getting larger and larger beds. Actually, I got into it, towed my net into a place of it the other day, and I could barely get the net above the boat, and the fish traps are starting to see this.

NS: Because of the red grass?

RC: This is a red, slimy grass. It's not native. I've never seen it before. If it was around here, it was very, very minor. [laughter] Now, all of a sudden, there's beds of it big enough so it'll fill a net right to the brim. I mean, hundreds and hundreds of pounds, they're like tons. [laughter]

NS: So, where are some of the places where the eelgrass has disappeared completely? Because it may be in a specific area.

RC: Well, boat traffic mows it down a little bit. Just a propeller chops it up. The weight and shoal water – the weight of a boat probably bending them. Eelgrass can get like six foot long.

There's places in Coecle's Harbor, when I was a kid that was like six foot of water, low tide. You'd have trouble rowing now because your oars would be –

NS: Covered with grass.

RC: – we rode all the time because we didn't have no oars. [laughter] but you'd get a certain – you'd make three or four strokes, and then you'd have to make a stroke to shake the eelgrass off of your oars [laughter]. The eelgrass didn't come back almost that thick in a creek here the last few years, not quite But so many outboards chop it up. So, in the channel areas or where boats go, there's a certain amount of mowing going on. So, that may be a –

NS: Those were where scallop beds were?

RC: Yes.

NS: Some of the deeper water for the –

RC: Human activities, power boats and like that are damaged in some areas. Because it's getting that sunlight, it might get above.

NS: When did you see the eelgrass start to first disappear from those areas where there were scallops? How long ago?

RC: I think eelgrass was like heavy. It never was always heavy or anything. Some years you'd notice it would be –

NS: Excuse me [laughter].

RC: – there would be a lot of it. For some years it wouldn't be as much. The grass would be much heavier certain years. I don't remember what the weather pattern is, I just can't remember back that far. I didn't think anything of it. It's just like your grass on your lawn. Some years it rains and you know that you've got grass all the time and you're mowing all the time. Other years you have a little drought and you don't mow as much.

NS: So, this –

RC: The bay.

NS: If you had to pick like a period when you first think it started to dwindle? Like ten years ago, twenty years ago?

RC: Yes, it was prior to the brown tide. Things started to change a little bit. You started to see not as much grass or – but as soon as the brown tide come along, it was like five years. It was almost nothing. I've dragged out in the bay for twenty-five years with a net. In some areas we used to avoid working in because the grass was so heavy at times we couldn't work in that area. So, mostly rubber grass. Most grasses don't really go past six foot of water. When they get into

deeper water, you get less different kinds of grasses and get away from the eel grasses like shoal water grass. But the stuff just totally disappeared for those years that are brown tide and then come back in some areas a little bit off and on. Mostly –

Female Speaker: Okay. This is tape 2, side 2.

RC: As the bay was kind of recuperating, after a couple real bad years of brown tide, eel grass started to show up in the shoal water, real close to shore. Any scallops that they fused it around were all very close to shore. That was because of the oxygen, I guess in the water. Is there still a little bit of life close to the beach where waves would help produce a dissolved oxygen in the water life. I've talked to people in Jersey and they had the same kind of thing going on there. There was a lot of fish life in the surf areas where there was wave activity, but in other places it was like dead zones.

Actually, probably two years before the brown tide showed up, there was a bloom of pollution off of Three Mile Harbor and three of us draggers worked in that area, made total tow in there and never had one fishing on neck. This was a warning signal prior to the brown tide that something was happening. I told people about it and nobody seemed to care. Just like, "What do you know about it?" "What do we care about it?" You might as well talk to the wall. But all of a sudden when the brown tide come around and it started to affect everybody, started to be a wakeup call.

NS: When was that? When did you see that?

RC: I guess it was [19]84, [19]85 is when the brown tide showed up. It was like [19]82 or so. There was a couple of small blooms in the bay and I went up a friend's airplane and flew around and you could see it. It seemed to be like a mushroom cloud that come out of Three Mile Harbor. It was come out quite covered like about a third of Gardiners Bay. It seemed to be holding right off Three Mile Harbor. Seemed to be [laughter] where it was coming from. We couldn't catch any fish in that. The fish were moved right out of that area. Now that's what they're finding in the Gulf of Mexico.

There's areas where there's oxygen depletion that either kills the fish or the fish move out of it. It's happening in a lot of places. So, it's not just unique to here. But in the beginning, nobody really wanted to talk about it. We didn't know what we was talking about really. No. Didn't know how to put anything in scientific terms, probably still don't. But a lot more people are aware of what's going on now in this. Whether anything will be done about it or not. But we saw that was happening prior to the brown tide. But after the brown tide showed up, grasses disappeared, and almost all kinds of shellfish disappeared out of the bay when the brown tide –

NS: Were there differences right here as opposed to East Hampton or Gardiners Bay? Were there things that were happening here that only happened on Shelter Island? On the –

RC: I really haven't got too many comparisons to be able to make. I know like when the clams survived, they would just get poorer and poorer and poorer. They would almost be just shells with a piece of meat in them to keep them. Then after the brown tide would subside in the fall,

they would start to get filled back up. They'd get healthy and by wintertime, there'd be good clams again. There would be –

NS: No, but was what was happening here, was it only happening on Shelter Island? Or was it happening in different parts of the estuary?

RC: Well, Lake Montauk still had scallops a few years that we had the brown tide, but East Hampton, Nappe and like those places. Nappe maybe had a couple of years. They had a little bit of scallops here, but Three Mile Harbor didn't have any. All up around South Hampton, Flounders, down through South Hole or Creeks that had scallops. Before nobody was producing any. East Marion and all the traditional places, Montauk, and Nappe, they were all –

NS: So, you were all in it together in terms of what was happening.

RC: They still had a couple years where they had pretty good scalloping, but not as good as it had been years ago. But there was enough flushing of the tide there. They were a little bit out of the zone a little bit. They were on the fringe of the brown tide. But actually, as the brown tide would start coming out into the bay in the summer, we would have to keep fishing a little bit further towards Gardiners Island. Would get, like when at the height of the brown tide, sometime middle of the summer, the only place that I could drag in that and catch any fish and go in this bay would be in Cherry Harbor and down close to Gardiners Island near the fork.

It was like a line that went across from somewhere was like Lion Head Rock across the Orient State block where it's called Ben's point, between Three Mile Harbor, that half Gardiners Bay, there wasn't anything in it. The fish just moved out of that. Then as it would clear up in the fall, then you could start fishing back up in there. But when the brown tide was heavy, you could see the brown tide. Then when it got to where the water was a little bit clear, then you'd catch fish there.

NS: Were there things that only happened here on Shelter Island, that did not happen any place else? Besides all the -- I think there's a lot more development on the mainland than's happened here. But anything that were in the harbors?

RC: We can't blame it on agricultural runoff because by the time the brown tide come around, there was no agricultural left on Shelter Island. So, we do have one small sewer plant in the Heights, but that's only really operating at any peak there in the summer. That's when –
NS: When was the sewer plant built?

RC: It was when the Heights was developed in 1870, it had a sewer system put in. There was no way. It was just natural flow right out into the bay. Then sometime in the [19]60s or so, a chlorinating plant was put in there, which probably wasn't that super-duper either. But now they've got some kind of sewage plant that –

NS: That treats it.

RC: – that treats the sewage.

NS: When was that put in?

RC: That was just done in the last five years or so. A lot of people think the chlorine that was put in the water might have had something to do with the brown tide, but the sewer plant opened it up in Riverhead happened the same time as the brown tide showed up. So, that looks like a real suspicious thing. A little coincidental [laughter].

NS: A lot of the second homeowners, when did that first start to happen?

RC: It's been going on for forty years. Since [19]70, there's probably been more. Each decade has been a little bit more, a little more. The dredging was probably done, a few wetland areas were filled up or done just before the [19]60s or mid-[19]60s, a couple of dredging projects.

NS: Where was that?

RC: They dredged this creek and some of our land has been filled. My father's land, there was a little wetland in there that was filled up. There was another creek on the other side of the shoreline that was filled up.

NS: Which creek was that?

RC: So, it destroyed –

NS: Do you know the name of that creek?

RC: Foxen creek. It's just a couple acres there and an acre here. You start putting it all together. It ends up being something, but we still have a lot of creeks, West Neck Creek, Mashomack Creek, Ms. Nicolls Creek, or Ms. Annie Creek. In the Mashomack area, there's three or four real good creeks. This creek here is pretty much same way as the Indians left it.

NS: Which creek is this?

RC: This is Dennis Creek. As Foxen Creek, Condons Creek and Dennis Creek, they commonly refer to it as Common Creek area, I guess. But each one's a little unique. But yes, over on Silver Beach area, in West Neck Creek area, there's been a lot of bulkheading and filling in of wetlands. Manana Creek, Dickerson Creek is a few little areas. It's just like an acre here, an acre there and done. Up until the mid-[19]60s, that was accepted practice when they had a public works project going on to dredge a channel. They had to find a place to put the spoiler.

NS: Dredge. Where did they put it?

RC: So, what they do is they picked an area that was a wetland fringe area that was metabar. It's like Condons Submarine was built was a small little creek. Outlet there and that was filled in. When that was made into a marina back in the [19]50s. So, this stuff has been accumulating, you've been taking a little away here and a little away there. Eventually it's starting to have an

impact.

NS: When did they first start doing channel dredging and that kind of thing?

RC: The first project that I ever remember was doing Condons in the [19]50s. But they did the dredging over in West Neck. Before that sometime in the [19]40s and [19]50s they started – originally, they would do it by crane, come in and dig out an area and fill it in. Sometimes trucked in land, filled it from upland too. Like where the Heights is, that was a wetland where the bridge you come across down the little hamlet there, that was filled in land way back in early [19]20s or something.

That was nothing but a creek there that was probably a meadow. If you could find an original photograph of it over a hundred years ago would've been a meadow and a sandbar there. That was filled in. Like where Tuthill's boatyard is, that was an island boatyard. That was a creek. That land had been semi filled in. There's just small pieces here and there on Shelter Island, not as extensive as some areas. So, we're pretty well –

NS: What was happening on the mainland? Did they fill in a lot in the Green court?

RC: They had a lot more developed. Like in South Hole, they dug out a lot of creeks and bulkheaded them up more so than Shelter Island.

NS: Would that be on the south side or more on the bay side?

RC: No, on the Peconic side. The Meeting House Creek and all those creeks that grew –

NS: Is that where most of the wetlands were on the bay side?

RC: Yes.

NS: Okay.

RC: I tried sea scalloping once and fishing five miles off from Montauk and caught oyster shells [laughter. It was that thick. They were. I caught chunks of bog and I dredged it. So, that had to be a wetland about five miles off of Montauk a few thousand years ago or something like that. It was because those oysters wouldn't have grown in the ocean [laughter]. They were semi faucet type of shell. You never see a shell like that in here. I've never seen an oyster shell that's that thick.

NS: I cannot imagine that.

RC: Just one half of the shell. Some places on Nappe, the draggers will bring up pieces of metabar where they probably – sometimes a thousand years ago or better. That was in Leon Creek area and it's out in the ocean now. It's Long Island. I don't know how old it is. Maybe twelve thousand years old or something like that. It's not really too old.

NS: It is like half a million years old.

RC: How old do you think?

NS: Half a million.

RC: Do you think it's that old?

NS: Yes, the geological stuff, it was like 450,000 years old.

RC: Yes, but it's been shrinking ever since. It was really – [laughter]. It was put here by the glaciers, whatever that time was. I was just thinking last glacier age, I thought was in the thousands of years ago.

NS: What have been the biggest technological changes besides switch from sailboats to motorboats?

RC: Pardon me.

NS: What has been the biggest technological change in scalloping and shellfish other than the switch from sailboats to motorboats? You have talked a little bit about the clothing. Have there been other big changes?

RC: In the fin fishing? Like I do dragging hydraulics, making work our lot easier or pulling in the nets. We use net reels that store the net on. Rather than the old boat I had just, you hold the doors up to the side and then you had to take – when the net come off, you had to take a whip off of the boom and lift the net up in sections. We call fleeting the net up. You'd maybe have to lift the net two or three times before you got to where the bag of fishes to haul edible at the boat. Now we have a net reel, same operation, same gear, and everything except we can wind the net up onto a reel. It makes it really easy the storage and it gives you more deck room.

NS: What about for shell fishing?

RC: For shell fishing, when we went to power, there really hasn't been any changes. You still hand color after you have to haul the dredges in by hand, that's law. You can only use certain size dredges. You can't go over a thirty-six-inch blade, but you can use as many of them as you can handle or want to. Most people only use maybe eight at the most, but I use four to six dredges. If the scallops are real thick, sometimes I can get away with using two or three. But you still have to put them in bags and you have to pick them up by hand and you have to wash them off by hand and you bag them up, tag them, bring them home, and you have to open them by hand.

NS: Who does the shucking? Is that something that women help with as well?

RC: Yes, most everybody does their own opening. If they go to a shop, some people are lucky enough to have a shop where they can take them and they open them up for a fee, but it costs

quite a bit to open them. So, you limit resource by not having to pay anybody to open them up, making another $50 a day maybe. It's part of the cost of doing it. But we always opened our own because when you know what your product is, you know how it's being handled and other people know how you handle your product so they're willing to buy it. There's a lot of regulations on the inspection of the shop. The DEC make sure you have refrigeration and sinks to wash your hands.

NS: How fast would you have to get them from when you shuck them to the shop? Would you do that the next day?

RC: Most openers can open around a gallon an hour. Rule of thumb, as everybody does, about a gallon an hour. Some people can open fast up some a little slow, but just about everybody opens a gallon an hour. So, when we was getting twenty bushel and my wife and little kids, they didn't know very much, but the two of us had to open twenty bushel pretty much by ourselves. We'd spend quite a bit of time down the cellar chopping away. But –

NS: So, that would be the next day's activity. Once –

RC: No, we'd do that. We –

NS: Come in the night.

RC: Yes. In the beginning of the season. We'd be home by 11:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. in the morning.

NS: Okay. You would spend all day shucking –

RC: Shucking, and then we'd open all afternoon and sometimes we'd be done by dinner time, early in the season when you got them fast. But as the season wore on, you'd be getting home at 1:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m. Then you'd start opening at 3:00 p.m., then you'd be like 9:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. at night before you are done. You felt like a robot after a while. Like you pray for Sunday [laughter] or a good windy day that you couldn't go out. Since the scallops are starting to come back, the town made a little that you can only have five bushel for these limited seasons and stuff. So, it hasn't been that much scallops. So, five bushel I can open if I come in sometime in the morning – with my five bushel, I can have those open in a couple hours because you're only going to yield. Maybe the best you'd ever get is a gallon out of a bushel. But most of the times it'd be like six, five, six pounds of bushel. So, five bushel, he'd have thirty pounds, something like that. So, I could probably open those in three hours of fast opening. We haul our shells down the creek there, take it to the town dump. I used to dump them right here and used them in the driveway and dumped them on the edge of the – I don't have a bulk yet. I have a shell heap. You can still see some shells sticking up there.

NS: Yes, I see a few.

RC: But we'd bring a pickup, truck or van put the scallops in them, and we'd dump them in the driveway. That's how we paved the driveway [laughter]. I thought the driveway has been piles

and it would smell like scallops around here years ago.

NS: Once you were done shucking and you had the scallops, what would you put them in to take them to market?

RC: We used to use tins and we still call it a tin, even though we're using plastic tubs now.

NS: Okay [laughter].

RC: But we used to have a tin, it would hold five gallons. But it was a special tin at oyster companies like Bronzes or Greenfield Oyster Company. They made up these containers that fit in fish boxes. They were just shaped so they could fit in a fish box so they could ship them. There was a couple buyers. There's always been probably a couple buyers on Shelter Island. Sometimes –

NS: Who were they? Who were some of the buyers?

RC: Well, Bush Ryder was one. Bob's Fish Market.

NS: Bob's Fish Market. What was the first one that you said? Bush?

RC: Bush is his name. He is a bayman. He bought scallops. He has a fish market. He's the one that's around now, but Morris Tuthill and Polly Water, Charlie Stroebel had a place which is on a beach or on the other side of the island, but he was one of the first ones.

NS: Around Condons Beach?

RC: Yes. It's a restaurant and everything. They don't handle –

NS: I know that guy, yes [inaudible].

RC: Charlie is the guy that bought it for him. But they originally had a small restaurant there and then he – like a snack bar. He had a scallop shop in the back. So, he had the summer season, he went scalloping and he saw it and then he bought it. But he froze in the [19]50s. They would freeze the scallops up so there would be a steady supply of base scallops in the winter and that they could buy them cheap in the fall when there was a lot of them around. Freeze them and then take them out the next summer and sell them to the restaurants when it would be a big demand for them.

There was no product around and they made a lot of money doing that, but they had a lot of inventory tied up for a small guy to put thousands and thousands of dollars away. But they made it. That's what Brown did too, I think is Brown's Oyster Company is one of the major buyers. Then he has buyers in each little town that worked for him. They buy it and they take them –

NS: So, would you sell mostly here on the island or did you also sell in the mainland?

RC: Yes, most of the scallops was sold right on the island. But the buyer took them to either the oyster companies in Greenport or Brown, he worked for them. He was just in between man. Because by when you get finished opening at 6:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m., 8:00 p.m. at night after being up from daybreak and working flat out almost. You want to just go deliver them to somebody and get your money and go home and get rested up for the next day. I think Sadie wants to go out.

NS: We were talking a little bit about things that have happened on Shelter Island and other dredging projects. Are there other things that come to your mind when you think about changes in the estuary that other people may not know about?

RC: I think way people take care of the yachts around the water. Everywhere as you are on the east end, you're in a watershed area. Whatever's done on land's going to end up in the bay sooner or later. But I think people are a little bit obsessed with having nice green lawns and what they put on that lawn to get that nice trimmed lawn is impacted in the bay.

NS: Have you seen a situation where you have a very large lawn on a waterfront piece of property. What has happened in the bay right next to it? Have you encountered –

RC: I don't think it happens right there. Each green yard is going to have more pollution smack in front of it. I think it's something that contributes to the whole bay hell.

NS: Yes, with the tide going in and out.

RC: Like this summer, we are going up into Greenport when there was a drought time and supposedly sprinkle alert on Shelter Island. Not meant to use your sprinklers and conserve water, and these five or six houses got green lawns and everybody else's is brown. I's just like some people haven't got the message yet that they still want to pump a lot of water and irrigate their lawns and they've probably got a lot of fertilizer on that same lawn. That adds to the nutrients that are going into the bay. You can't blame it on agriculture because agriculture has been declining development has been expanding and growing. I don't think you can really say it's all agricultural runoff anymore. There's been a big change in the type of fertilizer they use. Most of these fertilizers now are synthetic fertilizers. They come out of a test tube. They're not made of fishmeal like they used to be, which was kind of an organic fertilizer.

NS: Have you seen a situation where there used to be a clam bed or a scallop bed? I am telling you about twenty years ago that started to decline as more houses began to be built. As we have seen that kind of are compact.

RC: When things disappear, the natural cycles come back. They started to reset right in the old grounds where it used to be good clam beds. They like that. The bottom hasn't been dredged up and changed. I think–

NS: So, the changes in the actual bay. That is more direct.

RC: Each little clam bed area, that bottom is very unique to the shellfish that live there. If you

start dredging out, digging it so the water is six feet deep around these docks and stuff. That whole stratum of the bottom has been changed. So, clams don't sit in that new type of bottom because it's been – the clammy leg bottom, which is sand and mud and then dug up and cultivated is where the clams like to sit.

NS: Any specific dredging projects that you remember clearly? It's really changing. The shellfish in particular.

RC: When they could fill Crab Creek and pumped it up on the wetland area. In the Dickerson Creek, they pumped it up and put on a wetland area. When they did Condon's Creek, they pumped it up into Fox and Creek and a freshwater pond and filled that up there. Totally destroyed. They'll never be producers again. Some places like where they dredge a creek, soft clams just love fresh dredge spoil areas. They come back in there. Then the piping plover, which is supposedly endangered and all that, they like nice spoil bank areas. They nest on those beaches [laughter] where that spoil has been pumped up. They like the fresh sand for some reason. So, there's a couple. Soft clams do like to come back in an area where it's been disturbed. You're allowed to go power soft clams out in deep water and the places where the most activity on the bottom seems to be the most productive areas that every bay men will pretty much tell you the same thing. Wherever you go, scallop and a clam in or dragon. The more that bottom is tilled up, it's cultivated, it's the better-producing bottom. That's where the fish come in. That's where the clams set back in. The hard clams set back into a bottom that's been dug up and it's aerated. The bottom is worked on. If you look up in Peconic, that hasn't been worked in so long that the bottom has just got a hard crust on it, and it just gets to be a dead area. It doesn't produce. So, its man is part of the ecosystem a little bit. We're telling the bottom up and the bottom is probably unique to what we're doing there. Probably some destruction, but it's kind of like a farmer's field where you're working. It's agricultural land. It's not forest. But it's unique to that operation.

NS: That is fascinating. I did not know that.

RC: Like in the northwest, you're just – I mean, the grass, the first day of scallop and going out to grass would be three foot deep, and three hundred boats would go and work for a month and tear a place all up. By November, it'd be so there wasn't much grass left there. It'd be all roots torn up and mowed down and everything, and you catch the scallops and harvest, clean a whole of scallops up. Come back there the next year, there'd be just as many scallops there, and the grass would be just as thick. So, the harvest and activities that go along hasn't harmed the cycle. That's something else comes in there and disturbs the cycles. Just listen to these tapes.

NS: Okay. This is tape 3 of Roland Clark, side 1. Okay. We were talking about the amount of activity that was in the estuary.

RC: Well, the clams set in this creek maybe eight or so years ago because we had scallops the year before. We went in there with dredges and dug the creek all up. For some reason, conditions were just right. The clams set in there like crazy. Then we had five or six years of real good clamming in this creek. That seems to be like what? Soft clams and hard clams. If the bottom's kicked up and rototill cultivated with clam rakes and dredges and different mechanisms

that we use for harvesting, it seems to make them more productive area. But areas that hadn't been claimed in a long time, there'll be a few shallow clams there, and it just doesn't seem to be any new set. At one time, they were historically good areas. A lot of times when they try to reseed soft clams or hard clams in an area, what they do is take something dredge and like that to scrape the bottom to till it up to transplant the stuff there so it loosens the bottom up so stuff can go into it. Bottomness, the brown tide was like a sediment, just a layer of dead algae on the bottom. It's just dead brown, slimy stuff that it probably will benefit in the long term. I think it's good nutrients that will – it's like compost and it's probably adding to the dead vegetated matter that the estuaries are made of mud is just nothing but decomposing vegetation that's been accumulating for centuries, I think. I'm not sure.

NS: Yes, I do not know.

RC: It must be some kind of organic matter that's been there to have the smell it has and everything. It's more than just dirt. The right mixture of that mud sediment is what fish like to spawn on and live in.

NS: As a hypothetical, do you think it would be a good idea if they did some more? Not the heavy-duty dredging, but something like you were describing, like the rototilt. Do you think that would be beneficial?

RC: I think it's important to have a certain amount of activity on the bottom to keep it from getting hard and man's activity. The tools that we use. Like I drag a net and the doors disturb the bottom. That grass comes back each year. It's not like we work in this whole area. We only work on little sections of it different seasons year with different – even though they look the same to everybody, when you're using a flounder net, it kind of digs the bottom up over. Do that more or less when the floor grasses start to grow, and then as the fish flounders are moving out, and then the finfish like weakfish, butterfish, scup move in, we use lighter gear that just barely touches the bottom. So, all that time that we're fishing for these fish that are a little bit midwater, the bottom is not being disturbed very much at all. We do it in a different section of the bay. So, there's never all of a bay being disturbed, just like the northwest is for scalloping. Basically, that place is left alone all year long. It's just scallop season when you go in to harvest it. Then that's the end of – that's when the grass would naturally shed and die and go up on a beach anyway because grass – Long Island history of people almost fought over seaweed when it came on the beach because they used it for compost on the farm. That was the thing that people were allowed to go on a beach to get it. Nobody could claim all of it to themselves. They had to go on, and what they picked up and put in their wagon was theirs, they couldn't go down on a beach and say, "This is all mine. You get out of here." It was a communal property. So, that stuff is shed way back before anybody was out there to damage it with powerboats or dredges or drag nets or whatever.

NS: With clamming, what were the most common tools? When you went clamming, would you use dredges or did you go –

RC: It's more recreational.

NS: Okay.

RC: But I have done some clamming, but my nephew goes half of the year. He spends clamming where he's looking to get a couple of bushel clams a day.

NS: What kinds of tools has he used?

RC: He uses the same thing. Bull rake. It's a twenty to thirty-two-three. They call it a bull rake because you have to be a bull just about to pull it on differently. You just jerk and all that pulling and drifting in your boat and pulling it in the bottom. He's been out here in the creek this morning doing that. But some bottom – Shelter Island doesn't have bottom that's really that good for clams. Just some areas. Like in Great South Bay, they have a lot of nice soft bottom, sandy bottom that's been worked. Probably maybe Shelter Island bottom just because it hasn't been worked in some areas, it's hard and dried up. So, it's a non-productive.

NS: What about the soft clams? What would you use it for?

RC: Soft clams? Usually a long tooth, hand rake.

NS: Would you dig for them?

RC: Yes. They got usually a spring low tides is the best time to clam and good low tide. But we're allowed to power. You can use a small outboard motor on it, a rack frame that you dig a hole in the sand. It actually kicks the clams out without breaking any. You can get a lot of clams out.

NS: Is that fairly recent, the rack frame?

RC: There are quite a few guys that do it.

NS: Yes. But is that something that is newer? Was that around?

RC: Yes. It's only been done since in the [19]60s, I'd say.

NS: That is what I was wondering.

RC: Nobody had outboard motors really too much [laughter]. Probably before then, there were so many clams that there were enough being dug by hand from low tides and stuff. Even this last one, I've got to the point where there were so many clams around. There was really no market for them. The demand was not there. But a few years ago, when clams were very scarce, the soft clams were bringing $100 a bushel at $7,800 a bushel, because there were very few of them around. But the last couple of years, there's been a lot of clams around, and they'd be like $30 a bushel. So, if you went out with a power, you could dig ten or fifteen bushels. You could make one or two, would fill the market up. There's a lot of clams around this. The water quality has come back and it's not hard. Most secret to go out and find a basket of soft clams on Shelter Island anymore.

NS: Would that be – you said it was at low tide. Would that be along the shoreline here that you would find them?

RC: Yes. This is a different creature. There's some favorite spots that are like Banana Creek and West Neck and different places around Cockles Harbour. They're not all over, but they're in all a good traditional clam and bottomless. Soft clam, just about every place you can ever remember that you went and got soft clams. Hard clams are not as plentiful there. New York state rejuvenated everything. But we've only had the coming and going of the scallops. We only had a couple of little years, one really good year, and a couple of mediocre years since the brown tide. But the one year that we had good was the best year anybody can ever remember scallop. There were more scallops taken out.

NS: When was that?

RC: Three years ago, I think. Even though he's only taken five bushels a day, it was 150 boats out there taking five bushels a day. The buyer on the island, one, he handled about 90 percent of the scallops, I'd say. But he was paying out something like $15,000 a day for a month. Ups. The price of scallops is like $5 a pound. So, that's a lot of pounds of meat. That's a lot of money to be put into a town in the off-season when there's the tourist dollars that go on. There's not much around here. You've worked for the town or some store or agency or schoolteacher or something like that. That's the only other money that's really being made around town.

NS: One of the things that I am trying to work with is there are a lot of reports generated by DEC on landing, shellfish landings, and different creeks and harbors. How accurate do you think those statistics are?

RC: I don't know.

NS: I mean, like when you would sell scallops, would you have to give a count?

RC: Yes.

NS: How did that work? But how would it work in terms of reporting what I would tell?

RC: I think it's some kind of voodoo assumption that they make. It's like they go by how many licenses there are, and I go by how much is reported by a major buyer or something like that.

NS: The buyers would they send in the numbers.

RC: A computation somehow with a calculator or computer and come up with these numbers. But since it's a cash business, I would doubt that a lot of it is reported and the volume I know was there. The guys that work on the water, that's their livelihood. They pretty much depend. They have to declare it. Otherwise, they wouldn't have any income to show.

NS: Would you sell most of your scallops to a buyer or would you sell formally?

RC: Years ago, we usually had a few people that came around. I'd say back in the [19]60s, several. They have local customers that always the weekenders and different people would come out. They would always come down and buy scallops from you.

NS: That is what I was wondering. How much of it was just stopping by and they knew who you were.

RC: It got so in the last few years that we didn't have a fish market years ago, and now the fish market has them. So, people tend to go there. It's not as much personal contact with some of the people that know your baymen. In the old days, if people came to the island, my father had scallops. They knew he took good care of them, opened them nice and clean, and they weren't laying around.

NS: Well, for instance, when you were a kid, did your father sell to the buyer or would you sell mostly to people that would come?

RC: A little of both. He had people.

NS: How much? Half and half?

RC: No, not that much. It would be mostly, say, if you had five gallons of scallops, you might sell one gallon of them, a couple of quarts a day. Usually, in the beginning of the season, there would be local people who would know you were out of scallops, and they'd come down and buy. It was a way of getting an extra half a dollar for a quart of scallops. You might get $2 for a quart of sculptures compared to $1.50 from the buyer. Since money was very scarce, it was a little bit of extra added. You improve your income a little bit.

NS: So, he would keep a gallon for himself and sell the other four gallons to the buyer, about that.

RC: Yes.

NS: That sounds like the right percentage.

RC: I'd say less than that. But some days–

NS: So, maybe eighty percent would go to the buyer.

RC: At least eighty percent. But I mean, on some given day in the first beginning of the season, it might be people show up and want three or four quarts or something like that. But usually, people would come out on weekends, would want some scallops to take back home to give to somebody or something like that, and they'd come out. It was actually people coming day tripping out to the North Fork so they could stop and Bruins and different places and get the local bay scallops from Peconic to take back to their friends on the West End because the scallops were lost like Northport and places like that. They lost their scallops years ago and never got

them back. The scallops produce them. Great South Bay and other areas. Wasn't just East end of Long Island. But a lot of people knew what they tasted like. Just, you lost your market because you didn't have so many years of production. But as soon as the scallops came back, all of a sudden, people had been eating these substitute Irish, Peruvian, Chinese, all these other scallops. They'd throw them right out as soon as they got the bay scallops from here [laughter].

NS: That was enough.

RC: Yes. I mean, those other scallops are good and everything, but they couldn't hold a candle to a freshly caught bay scallop. I mean, we'd eat the first – we ate scallops the first day of the season. At lunchtime, it's, well, it was still touching when you put them in the frying pan and cook them up [laughter]. There's a difference between – those scallops if you had them tomorrow for lunch would taste different. The taste is there when you first open them. You want to eat them like day-old corn, two-day-old corn. The longer you keep it, the less flavor they got. But they're still pretty good, even several days old, but we're so fussy. We just love them. Open them up and bring them up to eat. We always open the freshest. The ones we caught the first toe in the morning wasn't as fresh as the ones we caught the last time. But most of our scallops were open the day that always, I mean, very unusual. Maybe a couple of times a year we'd open a scallop the next day. But most of the time they were open at – they're still open and closing when they are on the table. They were still a lot of scallops. They were brought home, and they were opened. Sometimes they'd be sold while they're still pulsating, like wiggling. That's as fresh as you can get.

NS: Were there ever any big weather-related events that really affected the shellfishing or the fishing event? What were the big ones for you?

RC: Well, good Northwestern. A lot of times we'd get the bugs would blow ashore and that could kill off the crop for next year. But sometimes it was a windfall for us because we'd go down and pick the scallops up off the beach. Like when the tide would go out after a good storm, there'd be just heaps of scallops on the beach, and we'd go down and get bushels and bushels of them and open them up. It usually happened when the mature scallops had been harvested or they were getting scarce. A lot of times, it was our Christmas money would get up good northwester just before winter set in just before Christmas. They would be seven or $800 in one storm. It would make a nice little Christmas money for the whole family. Everybody would be down there, but we'd be down there in the middle of whatever the tide. The wind would – we knew where scallops would be washing ashore. We'd be down there when the tide would be right to pick them up. Otherwise, the seagulls just get them. If they get in sometimes on Sandy beach, it ruins them. But you can't let them. You'd have to pick them up when they were nice and fresh up on the beach the first thing in the morning. Usually, the ones that are on a rocky beach are the best because they wouldn't have any sand in them. Sometimes some beaches where there's a lot of sand, they get all sanded up and ruin them.

NS: So, which were the rocky beaches that you would go to after a good Northwestern?

RC: Well, each beach has got certain amount of areas where it was, but most of the beaches are fairly rocky. But Silver Beach was where a lot of scallops would wash in, and some around the

harbors outside of Ram Island. Or Hay Beach area. But depending on which direction the wind was and if you knew there was a bit of big scallops there. Sometimes in the creeks, they would even blow ashore. But most of the scallops in inshore waters, the bugs didn't get big enough to really be worthwhile open at that time of year. It was the scallops and the deeper water from like in Silver Beach to big scallops would wash in.

NS: Would a storm ever totally destroy a clam bed or a scallop bed?

RC: Yes.

NS: When would that happen?

RC: Well, some of those storms washed in. We had a couple of northwest storms that really destroyed the next year's crop, blew it up on the beach. But sometimes, it would be an anchor frost that would kill the scallops off.

NS: What is an anchor frost?

RC: It's when the bottom would actually freeze before the surface of the water. It takes a really certain condition for that to happen.

NS: Do you know what they are?

RC: I don't know. It would just once in a while it would happen, mostly in a shoal harbour or something like that. We'd be better off if we had if the whole harbor would freeze over or kind of gently. But a couple of times, one of those real severe northwest winds on a cold front come through that the surface water would be moving so much that for some reason they call anchor frost, or the bottom would freeze and would kill the scallops. So, the ice did kill a lot of scallops, I think. But I think sometimes it protected them a little bit too, it's just extreme conditions did affect the winter kills of scallops and like that.

NS: Oh, wow. Were there any particularly notable storms that you remember? Like what years they were that really –

RC: No, I can't think of any.

NS: But it would happen every so often.

RC: About every year you would get a good northwester or a northeaster. It would blow some scallops up on the beach and you would get that one or two storms there just as winter was setting in. Anything that would happen this time of year, there was probably enough grass on the bottom that they wouldn't wash ashore that easily. They hang on to the grass or something. But later on, the bugs would be smaller.

NS: What are bugs?

RC: They're the juvenile bay scallops.

NS: Oh, okay.

RC: But if they blew ashore at this time of year, they'd be too small to be worth anything. You couldn't open them. There wouldn't be any needing them. But later on in December, there would be almost legal. But sometimes there would be full of meat. So, it was like it wasn't against the law, but there was a technicality that actually bugs them to be a certain size, to be legal to take. But is accepted practice and stuff that blew up on a shore. You could take it. But then DEC has gotten more paperwork about it. You meant to notify them. They meant to certify it. By the time you went through that, the scouts, the seagulls would have them. They wouldn't be fit to take up. So, you just go down and whenever it happens – we haven't had that problem in the last few years. But whenever it does happen, we just go down and take the scallops and then worry about technicalities later if they arise.

NS: Well, was it very common or were there certain folks that would harvest the bugs, and try and sell them later or has that been a situation?

RC: Well, in the winter when things got hard, there wasn't any mature scallops. A lot of us would have to go bugging. But it's legal to take a scallop of a certain size. We use a wooden gauge like this here to gauge the scallop. I don't know what bugging means. The FDA did this to about four bushels of scallops. She was a little buggy [laughter]. Some guys didn't bother much about the law. Sometimes you have to have something to make a living on. If that scallop is an eighth of an inch small, the eye is still the same as a legal one. So, you just turn a blind eye to it's more important to make a day's pay than it was to let it grow out the window that day. The conservation would be around and check us. That's how we get nicknames of Bay pirates and all that kind of stuff. But that's basically we look for scallops that big and we look for an area where the scallop would be – Sometimes a yield would be better or a bushel of scallops this size. You'd get a gallon to a bushel where when they fully mature, you'd only get six pounds or five to six pounds because they get so much growth on them, and they develop more shells. So, it'd be more scallops to a bushel, but the yield would be in. Meat would be good. A Bogue scallop is the best eating scallop there is for stew or fried scallops. There's no. But if we could get – if you pick one by the book and you picked out four bushels of bugs a day, you'd get four gallons of scallops. In wintertime, the prices were always good. So, you made a good living. But sometimes you wouldn't get out every day. Or you might – ice might be held in for two weeks, and you hadn't had any money in two weeks. You did whatever you had to do to pay the bills. It's not written up in any book or anything, but–

NS: Yes, I know.

RC: It's quite a while, I think.

NS: Yes.

RC: But even amongst the pirates, there were some that would go beyond just trying to make enough to get by on and push the limit. Most everybody that I tried to catch a good-sized

scallop, some places there would be scallops way bigger than the cage. The technicality of the law of that little bitty 16th of an inch could make you a crook or make you a good day's pay just gamble off somebody because the law only allows you to take ten percent smaller or two percent smaller than the gauge limit. So, when we used to be gauging them, I actually found that I was throwing over legal scallops because it's just repetitious, like between a hole and the dredges and then culling out, usually call them fairly clean. You didn't have any other debris. But the gauge of engagement, engagement, you'd find yourself throwing little ones in the basket and the big ones overboard after a while because you're just handling so many scallops.

NS: Oh, God. Yes.

RC: So, it was like most of us would just try to find a place where there were nice big scallops, so you didn't have to mess around and just pick out a few little ones. But if the DEC really checked, you'd probably – they could find you in violation. But it's like I never had any trouble with DEC. I don't worry about it. They came by and I checked out everything. They wouldn't dump them out and check everyone and check to see if he got two percent. They could see that it looked like he had ninety percent or more legal. It wasn't a contest. They're like if you raise all kinds of hell with them or something like that, you might be opening up.

NS: Has that been a common experience among Baymen having to deal with?

RC: Well, he just works with them as best as possible.

[end of transcript]