

Ken Mades

April 12 2016

Interviewed by Nancy Solomon

:35 Hampton Bays. Bayman. How he got started. Grandfather worked the bays. Farmed and fished.

:35 - :53 Father World War II. Coast guard. Disability discharge. Worked the bays.

:55 - 1:30 - Ken worked the bays entire life. Went to school. Worked on Wall Street.

1:30 - Had children. Moved back. Then worked the bays. Turns 78 this month.

2:00 - Grew up in Hampton Bays. 1657 family have been in South Hampton. Hampton Bays since 1740. Ancestor were first settler, Hampton Bays. Still own a small piece of property from the original homestead.

2:30 - Mom still lives on it. Will be 102 in May.

2:52 - first memories on the bay with grandfather. It was a paradise. After World War II, Population 1100 in Hampton Bays. Very rural.

3:25 - 95% of the streets didn't exist. Along with all development that went with it. Bay was healthy. Produced 98% more than it does now.

3:45 - When started to make a living, 175 full-time Bayman in South Hampton Township. Always knew there was a future down the road.

4:15 - 2016 we have about 15 baymen. Very few under 50 years old.

4:30 - Clammed and fished with father. Harvested eel pots. Those days water was so thick you could not run an outboard motor across there. Eelgrass.

5:52 - Lost the eelgrass. Lost everything. Brown tide is the reason.

7:00 did I need to set many pots then. 25-35, 40 at the most. Harvested winter flounder, shell fishing, abundance of soft and hard clams. Used tongs, mud rakes, scratch rakes.

7:46 - A blacksmith made them. Olaf Anderson. Very nice man. Made nice stuff.

8:25 - 1963 first year on his own. When came back to New York. Shellfished to almost exclusively. Started to fish pound nets.

9:00 Most productive shellfishing was literally everywhere. Areas were natural stats occurred, more prolific than others. No area that didn't have shellfish. Brookhaven, whole East Bay.

10:20 Pound trap. Takes about a month of labor to build pound nets with poles.

11:22 - Caught a little bit different things in different places. Sea trout, weakfish, winter flounder in large numbers. Always lots of little ones coming up. Never had to worry. Caught eels in the pound nets too.

12:10 - Before lobster die off in the Sound, would sell in the spring 150,000 pounds of bait to the lobstermen. Still a big business but it's out-of-state now.

12:43 - Blue claw crabs, white perch - don't see much of anymore. Small resurgence last year.

13:35 - Town regulation. Take nets out at the end of June here. Long time regulation. We didn't want to fish the summer here. Was not type of fishery you would want to do in summer. Put back in around Labor Day. Leave in till late November or a little after thanksgiving.

14:08 - Sometimes had son work with him in the spring. Back in the years when we handled a lot of beat, I would have someone come out with me in the spring. But worked alone in fall.

14:40 - Horseshoe crab situation changed. Nothing as good as once was. Numbers are still good.

15:10 - Hunter all his life. Redknot not threatened by the horseshoe crab harvest. But needed regulation however. Handled well in the state and others.

15:35 - Still does eel pots now. Has barely any horseshoe crabs for the eel pots now. But that's always a problem in spring. Freeze some in the fall.

16:00 - Puts a few fyke nets in to catch a few now. Does not need a whole lot a day. Used to have big horseshoe crab pens. Now just stores and live cars. Lobster keeper cars. Fishes deal in the spring. And a little bit in the fall.

16:48 - Does not use horseshoe crabs for anything else. Main use for the horseshoe crab is for the cod fishery. 90%

17:05 Pound nets. By webbing from manufacturers. Last long time. 35 years. Just replace panels here and there once in a while where there is wear. Makes all his own nets. Nobody to make our nets. Do all the mending. For every hour on the water this an hour on the shore.

18:16 - Recreational accidents involving pound traps. Never had any. Pound nets are huge. Required to put lights on them.

18:55 - Kind of boats he uses for what. Wooden boats that are glassed over. Style - sharpies. Howard Pickerel builds them. Building him a new one this summer. He's in his 70s.

19:40 - Used eight or nine boats in his life. Only kind of boat he ever used. First boats were all wood.

20:06 - Fiber glass. Not suitable for what he does. So still has wooden boat but is glassed over.

20:32 - Decline of the waters. His observations. A lot of problems with things that don't belong in the water. Septic, runoff, the way we live, all the products we use, poison keep spreading. If we can't improve the water quality to the way was back 40, 50 years ago, I don't think you could maintain what we have now.

21:34 - South Shore Bays, soft clams are practically extinct. No soft clam fishery at all here anymore. Some say, you guys caught them all. No.

21:55 - Water is more acidic, without a doubt from the runoff. Upper bay, is nothing happens anymore. Zero in upper bays. Where you don't have a good flushing. Don't know if calcification can happen anymore because the waters are so acidic.

22:55 - No point in planting eelgrass. Feel good hopeful thing. Cannot condemn anyone for trying to do well. Need a good environment for them to survive. Used to have thousands of acres of it. How many acres can you plant?

23:38 - Shell fish seed product. Mid 1980s had the worst brown tide problem. Did not even clear up in the winter.

24:00 - Because of possible extinction - made sense to put scallops in the water here.

24:35 - Planting hard clams. Before Shinnecock Inlet was here, no hard clams. Salinity didn't support hard clams. Had oysters and soft clams. Some hard clams in Moriches bay. None here. Zero.

25:30 - After World War II, Baymen were catching 25 or 30 bushels of littleneck clams per day. Clams in Peconics. From zero. Set in East Bay, do not need a lot of spawners. All you need is conditions.

26:05 - Can plant all of the hard clams you want. Cannot duplicate what will happen in nature. If you cannot duplicate conditions, all else is wishful thinking.

26:48 - Still able to make a living. Do not need to earn anything like he used to. Only reason being - not a lot of resource - but there is no competition now. Everyone is gone.

27:15 - Close to inlet gets sets, not like they used to. Better water quality. Not like it used to be. Not many people harvesting.

27:45 - Another factor. Deep stabilized inlet. Deep trouble without it. Would not have anything without it. Have complete exchange of water every two days. Rise of tide three and four feet. Too much exchange here but if we didn't have it could not be certified. Whole area would be closed.

29:00 - State new regulations what to do with shellfish once you harvested. Summertime

80°water - have to get it to dealer at 42° or below. Doesn't think anybody can. Doing this a long time. Knows how to take care of the product. I know that's been a problem. Problem came from

the Oyster Bay. Have a lot of clams up there. Let the Sunbake them. If they start to get up it's a problem. Lose moisture. At that point they are weakened. Shelf life goes down. Too old. Should not be eaten.

30:08 - On really hot summer day, everyone goes early and they come home early. Always cover the clams with wet burlap. All you have to do is keep the sun off. Does not see how anyone can comply with this.

30:44 - Working out of a 16-foot sharpie. Cannot put an ice chest in his boat big enough to store those clams or have room to work and have equipment.

31:30 - Close calls. Been hurt plenty of times. Dangerous business.

32:00 - Doug Chain. Recently passed. Baymen. Good friend. 1977. Moriches Bay had 20 inches of ice. Drove truck 500 feet on to ice. Cutting hole through ice with chainsaws. Bitter cold. Some days 35 below zero. Then snowed. Could not see where the holes were. Marked ours.

33:15 - one day snow was dry and powdery, could not see the shore. Out there clamming.

Freeze ups were common, every winter had them. Breaking ice all morning just to get through with boat in afternoon.

34:01 Harsh environment. Finger caught. Still works. This one almost cut off in outboard motor. Not scenic. He is realistic. Not academic but knows how this whole system works.

35:02 Hopes can keep where it is. Not let it degrade further. Hate to see it all disappear. Thinks about how it was and how it is now, and it can make him cry. Upsets him that much. Too many of us. And the way we live. More people coming without a doubt.

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