

Billy Reed

February 3, 2015

Nancy Solomon of Long Island Traditions

Time: 1:04:59

00:00 - 05:00

William/Billy Reed of Hampton Bays. How got into fishing and early experiences. You boy - 14th of 16 children. Older brothers were baymen. Was too young to go clamming. But would watch them in the mornings leave the dock. Learned at young age making a living off the sea.

Recall in first grade – teacher asked the children what they wanted to be when they grow older. One boy said fireman. I said I wanted to be a clammer. Didn't make it to clamming for two summers but then. As young boy built Elizabeth Jay in my backyard – 43 foot wooden dragger.

Four years of my life growing up, after school, Saturdays and Sundays constructing a boat. Remember so much of that.

Back in the day when National Fisherman had great articles in it about net building and boat construction and winks design.

Another older fishermen came along – he wanted to run the Elizabeth Jay. So I worked with Jimmy Miller, who has since left this earth, worked with him from May till first Wednesday in October of 1989.

Remember that because first Monday in October Peconic Bay opened up. During opening of Peconic Bay we used to be able to fish in there. He tore the net up pretty bad.

That was the time that you didn't really want to be on a little boat for the winter. October things get rough and ugly. So he was seasoned fisherman and had his fun working in a little boat in the summer and so he went off to work a bigger boat in the winter which is wise.

That was my chance - started running boat when I was 19 years old. Remember I was nervous. Stayed in Peconic Bay for a while.

Chuck Sydow doesn't know I tangle my gear in his decoration site. I didn't know left from right.

Harvested horseshoe crabs, fluke there. Took it slow. Worked hard. One day built into the next. For married at young age and had children at young age. And we had a good journey.

Born August 4, 1969. Grew up in West Sayville. Born in Bay Shore. That was the great days when parents fed you when you were gone. You came home and you were gone and are dinner and you were gone till you got tired.

We were able to be Tom Sawyers and Huck Fins.

For Christmas, one year I remember the younger boys got a bicycle to share - a used bicycles from Clarence Slayger. Basically we built our own bicycles. Back then built our own things. Used mechanical skills you learned as a young boy. Replacing barons in a bicycle. Learned so much on a bicycle. It wasn't far from the water.

05:00 - 10:00

One mile to water. Ride our bikes down there and go snapper fishing, crabbing, all the things that were healthy to do. It was a good time besides catching snakes, frogs, turtles.

First mentor as fishermen: Bob Harter treated me good like a son. I would call him up frequently.

Sty Steinanson - no longer with us. When I first started fishing was 19/20, the older fishermen, 50 an older, they would gladly help me. They would gladly tell me this is where I had fish yesterday. This is what I'm doing.

But the younger fisherman, that were younger than that, they see you as a threat. As you mature in life, your perspectives change, individually. You can see it. The younger guy, he's just trying to grab a piece of the pie for himself. I got to get it before he will.

The older fisherman, he sees the picture differently. He's a young man, trying working hard and they want to see the young man succeed. They see the generation to generation. They want to bring along the next generation.

I remember asking Sam Scarborough bringing him my chart. Sam can I fish here and here? And Sam is like yeah here and here.

Remember Jimmy Miller ripped up that net in Peconic bay. I knew how to sew but not well. I used to sew in my basement in HS - used to take piece of netting and hang it up.

When he ripped up the net and quit. Got net off the dock in Shinnocock Canal. Hard to explain a tear - tear went from mouth of the net back to the end in a tongue shape.

Now that I had all sorts of experience I know you start seeing from cot end first. You start sewing what ripped last first. Then you put tear back together. So the tongue had ripped out. Spent all day sewing across. Was making my own net.

Another old fishermen Dougal and was laughing and he took time to show me, this is how you put a net back together.

He would go fishing and I would spend all day sewing and then at end of his day he would stop my again and see how I was making out and give me some more pointers.

In three days I had it back together. It would take me a full day now. Dougal would stop by and teach me what I needed to know and leave me alone and check in again.

I was blessed to have a lot of men teach me.

Ever cross paths with Old Oakers? We grew up in same town but no.

Any other fishermen taught you things you still remember today? Sandy Mason. Always had a good relationship with him.

Some of the things he taught you - Sandy taught me to go slower. Be safer. Sometimes faster is slower.

Remember had big storm - Halloween storm, way back- think it was the perfect storm - one Sebastian Junger wrote about. That just flattened our beach out. Remember whole parking lot was covered in sand. Every net was buried in sand. Remember digging the net out with Sandy.

10:00 – 15:00

There was a broken pallet with nails sticking up. I just dig and take this thing and chuck it. Sandy without saying nothing he just goes over and turns the nails over. Seems like nothing but little things mean a lot. In our business almost gotten killed. Numerous times, all just by from hurrying and rushing. Not taking things slow and cautious. Being fearless and some of the stupidity youth brings with you. He taught me that strange lesson of sometimes just slow down a minute, evaluate it and then go.

When was younger fishermen, if I was not at my boat by 4 am and out the inlet, the whole day was shot. If I was a jack rabbit off the line, I will not bother. Day is wasted. Forget it.

Sandy would show up at 6 am and mossie ? on out. There is plenty of time left in the day after four o'clock. It is a strange thing that he taught me to go slower.

Taught me life lessons. About being patient. Sometimes these fisherman become your close circle. Share not always things that have to do with fishing but things to do with life. They can become your confident and encourager and give you good advice. And vice versa. As I get older, I can give advice.

Lesson story from Sandy: one of the classic, Sandy was very observant of what is going on around him. I am observant too but he sees things differently. He proved couple of times. While he was squidding, he landed giant blue fin tuna. He is like I see it on my scope a little blob, then I haul back, put bait on the line. Here he is bringing in a giant tuna. And I am totally oblivious to it.

He showing you on the screen. Watch the screen half way through the water column for this type of blip. When you look out in the water, you just see water. But underneath that there is a chain of life going on – things you cannot see with your eyes - have to use other senses.

Who taught you about understanding weather? Was an ok student at school. We read – especially when I was a younger fishermen, studious mode in college, when I started fishing was still in serious studious mode. A lot of good writing on weather. Cornell Cooperative Extension at the times offered videos to us. I would go there and eat it all up – had things on weather.

Was telling my daughter the other day – look up at the sky. See the high pressure system coming in and high clouds coming in, see a sundog in the sky – in 12 hours you are going to have rain because of the sundog in the sky.

15:00 – 20:00

Still have all the Audobon books - Weather, Bird, Sky, Mushrooms. Watch nature around us. As commercial fisherman who makes his living from the water – need to be in tune with so much that is going on outside. People get in cars- it is windy out. I need to know what direction wind is coming from. Northerly? South Easterly? These things have big effects.

How do understand those kinds of winds? What kind of wind brings you good weather, bad weather? Any wind that is strong brings bad weather. Easterly winds, winds go counter-clockwise around a lull. Long Island, where we live, counter-clockwise with a low pressure system would, say 100 miles south of Long Island would be easterly winds.

Easterly wind is big fetch of ocean. Winds coming from Nantucket – 200 miles of ocean so easterly wind is always the worst for where we live – easterly wind is a low pressure system – to an extent.

Squid fishing in the summer is amazing. Cannot figure it out. When wind blows out the east, squid just come off the bottom and start catching. South westerly is great for squid fishing. Squid settle down on the bottom and go to sleep and we scoop them up on south westerly wind.

Northerly wind sometimes is a bad wind with squidding. Squid are very finicky which makes it fun – it is a challenge. Sea scalloping doesn't really matter as much unless it gets really rough and bottom gets too silky. And their filter feeders – choking on all the filth. They take the day off and we do not catch as well.

Of course if a swell gets really big, a lot of animals shut down. Fluke will go to sleep, bury in the bottom. So we just over the top.

Any wind that gets over 30 knots is just ugly. I do not want to be there.

What it is it like? First it is cool. You are a fishermen and you are taking a beating, you cannot standup, you have to watch every step. It is challenging. Testosterone level goes up. Have to watch foot placement on the ground. Have to watch your hands – have to hold on as you go. And for a while, it is alright. This is what we do. But after six, seven hours, eight, ten, twelve hours – it just gets terrible.

You cannot even sit on a bench – you are sliding back and forth. You cannot sit in your chair – gets to be so uncomfortable.

Last year – coming back from New Jersey, I could not lay in my bunk – had my arm hooked around my bunk around the mattress to keep me from falling out – you get lunched off the bed. Then get back on again. After a while, can I just pull a string and make time advance so I can get in.

But we endure it because providing for our family. It is what we do.

Used to fish alone. No longer aspire to that. Fishing alone had set of good challenges – such as you really had to watch everything you do, every motion. Because you only have so much fuel in your tank. That was fun challenge. Fished alone for ten years.

But will not do it again. A good man pays for himself.

20:00 – 25:00

When you fished alone, had some close calls? Yes. Thankfully the lord preserved my life. I think a lot of times, these are all when I was younger, thankfully haven't had close calls lately.

Closest call working by myself was yellow tail fishing off Moriches – 20 fathoms – 15 miles off Moriches – wind was blowing south easterly – which put the wind on my side so I had to come north westerly to get home – it was too rough to pick on the deck of the boat. Had Elizabeth Jay at the time. I look back – all so beautiful – was married, 3 or 4 children at the time, working, was not making too much money but was making enough money to provide for my family.

Taking a beating on the ride home – since it was too rough for me to pick, all the fish went to the leeward side, not the windward side – goes against the wind that's how the boat rocks – boat had a good chair was able to turn myself sideways and pen myself in. Get in this big rocking motion the whole time going home. Go down one way, go back the other way – like being in a swing ride for two hours.

Get to Shinnecock inlet – half a mile away off shore. Now get tidal influence on the waves. So one of those nice gentle swing rides, the boat went over on its side. Then another wave came and went back upright again. During that incident this engine was cooled by sea water. Impeller became air bound when it came back down again. Had to get towed in because engine was overheating after that.

Remember Chris Harter was in the North Sea – weather was fine. That boat was much bigger and had the wind on its stern and he had a fine trip. For me that was the closest working by myself. Had other close calls when I was not by myself.

One time – we bring bag of fish in the boat. Brother lifted it up to pop the pucker and we were up in the sea – which means the bag then went out the stern of the boat – I was after the bag – grabbed the cot end with my fingers and the bag swings way out with me on it. Then the bag swings back in. Thought it was fun. You are too stupid to think it was dangerous.

Third close call – Had gotten this knotless netting from Japan – Mishito netting. No knots. Really slick when you are fishing. Waited six months to get this twine. Made a net in my front yard. Eagerly built this whole entire net from scratch. Put it on the boat – so excited about knotless netting – will come up stealthily on the fish - they are not even going to know we are here.

First 30 foot of butter fish. No one else has any butter fish. Thinking this net is so awesome. It was fall – next day – a Saturday - calling for a hurricane to pass by – but will be 200 miles off shore. Was smart enough – knew the weather – knew big swell was coming and knew ocean was going to be getting rough. But with my new net, we will be out there and mug.

Tell my brother to show up in morning. Get there in morning and ocean is flat calm. Let's get those butter fish again. Caught off Round Dunne which is West Hampton. I go back – there is nothing. Maybe fish went west. Go to Moriches inlet – nothing. Smith's Point – nothing. By now – now it is 12 pm – already know it is not good.

25:00 – 30:00

The swell is huge. Not going to feel the wind from hurricane but the swell is huge.

Didn't want to scare my brothers but knew inlet was going to be really bad. Knew had to wait for the tide start coming in because without going tide it just cuts the bottom of the wave out. Makes the wave twice as big. Goes back long time ago - 1995.

Remember driving back really slowly because I had time to kill. Opened all the scuppers on the boat in case a wave breaks on the boat, water will wash off fast. My brother Tom knew something was up. He goes to put his life jacket on. I am like what do you need the life jacket for? He was older - often times wiser.

Actually times the current wrong. Tide was still going out when I made my approach and of as nice summer day and coast guard rubber floatable was right alongside. 100 feet off my side as I was entering the inlet. They were right there - waiting for something bad to happen.

But one particular wave was so awesome because I survived it. We just about pitch poled. When a wave comes, if your bow goes under and the wave breaks, you'll just go stern over the bow. The wave hit out stern so hard, felt like someone came from the back and gave you a shove. Water broke on the deck. Boat went right into the 4 peak and into the wave it. Had couple of feet of water. Huge wave.

Felt tough. Feeds to youth and immaturity. I still do prudent but not enough. In hindsight, why didn't I just wait two hours to come in? Why didn't I stay in Montauk Point for five hours? I would have nothing to worry about. Now I think totally different. Then I was like we will get in - will be fine. That was a close one.

Then lost the Providence - sank at the Shinnecock inlet. I wasn't there that day. I was on the North Sea. But that was a smooth summer day and you let your guard down. Every time we come in the inlet we should look in back of us. Get so acclimated and so used to the seas that even on a nice day a strange sea comes and grabs you – you are going too fast – you have a lot of weight on the deck of the boat and rolls right over – two men nearly died.

My father made the Providence – he is like if it ever flips over I made this window so you can get out. That's hose Vinny got out through the window my father made. Once chopped my finger off.

Scariest story you heard about another fishermen? Injuries on a boat scare me a lot know. We know plenty of deaths on boats. From net reels and winches, from wires, from shacks spinning. Sweat shirt gets caught. Those things scare me the most. Falling overboard.

30:00 – 35:00

Younger chopped end of ring finger off – it was stupid. Something that happened to somebody else what you learned from? In many ways, we learn from all these sad things. Going through my head – so many incidents – almost hate to mention them.

Everyone who comes on my boat – I tell them “Watch it”. Whenever we are lifting a load, do not stay anywhere near the line. If the line snaps, where is that force going? Where is that recoil going of that wire? That is one of the things that scare me.

I tell them the men, if you are going anywhere where I cannot see you tell me because I am responsible for your wellbeing at all times. We know stories of guys who go out to use the bathroom and never come back. No peeing off stern of the boat – go right on the deck. Do not want you near the rail. Guys go to the rail and slip over. We have deck hose that cleans it off – safest spot to go.

You do not want anything to happen to anyone carelessly.

Things learned about the weather that most people do not know? Not really. Men have been sailing the seas forever. The weather changes fast. Ocean gets rough fast. Does not take long for the ocean to get ugly and vice versa. Does not take long for the ocean to get nice again. Ocean gets rough fast. Caution people that.

Can you tell when ocean will change? Yea you can. Year is 2015 – weather forecast are much more accurate than they were 25 years ago. Have to watch clouds. Clouds tell you so much. Shape of the cloud, are they cumulus, cirrus, stratus clouds? How thick they are? Tells when about the wind is going to come. If the sky is clear – it does not tell you a whole lot. Might be high pressure systems – that is good.

If wind is out of the north – can be clear skies. So we watch the clouds a lot for weather. Use Noah radio as much – use other land based systems and compile them all – suck in all the data and process it.

Mentioned you knew swell was coming when you were making your way back to the inlet. Are there other things you noticed changing when you know bad weather is coming? Water is like snow globe. We catch better when it is calm. Things are all settled down. When bad weather comes everything gets shaken up. Ocean is just like that. Everything is out of place. Fish that should be tight to the beach are off the beach. It is a whole hog pag. You will catch fish that you do not normally see. Southern fish up here. Will catch shrimp.

Birds? You definitely see birds you do not normally see. Hurricanes bring up a lot of southern birds. They get caught in hurricane. Friends in Nova Scotia had laughing gulls in parking lots in Nova Scotia. Laughing gull is southern bird with black head. Used to never have them around here.

35:06 – 40:00

Not in Shinnecock but they are in Islip. Seeing pelicans. They will get sucked up in hurricane. They are not normally here. Like we see snowy owls. They do not really come by storms. Has to be a really big storm that formed in the tropics. They get stuck in the storm and wind just blows them around.

Do you recall some of the things that you saw before Sandy hit? Usually after storm goes through that we see things. Beforehand no not really. What did you see after? Saw very little nature after nature.

Sandy cost us a lot of money in lost revenue. Doing whelk operation at the time. We were fishing whelk pots in the ocean. Four weeks till we caught a whelk. Not only that all my gear was tangled terribly. It was tough - have crew – trying to make a pay check for them – they have families. After Sandy we just didn't make any money. Snow globe was out of whack. Did not catch scallops. Did not catch them for six weeks. You go fishing, you are not making any money.

When storm get that bad – messes up the ocean for a while and those species. But we survived.

When you heard about the Sandy, what were some of things you started to do in preparation? Knew beach was going to be flattened. Got all our gear and put in proper spot. Had the North Sea in a good spot.

The Provenance was not in a good spot though. We were in the worst spot possible - which is a slip by Shinnecock inlet. No barrier from the wind, nothing. So we tied lines and lines and lines like a spider web. Nothing you can really do but to wait the storm out to see if you survive it or not. And we survived it. I can remember going to end of Shinnecock Road in the morning with binoculars out and seeing the boat over there and being relieve. Because that would have been a really bad hit. That would have been tough.

Describes how he tied The Provenance up: right by the inlet are those big boulders – rock jetty – went around the rock jetties with ropes. Tied ropes around the boulders – these are not going anywhere.

Another problems with ropes is chafing in a storm. Boat moves so boat surges and you have a lot of chafing, rope rubbing against things. Have to put the fire house over it for chafing but even fire hose chafes out. And cannot tie too many ropes to one cleat because there is too much force. Have to go around gallows' legs and make sure everything you tie too is supper strong. Have to really spread the load as much as possible on multiple points around the boat.

Instead of tying a rope to a piling, where is the give? So we put tires over the piling – then tied to the tire – because a car or truck tire has a little bit of give to it. When things are moving they have to have give – if it is too tight the rope is going to snap. Then had to tie the tires, because the tide was so high, had to latch the tires down to whaler underneath to make sure the tire did not come off the whole piling.

40:00 – 45:00

It was quite a production. Had done that before. You would be amazed at the things that we know in order to perform our job. You learn with experience. You do something for 25 or 26 years – you learn what works what does not work – most you learn by making mistakes and doing things wrong. That is how learned doing most of my stuff. But people share their ideas.

Some ports are nice for storms. What makes Shinnecock so bad where we tie up is – the inlet now is very good and a safe inlet nut it is a deep inlet – the one thing bad about that is the energy comes into the bay and things surge around more. It is not tying up in Sayville – all you got is wind or Great South Bay or tying up in Montauk – you do not have a swell coming in Montauk Harbor or New Bedford that have gates on the harbor. But we survived. Good adventure.

Any boats lost during Sandy? None of the commercial boats were. Boats on land fared worse. Because of liability reasons no one wanted my boat in their marina or in their slip. Afraid my boat was too big and would snap holes. So I had to weather it, right where I tied up, like I said was a bad spot. Trying to get the boat out of their in a bad way.

In hindsight should have gone to north side of Shinnecock Canal – just would have dealt with wind. Wind is not bad – 100 miles an hour and your boat is fine. It is the surge of boat going back and forth, have 150,000 pounds moving – that is where the force really lies. It was not bad – these are the things that

we do. This is what nature throws at you. This is how it is. You live here – you will get snow storms, big storms on the ocean. When weather is good – we work hard. When it is freezing cold like this morning – we chicken out. It is just not safe. Probably when was younger – would have gone today.

Example: Negative four this morning – ice on deck of the boat. One little slip on floor, break an arm, fall over bow or stern. Older and wiser applies to my life.

Usually three people work on boat now. Three-handed. Scalping – because there is a lot of scallops to shuck and work is tremendous.

Wife packs all cold food – do not give me anything hot because I do not have time to heat anything up. Peanut Butter and jelly. Shove in mouth. Go back to work.

Harder we work - faster we work - more intelligent we work the more – the more money we make. We are not out there for our health. We are out there to harvest as many animals we can in shortest period of time possible.

Crew is younger – 32 and 25 years old. Teaches them things he was taught. Try to teach them as much as I can. The more everybody knows, the more intelligent your crew is. The better it is for the boat. If you are the only guy who knows how to sew on a net. As soon as it rips up, you are the only guy putting it back together.

The things that Dougal taught me earlier – I will let you start from the cot end. We ripped up net pretty badly last trip on Thursday of last week – had to take the net off the boat.

45:00 – 50:00

But here we are – putting it back together like you are supposed to. Like to be a teacher and teach them – they have to know.

What have you taught them about getting caught in a storm that just comes up? Tough. Was a storm earlier in year – I did not go that trip – stayed home. It is hard when you are captain of a boat. You want to perform. You want to catch fish. Want to bring boat back with good catch of fish.

Chris Windsor – great guy but did not listen to the weather in the morning. Calling for a gale of wind in afternoon. Well gale turned into a storm. But he did not do the last minute check. It was cranking 50/ 60 knots of wind. More northerly than anything.

One of the guys – got to get out of here – not safe. Lost all margin of safety. Only made 4 and half knots for steam home- just so rough out. Men shucked whole way home. They got everything done. Boat cracked up the dock so hard you just cannot stop it in that much wind. Had to tie up the boat with tow wire. Good memory – knowing when not to go.

Had I been there that day – I would have gotten out of there – would have left after one tow. When it gets that windy - have to get out of there. But they all survived and got a day's pay.

Was there one day, storm that forced you back to New York instead of New Jersey? Not really a big deal. New Jersey opens up first Sunday of September or First Sunday in November and January.

Was just this past September – weather forecast had been accurate. Had been really good. Calling for really bad weather. Monday night – first Monday – Sunday night was flat calm. 3,000 pound limit and one of the guys did not want to go. I want to go – still making money. Why because we work.

Knew exactly what was going to happen – calling for easterly winds 30 knots – but summer time - so caught the fish. Had 3,000 pounds in four short tows. Was untouched all summer. Cannot even harvest them so there is millions of them out there. Got 3,000 pounds like nothing.

Start our speed to New Jersey – wind starts blowing out of east – which is not bad – it is on your stern. Then get to New Jersey, 12 pm, pack out – that all went smooth. Got coffee and hamburger. As I am leaving Manorsquan inlet – right away I know – this is going to be ugly. Normally a 12 hour ride, will be 14 hour ride. Waves crashing over the top of the wheel house. Just ugly getting hammered and hammered. Doors are banging.

50:00 – 55:00

Ugly and noisy. Getting a beating. Summertime – was nice all summer. Another time you just have to endure. Made \$9,000 that trip. \$3 a pound. Expenses \$2,000. Pay the guy. My business took in \$5,000 grand for two days – it is very good. Need those chunk of money to come in because each net is \$10,000, fuel, all those numbers are big. We need those shots. I would do it all again. Take the beating, the punishment. I'm not throwing the towel in.

In winter goes to 5,000 pounds. Have to report that. One had his 5,000 in four tows – South of Montauk.

55:00 – 1:00

1:00 - 1:04:59