

Informant: Tom Jefferies
Date: November 3, 2015
Interviewer: Nancy Solomon
Location: Freeport, NY

AUDIO LOG

:24 – :45 Commercial fishermen. 60 years old. Grandfather Remsen. Owned fishing station. Tom went College. To become teacher but returned to bay.

:50 – Decided in late 20's to return to bay and work the water. Lucrative.

1:28 – Fishermen need regulations. Works every day, 12 months. Depends on weather.

2:18 - 3:50– His catch. Hand packing. Market locally. Only sells in Freeport.

3:50 – Need to diversify as a fishermen to survive. Evaluate by season, not by day.

4:15 – Save money for the winter when it is slow. Winters are tough. Bay frozen solid.

5:00 – Some women fish in US. Here mostly men average age mid-50s. No young guys getting into fishing. Reality of commercial fishing in the US. Dying breed.

6:11 – Asian product has helped local fishermen. Sea robin, conk, snails, crabs for bait.

7:25 – Opportunity. Can now target different species.

8:30 – Changes since Sandy. Thought will have to find something else to do. Several months no income coming in.

9:12 – Qualified for disaster relief unemployment. When you get a storm or hurricane of that magnitude, the season is over. By April

10:05 – Clams closed for a while. So much runoff, oil. Contamination from storm.

10:45 – A lot of debris. As time went on, fish replenish in bay. Mother Nature is resilient. Every month got a little best.

12:05 – Fishermen read the signs. Grandfather told him: don't look at the calendar. Look at the birds.

13:00 – Resilience of hearty commercial fishermen. Tony Sougstad, in his 80s, went fluking in spring. He did not miss a beat. Scary. Luckily bounced back. Not 100%.

14:05 – Tremendously hard winters last 2-3 years. Long lasting bad weather. Marine life cannot take the freeze like that – they just die. In storms, they will leave, but in freeze they cannot survive it. Water gets too cold, nothing can survive.

15:00 – Cold winters are worse on fishing than storms. Snow before Thanksgiving to end of March. Species have a hard time rebounding from that.

16:05 – Bay closed for so long because polluted to the max.

16:25 – At night can smell oil leaching out of the ground, tanks all over, boats abandoned leaking gasoline. Governing forces closed all shell fishing.

17:35 - 00:48 – Have solid testing program in NY. Town also does water samples.

17:55 – Testing gives fishermen ability to put out a good safe product. Local product.

18:20 – Local seafood is number one for people.

18:41 – Bait fishing recuperated by next spring. Clams don't swim, same with crabs. Subject to the chemicals and runoff.

21:00 – Prioritizing after the disaster.

21:40 – Clamming opened around 4th of July. Over 6 months to get good testing.

22:45 – Clams filter water. That is their job.

23:05 – Slowed down this season – attributes to tough winter. Started bait fish before clamming in 2013. Started pretty much on schedule. Saw birds – signs fish are coming.

24:15 – Changes in the bay and marshland. A lot of erosion.

24:28 – Lost bay house. Allowed to rebuild after three years.

25:28 – Depths in canals changed. Narrower. Lost a lot of marsh. Most important thing. Large chunks moved. Place in Baldwin Bay – called Bayhasic – that is gone.

25:42 – Docks gone. Empty houses in Baldwin Bay – peninsula called Bay Colony.

26:30 – Resources if water quality stays good and flow stays good, close to Jones' inlet, good for flushing the bay. 6-8 tide drop every day. On moon tide – 10 to 11 feet.

26:48 – Fresh water from the Atlantic every 12 hours.

27:19 – Ice will shave off giant chunks of marsh. Marsh does not rebuild. When it is gone, it is gone forever. Very dangerous. Life begins there.

28:40 - Bulk heading takes away marsh and hinders the flow of water. Need the marsh to survive.

29:30 – No decline in shell fish even though there is decline in marshland. Run a good seeding program in Town of Hempstead.

30:00 – Here we have sewage problem. Antiquated sewer plants. High population density. Hurts fin fish and shell fish population. Bay Park.

31:48 – Large part of bay closed for a long time. Plant overflows. Sewage causes diseases.

34:00 – Have the money and the technology. Waiting for funds to be released.

34:40 – Damage to boats. Stayed. But will not stay again.

35:44 – Many people evacuated. Very Scary. Knocked down in the water. Closed up. Stayed in. Even if lost things. Nothing more important than your life.

36:15 – Didn't lose much. Lucky he filled his bass tags right before storm, not knowing storm would come.

36:40 – DEC – that year lowest that bass allocations were filled because of the storm.

36:50 – Once you get a storm like that all bets are off. Does not matter how good a fisherman you are. Not going to catch anything.

37:04 – Was lucky. You do not know how bad it can be until it how bad it can be.

37:20 – Preparations made. Taking boats out. Putting stuff up to higher level. Five feet of water at street level – tremendous amount of water.

37:32 – Lost all tools. Pictures. Never thought water would get into cabinets.

38:30 – Tools of the trade are at risk. Not manufactured anymore. Did not lose his nets.

39:00 – Lost some backup outboard motors. Doing it for a living, you do not want to miss a day. Lost some small freezers. Saved one large freezer & compressor on top.

40:00 - Did not have the crazy wind during Sandy. Wind and rain did not transpire.

42:00 – 130 mile an hour winds. Joaquin hurricane. Watches national tropical updates.

42:42 – Nothing you can do but prepare for the worst.

42:00 – This area spared for number of years. Couple of nor'easters, relentless tide.

42:18 – Gloria in mid 1980s came at low tide. Superstorm Sandy came on the moon at the peak of high tide. Perfect in a horrible way. Tide never dropped.

43:10 – Water went to places never went before. Hurricane of 1938, not as many houses.

44:22 – Gloria got off pretty easy. Irene 14 months before Sandy.

45:58 – Hurricane Donna early 1960s. Pretty bad but does not remember it.

46:30 – Things took longer to get back to normal at home than getting back to work.

47:04 – All the flowers came back.

48:32 – Shop below is cinder block. Upstairs is the dwelling. Easy to clean down below. Power washed everything. Highlight of day was when garbage truck came – so much refuse. Limit themselves. No power for number of weeks. No heat.

49:29 – It did not seem as long now as it did at the time. Waited on lines for gas. Food was tough for a while. All local markets in area were closed. Go as far as Sunrise Highway looking for meals.

50:12 – Owner of deli came with station wagon full of bottled water and toilet paper.

Gave out for free. People pulled together. Also had break-ins. At night, was pitch black.

51:00 - Now there are abandoned and condemned houses.

52:30 - Bad insurance companies. Took money for 30 thirsty years and then do not honor claim. Lived it and other people too.

52:42 - No income. Lucky to qualify for disaster unemployment. Milk money.

53:05 – Lucky because filled bass tags before the storm came in October. Eat up savings. As fisherman taught to save. Not how much you make, it's what you do with it. Plan six months to a year down the line.

54:00 – Winter money with clams. Market gets high in December and January.

54:30 – Grandpa was a fisherman. Taught him to be frugal. Prepare. Live within means.

55:05 - Describes scene what was happening. Saw and smelled during Sandy. No lights. Electrical transformers exploding.

56:36 – Smells like electrical fire. Smell got stronger and stronger. Fiore Brothers Market around for 75 years and local icon restaurant Schooners burned right to the ground. Fire department could not get to it. No one got hurt.

59:58 – Found people were getting a lot of looters. Police setup check points.

60:00 – Water receded. Oil on the ground. Slipping and sliding all over. Reached into the ground. Called EPA. Home heating oil. It would clean itself out over time but the smell was tough for long time. Make your eyes tear.

61:00 - Gear up for task, one day at a time. Had to bring back in. Insurance company would not take word for what he lost. They had to see it.

63:25 – Storm will separate the people who want to stay on the water.

END