

TAPE SUMMARY INDEX FOR
LONG ISLAND TRADITIONS FIELDWORK PROJECT:
BAYSHORE TO PATCHOGUE

TAPE 003:
FLO SHARKEY
JULY 3, 2000

Flo's family has long been involved in the fishing or shellfishing industry and now her son is the fourth generation working the bay. Flo started treading with her father when she was very young and now that she is older she would rather scratch rake. She learned a lot from her father and her brother. Flo describes the method used in treading which involves walking backwards and feeling around with your foot. About 90 percent of the time she can tell a live clam from a dead one. Flo clams for wild clams--they are not put out into the bay. She talks about the name changes of the clams--everything is a neck but the cherrystones. She states, "if it looks like a clam, smells like a clam, it is a neck to me." Flo doesn't believe that one can just go out and learn to scratch rake somebody has to teach you. She uses her father's rake called a turtle rake which he designed. When she first started scratch raking she hated it but at this point in time she likes doing it. Flo talks about using stilts when scratch raking and that the best depth of water to rake in is waist deep water. She discusses the use of stilts and has three different sizes that she uses--she would rather not be on stilts but if she has to she like the wood better than metal. Flo never clams out of the boat--she prefers to be overboard. She looks for wetlands and mosquito ditches to try to find killies and then sets out her pots. Flo likes the killie business and also the fact that she can't support herself just by clamming. She talks about the design and use of the killie traps. There is no bait that works better than horseshoe crabs which you can find on a full moon in late spring and early summer--"you usually go where your father took you." Speaks about code of ethics among the clammers--now since it is hard clamming people do get upset if someone comes near where your working. The recreational people think the clammer know everything and will stay close. Because things are so tight that you need to make fifty percent of your wages by clamming to get a license. When Flo first stated many of the clammers were college students earning money to stay in school. In the past they would keep the clams until they were ready to sell but since 1998 you have one hour after docking to sell the clams. As you get older you realize the importance of following in the tradition of the family--her father wanted them to be able to support themselves and to take care of themselves out on the bay. Talks of how her son was taught to do razor clamming by her brother. Flo discusses how the old timers knew how to keep their mouths shut about where to clam and would keep it in the family. Flo wants her son to know what it is like to work on the bay but at the same time would rather see him go to college because the bay won't be there for his generation. Flo discusses the quality of water as an issue when it comes to clamming as many clammers have been exposed to disease from the water. She then discusses the destruction of the wetlands--the wetlands act as a natural filter and keep the water clean. In 1972 there were over 8,000 people working on the bay but now if you see two clammers you see a lot. Talks about how you would always see someone clamming and in the past the baymen would always help out another in need. Now you have nobody to call. Does oystering on the North Shore in the winter--she use to count on this to get off the bay and as a means of extra money. Oystering is a totally different way of life than that of clamming. Flo speaks of the bureaucracy of selling clams to a buyer. Speaks about knowing the bay--you learn where the best spots are. You have to work tides if you are a scratch raker or

a treader. On working in winter--sometimes you wonder why you chose this as a livelihood--and expresses how difficult it is and sometimes you make it back by luck. Recalls an experience when the ice cut their boat in half. When Flo was younger there were quite a few women who worked the bay--now she is the only woman working the bay. It doesn't bother her that she is the only woman out there. At first the men did not like the fact she was working on the bay--now she doesn't believe that anyone has a problem with her. Describes self as a bayperson. Flo describes what it means to her to work on the bay. Flo states "its a hard life, its a fun life, and you have to love it to do it" when asked what she would tell others about working on the bay. Concludes by talking about the future of the bay and the importance of taking care of the bay in terms of environmental consequences. Does not believe that seeding clams will ever replace the natural sets of clams.