

Nancy Solomon: How do you pronounce your last name, by the way?

Tony Sougstad: Sougstad.

NS: Sougstad.

TS: Right.

NS: You are the captain of *E.T.*, obviously.

TS: Captain, owner, chief cook, and bottle washer.

NS: What kind of fish do you go fishing for? All kinds, ocean and bay fishing?

TS: It goes by the seasons.

NS: But you do ocean and bay fishing?

TS: Not in the bay, no. You're not allowed to use that kind of gear in the bay.

NS: So, you are doing strictly ocean.

TS: Oh, sure. Well, this is strictly for the ocean.

NS: So, this time of year, you are looking for what?

TS: Whiting mainly. Just finishing our whiting season. It's the last month for whiting. Then you start fluking all summer long. We fish for fluke until the middle of October. Then we take vacation from then until Thanksgiving. We paint the boat, we make new nets, do everything that has to be done.

NS: How old is this boat? It looks really old.

TS: I'm not going to tell you.

NS: How come?

TS: [laughter] You insulted him, that's why.

NS: [laughter] No. When I say old, old is good in my book. That is how they used to make good boats.

TS: Oh, I'm old and I'm good. [laughter]

NS: You are not old.

TS: Huh?

NS: You are not old.

TS: Oh, no.

NS: How old are you?

TS: Thirty-nine.

NS: Really?

TS: Yes.

NS: You look older. [laughter]

TS: [laughter] I am older. I'm lying. [laughter]

NS: You look like you are about, I do not know, fifty-five?

TS: No. You're way off base. Forty-six.

NS: I am terrible with age.

TS: Yes, you are. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: So, you want to know about boats and nets?

NS: Yes. How did you learn to make nets?

TS: This is one of the least important parts of the whole operation, right? You learned something like this through osmosis.

NS: That is what I am interested.

TS: The most important parts of the operation is having the will to do it. When things are bad, to have the will to keep going and keep going and keep going. When finally good times come along, you never make up for what you had during the bad, but you do well. Just like every other business, sometimes of the year are good for some businesses and sometimes they're bad. This business is no different than any other.

NS: How long have you been in this business?

TS: Seventeen years.

NS: Since you were about thirty.

TS: What's seventeen from forty-six?

NS: So, twenty-nine.

TS: Right.

NS: What did you do before that?

TS: I was an engineer for Vernitron Corporation.

NS: So, you made your fortune and then decided to follow what you...

TS: No.

NS: No? [laughter]

TS: That's the whole thing. You do not make a fortune working on land. You can get by working on land. Of course, I didn't like working on land.

NS: How come?

TS: How come? I like being my own boss.

NS: Is it okay if I come down on your boat?

TS: There was a new position in supervisory in Vernitron, but that wasn't good enough for me.

NS: Is it okay if I join you on the deck?

TS: Of course.

NS: The boat is drifting a little bit now.

TS: Is that thing still running?

NS: Yes.

TS: Awesome.

NS: It is okay. It has got batteries and nice and quiet. [laughter]

TS: There are a lot of reasons why I did it. Some are personal. Some are not. But I'm glad I did it.

NS: Was your father a fisherman?

TS: No.

NS: No? Did he have work on boats?

TS: My father was a baker.

NS: He was a baker?

TS: Yes.

NS: How did you get interested in being a fisherman?

TS: Like I said, it's a long story.

NS: You got a lot of time?

TS: I'm here and I'm glad I did it. I'm glad I made the move.

NS: Is your family from...

TS: Because being of my age, all right?

NS: [laughter] What does that mean?

TS: I have brothers, uncles, friends. Everybody has been in some sort of manufacturing and so was I. I have seen people working for different places that have been laid off right after twenty- and thirty-years' worth of work. When you reach the point of fifty-five, sixty years old, they decide they don't want you anymore, you're out. I saw it happen so many times, I said, "I have to do something on my own or go for civil service. One or the other." Where there's some sort of security. That's one of the main reasons why I did this. Because what I have here now is a piece of equipment that belongs to me. The day will come when I can't go out anymore, it's very easy to find someone to get on the boat and run it and break my son in. When I can't go out anymore, I can live very nicely off the boat share.

NS: Tell me how you learned to make nets. [laughter]

TS: Necessity becomes the mother of invention. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: I did have some people that showed me the basic rudiments. It wasn't trial and error. I did have people that showed me.

NS: Who were they?

TS: Man in the docks right over here, Frank Apache. Frank Cona who lives in Baldwin. He's been a fisherman all his life. He helped me when I started. Some people in Montauk, people in Shinnecock. I went to net seminars. Eventually, I learned how to do it. Now I'm not bad.

NS: What kinds of skills do you think are the most important in making nets?

TS: If you know how to play checkers, you can make a net. [laughter]

NS: A sense of geometry?

TS: Yes, a sense of geometry. As far as making nets that work, we very seldom fool around with new designs. Very seldom.

NS: How come?

TS: You might change something a little bit. If it works, fine, we'll leave it that way. If it doesn't, we go back to basics. Everything on this boat is basic. Nothing is fancy. Nothing is outlandish. In some of the bigger boats, they've gone into different kinds of things. But as far as a boat this size, we stick with basics. We stick with we know what works.

NS: Is this the kind of net you would see on a boat fifty, a hundred years ago?

TS: No. Absolutely not.

NS: How is it different?

TS: Because fifty or a hundred years ago, they didn't have otter trawls. This net is dragged along the bottom and held open with those set of boards over there.

NS: Yes, those kinds of doors.

TS: It's held open and it's controlled with the length of cable that we let out behind the doors and the length of cable you let in front of the doors. It's the cable on the doors that are eighty percent of the catching power of this rig. If they're right, I wouldn't say no matter what you have in back of it is going to catch fish. That wouldn't be true. But if it's somewhere in the ballpark, it'll catch. So, we pay a lot of attention to the cables and the trawl doors.

NS: What is this net made of?

TS: This net is made of plastic. It's Japanese seine twine.

NS: So, did you sew all the different parts or does it come...

TS: Oh, no. This webbing comes in a bale. See this? This comes in a bale and we cut it out,

right? We seam the different parts of it together. Here's a seam right here. See?

NS: What is the seam made of? Is this cotton?

TS: It's not so much of what it's made of. It's how we cut the webbing, right?

NS: How do you cut the webbing?

TS: We cut it on tapers. It's all tapered. This one here is a two-to-one tapered net. It's also a four-seam net. I like the four-seam nets better than two-seam nets. They seem to catch better.

NS: Is that something that you have experimented with?

TS: Oh, no. Absolutely not. That's been tried and proven in Italy.

NS: Yes?

TS: Yes.

NS: What are some of the other nets that you have?

TS: We have high-rise nets.

NS: What are those?

TS: They're nets that get up high to catch fish that swim high. But we don't have much of a market for those fish anymore, so we hardly use it. We have the same net as this made out of four inches that we use in the spring for combination fishing or when the wintertime fish are leaving and the summertime fish are coming in. This net doesn't catch the summer fish and the summer net doesn't catch the winter fish. So, we use a combination net.

NS: Is this what you would call a tight-weave net? I am just noticing the square.

TS: What do you mean by tight-weave net?

NS: The squares seem to be pretty small.

TS: They're small because we're catching small fish. We're catching whiting. This is the whiting net.

NS: So, the different squares would be used for different kinds of fish.

TS: Oh, sure. Yes. Plus, also the way the net is cut.

NS: So, the fact that it is tapered?

TS: Right, tapered and the amount of meshes in the wedge.

NS: So, then all drag nets are tapered?

TS: We have different design nets for different kinds of fish.

NS: So, what are the different designs that you use?

TS: Oh, there's so many of them.

NS: That you commonly use?

TS: The ones that I use is this four-seam Italian net. The other one I use, the Yankee thirty-fives.

NS: What are the Yankee thirty-fives?

TS: That's the fluke net.

NS: Do you have one here that you can...

TS: I have one downstairs in the fish holes.

NS: [laughter] Can I see it?

TS: No. [laughter] I'm not opening up that hole. [laughter] No. But there's one down there. It's made out of the same stuff, plastic. The reason we use the plastic is because it doesn't hold as much grass and junk as the nylon nets do. Nylon holds too much grass. But it'll slip right through a plastic net.

NS: What were nets made of, say, fifty years ago?

TS: Cotton.

NS: Do you ever use cotton nets?

TS: No. That was before my time.

NS: How come you use the plastic? Do you know why it changed from cotton to plastic?

TS: Well, the cotton nets used to rip up every day. The salt would rot them. Then they found nylon was much better. Then they took the nylon and they dipped it in tar, which made it last even longer. There is still a lot of nylon that's around. I have two nylons. This is nylon in the back here, see?

NS: Yes.

TS: Because it's strong. It's much stronger than the plastic.

NS: Other than the material, have the designs stayed the same as far as taper?

TS: Pretty much so on boats this size. On bigger boats with bigger power, they've changed quite a bit. Now they have nets with meshes like these, five feet. They taper all the way. They go from five feet to two and a half feet.

NS: So, when you say five feet, each one of these squares would be five feet long?

TS: Right.

NS: What would they use those kinds of nets for?

TS: They use them for herring, butterfish, squid, and porgies. They're pulled on the big boats. We don't have enough market here in this port for that.

NS: So, you are using more of the smaller kinds of nets?

TS: Oh, yes. Well look at the size of the boat. It's a small boat. So, if you want to see some big ones, you go to Point Lookout over to Bruce Larson's dock. There's plenty of big ones.

NS: What happens if one of these rips? I have noticed some of these twines.

TS: I've just all morning, I put it – [laughter]

NS: Are these mending to...

TS: No. This stuff here, I don't want to tell you what this is because it'll make you sick. [laughter]

NS: Tell me. It is not going to make me sick.

TS: [laughter] That's cotton.

NS: Why would that make me sick?

TS: This is all washing machine lint.

NS: So, you wash this in the washing machine?

TS: No. We catch this on the bottom.

NS: [laughter]



TS: Where this comes from is from the birds who carry the sewage out into the oceans.

NS: From the sewage. So, this is not part of the net. [laughter]

TS: This is not part of the net at all. In fact, this comes from sewerage. There are some other horrible things we catch in here besides cotton.

NS: Let us get back to the question. What happens if one of these rips?

TS: That's what I've been all day doing, fixing this.

NS: Can you show me how you do that?

TS: No. I'm in the middle of doing it now. See, that whole? Let me see if I can find one. There should be some more holes in here someplace. Trim it. You take a needle full of twine.

NS: So, it is a plastic needle rather than a real needle.

TS: Everything is plastic.

NS: You twirl it around one of the intact pieces.

TS: There's a piece there. Cut it back.

NS: You cut off another piece?

TS: That's a bad piece.

NS: How can you tell if it is a bad piece?

TS: If it broke.

NS: I did not see that.

TS: See?

NS: Looks just like new.

TS: I just put this one. You see where the new netting is?

NS: Yes. So, you did that whole piece? All of the squares, you did all of those yourself?

TS: Oh, no. You see there's something up there.

NS: So, it came in a pattern.

TS: I had to cut it out so it fit back into the net. See? That's where I sew the pieces together.

NS: So, pretty good handy work you do there.

TS: If you're going to be successful in business, you better learn how to do that.

NS: Is it very hard to learn?

TS: What takes me an hour to do, takes newcomers maybe three days. So, time is money. Also, the chance of getting it back together properly are about eighty-twenty that they won't.

NS: It is interesting in fishing that there are almost two contradictory sets of skills you need. One is to be very strong and have a lot of patience. The other is to be very skillful with your hands.

TS: Yes. Also, where to go.

NS: How did you learn where to go?

TS: Education, training, and experience.

NS: What do you think is the most important?

TS: Most important? Being able to maintain this boat. That is definitely the most important. Of course, number one, when something is broken, you need to get it fixed right away. To be able to get a mechanic down or a net man down or a winch repair man down or someone to splice cables down on a moment's notice, is next to impossible. So, these are all skills you have to develop on your own. Also, the ocean is full of wrecks, and to learn where they are and how to avoid them. What you see here, from the cable on that winch down to the tail bag of this net, represents \$7,000 worth of equipment. If you put it down in the wrong places, you can lose the whole works. So, the most important thing is knowing where to go without ripping up your gear, to start with. Getting out the inlet is important too. You have to learn that.

NS: I guess it is pretty shallow around here.

TS: Yes.

NS: Is this boat have a flat bottom or it has got a flat hull?

TS: No, round. Actually, it's a classic boat. This boat was built by Franklin Post. It's an original Stonington dragger.

NS: Oh, really?

TS: Right. One of the boats that wrote the book on commercial fishing. She is probably one of the best-built boats of her class around.

NS: How did you get it?

TS: When I decided to buy a boat, I looked high and low. When I spotted this one, I fell in love with it. [laughter]

NS: Did you decide that you wanted one of this particular kind of boat?

TS: Yes, I wanted this boat. This particular kind of rig I wanted. There are different kinds of rigs. This one is called a western rig. Why they call it a western rig is beyond me. But they have western rigs and they have eastern rigs and they have stern trawlers. For the kind of fishing I do, I figured that the western rig would be best. I've worked on other types of boats.

NS: How come?

TS: A lot of reasons. Number one, if we hang up on the bottom in shallow water, the gear is far away from the propeller. The net is right over there. On a stern trawler, it would be right under the propeller. Number two, we have a tremendous amount of deck room for working. A stern trawler takes up too much room in a boat this size. In a boat sixty-five feet and over, the stern trawler would be a better way. In a boat this size, we need this room. We fill this whole back up with fish.

NS: About how many fish do you catch in a day?

TS: Yesterday we caught seven thousand pounds.

NS: That is a lot of fish.

TS: The day before we caught seven thousand pounds.

NS: Is that a good day?

TS: They were good days, yes.

NS: How do you know when you think you are going to have a good day fishing?

TS: Weather has a lot to do with it.

NS: For example?

TS: Winds. Nothing stays here on Long Island. Everything is passing through. It does stay for a length of time with the fluke. We catch the fluke as they come in and out. As they're coming in, we catch them. As they're leaving, we catch them. We catch them in dribs and drabs all summer along. Not that much, but the amount of money they're paying for them makes it lucrative for us to fish with. Very desirable fish. As far as bluefish and whatnot go, during the summertime, we don't bother with them because there's not enough money involved. We leave

those for the sports fishermen.

NS: Does wind make for good fishing days?

TS: South wind does. South wind seems to bring fish. It makes a rough ocean. But we always do better when the wind is out of a southerly direction. South to southwest is the best.

NS: What is the worst wind?

TS: The worst is easterly. It makes the ocean very rough. Dries the fish away. A big groundswell is no good either. A nice flat day is the best. Because when you get a groundswell, what happens, the swell goes all the way to the bottom. It stirs up all the mud and junk that's laying on the bottom. It gets in the fish's gills and they can't breathe. So, they come up off the bottom and scatter. Once they're off the bottom and scattered, our nets don't go high enough to catch them.

NS: You can catch them.

TS: This net rises maybe eight, ten feet at the most. Whatever swims above ten feet, we don't catch. So, when the fish come off the bottom, we don't catch them. If there's a groundswell on the ocean, our chances of catching are slim. When the swell first starts, we will because it hasn't turned anything up yet.

NS: Do all fish live at the bottom or...

TS: On the bottom or pretty close to it. There are two kinds of fish. One is called a demersal. The other is a pelagic. A pelagic is a free ocean swimmer. They live up towards the surface like a bluefish. You get a fish like whiting, they're in between. But at the opposite end are the fluke which live on the bottom. They're demersal.

NS: How come you go after the ones that are on the bottom?

TS: They're the ones that bring the most money for us. There are other kinds of boats and other kinds of fishing and catching fish that we don't even know are here. Like the gillnet is in the middle of the summer. They might catch tuna and bonito and mackerel and whatnot. We never see them. Of course, they're way up on the surface.

NS: So, you just do the deep sea.

TS: We do bottom fishing. We trawl the bottom for fish.

NS: You talked about the drag nets. Are there any other types of nets that you use?

TS: Oh, yes. Well not that I use, no.

NS: I know there are other kinds that other people use. There are gillnets and set nets.

TS: There are gillnets, there are purse seines.

NS: Seine nets.

TS: There are all kinds of things. This is what I do.

NS: Any particular reason why?

TS: It's much more steady. People always want flounders. People always want fluke. People are always looking for whiting. So, we stay with the bread and butter. [laughter]

NS: Is that the kind of fish that you also prefer?

TS: I enjoy catching them.

NS: What is the scariest thing that ever happened to you when you got out?

TS: Oh, a lot of things. [laughter] A lot of things have happened. I'm lucky to be alive. [laughter]

NS: Can you tell me one of the things that happened to you?

TS: People working around the ocean stand a good chance of drowning. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: We got caught in a storm on Georges Bank. A pretty good storm.

NS: Was it a hurricane?

TS: It was a good storm. [laughter]

NS: Why do you not sit down?

TS: I was on a boat called (*The David Bryan?*). We had gone up to Georges Bank. Plus, there was no fishing around here. We fished there for two days and we had a lot of trouble while we were fishing because of the leaks in the boat. I told the captain, I said, "Captain Dave, the boat's settling in the water too fast for the amount of fish that we're putting in it." I don't see any leaks or anything. There's no water anywhere. We opened up the spring compartments and there was water right to the deck. So, it was very slick and calm for the time that we were up there. It was only the two of us. It took us forty hours to get there from Newport, Rhode Island, is where we left from. We stopped towing and we looked at the leak. David said, "Well I'm going to jump over the side of the boat and fix the leak." There were four or five big shark fins cutting all around the stern because we were up on a big fishing ground and there were a lot of boats there. So, I said, "Oh no, you're not." [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: I said, "You go in the water and get eaten up. You're not leaving me out here all by myself." [laughter] So, I said, "I'll tell you what, David, you put your snorkel on and I'll hold you by the ankles. If I see a shark coming, I'll pull you out." [laughter] So, he tried to coat the hole in the boat as best he could. When he got done, we went down into the limber holes because they were clogged with sand. The water ran into the fish hole and we could pump it out. While we were laying there, a big boat called the *Bluewater One*, a big eastern rig from Gloucester, hooked up our gear and towed us backwards for two hours.

NS: Oh God.

TS: Nobody spoke English up there. We couldn't find what channels they were on. We were yelling and screaming. There was nobody on deck. They had no idea they were towing us backwards.

NS: Oh no. [laughter]

TS: So, when they woke up the crew to haul back, they saw us in the back of them and hauled back, big mess on their trawl doors. We got everything back into *The David Bryan* and we untangled the mess. We hadn't had any sleep now in three days.

NS: Oh God.

TS: So, we were dead. We untangled the mess and we went to sleep. When we got up in the morning and we could see in the sky the little puffs of cannon smoke, the harbinger of bad weather. We said, "We'll make another couple of tows and we'll get out of here." But we could see the Russian ship, they were anchoring up the (tube rails?), which meant there was a pretty good storm coming according to their forecast. So, we started home. On the way home, the wind would come out of the east, then it would come out of the southeast, to northeast. Pretty soon, it was blowing pretty good. The whole ocean was fairly white. Of course, the leaking in the stern, it opened up again.

NS: Oh, no.

TS: About 5:00 p.m. it was raining and blowing so hard the rain slanted across the deck mixed up with the – it was a complete maelstrom on deck. We were on the deck, the rain hurt my face, it hit so hard. So, about 8:30 p.m., 9:00 p.m., we decided we couldn't make any more headway because the boat was filling up with water. She was sloshing around so violently, there was no way that we could pump it out. Every time we'd put the boat in gear, the stern would open up, more water would come in. So, David was downstairs in the engine room trying to clear the pumps and I was up on deck. We had a hand pump, what we call an Edson mud bog. I was pumping like mad and saying Hail Marys like mad. I figured we had it, the boat was going down. So, I called David and I said, "David, before the water comes over the top of the batteries, don't you think you ought to call the Coast Guard?" He said, "That's a good idea." So, he called.

We were up on Little Georges and we called Chatham Coast Guard. They got us, barely. They sent the helicopter out, but they went to the wrong boat. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: We were so tiny out there. Who would expect to look for a tiny little boat all the way out there? That's big-boat territory. So, they hovered over a Russian ship that was maybe five miles from us.

NS: [laughter] They were going to give the Russian help?

TS: They said, "No, we're not the ones that are in trouble. It's the little guy over there."

NS: [laughter]

TS: So, they came over and they dropped us three Homelite pumps. We put one on the lazarette, one on the fish hole, one in the engine room, and the boat got dried out. Then the helicopter left. I said, "Oh my God, where is he going?" [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: So, anyway, the Russian came alongside and he yells, "Hey, Captains, you need assistance?" That's the only thing that they knew.

NS: [laughter]

TS: We said, "Yes. Yes." [laughter]

NS: You did not care who they were.

TS: Yes. So, they threw us a line. On the end of the line was a bigger line and a bigger line and a bigger line. Finally, we came to one of their main towing wires, which was about that big around that they wanted us to put on the front of the boat. I said, "No." I didn't want that because if anything happened, I couldn't cut it. So, I made them understand I wanted rope. So, they tied us up. I'm telling you, when the boat was dried out and we were tied up in the back of that Russian, I didn't care where they towed us. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: I was just so happy that we were alive.

NS: How long ago was that?

TS: August 16th, 1978.

NS: Oh, it is ten years ago.

TS: So, what happened after that, a big Coast Guard cutter came along about 4:00 a.m. The name of the boat was *The Chilula*. It was a light station boat and also a patrol boat for Georges Bank. They came alongside and the Russian cast us off. They hooked us up and they towed us into Newport, Rhode Island. Took them three days and two nights to get us into Newport.

NS: Oh my God.

TS: I got on the land. We packed off the boat and I went home. I had to hitch a ride home because I lived in Oakdale at the time. When I got home, my wife looked at me and said, "Oh, it's you. You are supposed to be dead." I said, "What do you mean I'm supposed to be dead?" She said, "Well, your brother's wife, Kathy, called last night and said that you had drowned." I said, "What do you mean drowned? Whoever said anything like that?" As it turned out, she got the tail end of a news broadcast that somebody with a last name that sounded very similar to mine who worked for a local had drowned somewhere over in the North Shore. It so happened it was at the same night and the same hour that we almost bought it. [laughter]

NS: Oh, God.

TS: So, that was the closest I ever came. But they were looking for two boats that night. They were looking for us and another one called the (*Ellen B. Travis?*). The *Ellen Travis* was a swordfish boat. She had eleven men aboard. She went down with all eleven men.

NS: Trouble you ever had catching fish, personally?

TS: Oh, porgies on Long Island Sound. A lot of trouble. I couldn't catch them. Everybody else around was catching them and I couldn't catch them. We changed everything on the boat and everything we did made everything just worse. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: Then we finally hit upon the right – it took two years before I learned how to catch them. Then they weren't there anymore. So, we gave up on that. That was one of the hardest times I ever had trying to catch something.

NS: Is it because of where the fish were?

TS: The gear was wrong, the trawl doors, the wires, everything was wrong. I didn't know any better.

NS: Is this when you first began?

TS: Yes. Well things are pretty easy for me now.

NS: I imagine you have caught just about everything.



TS: I have. But things are okay.

NS: What was the scariest fish you ever caught? [laughter]

TS: I'm not afraid of anything.

NS: Never caught a shark or...

TS: Yes, we caught sharks. We swam with whales.

NS: Yes?

TS: Yes.

NS: What would happen when you would catch a shark? You remember one time?

TS: Yes. We had what we estimated around a three-pound tiger shark in the net. All we saw was the bag of fish and this giant tail sticking out of the top of the fish. My mate, I called the fearless leader, said, "Don't worry about a thing. I'll take care of this." [laughter] So, we pulled the tripper on the bottom of the net and we were both in the cabin before the first fish hit the deck. [laughter]

NS: What is a tripper?

TS: It's at the back of the net. When we let them out, we pull the tripper and it opens up the neck.

NS: So, you?

TS: So, he was too beautiful a creature to kill. We don't like to kill things unless we have to. We'd rather let them go. There's nothing wrong with the shark. He's only doing what he's supposed to do. So, we hoisted him up by the tail and got him rolling pretty good this way. When he got him over the side...

NS: He was on deck?

TS: That shark was so strong, he was able to curl around and try and bite the rope that was holding him up by the tail.

NS: Oh my God.

TS: Talk about strength.

NS: [laughter]

TS: He was some creature. You could see the muscles rippling in his side. I said, "Boy, that

thing doesn't deserve to die." So, we let him go. We don't have to kill everything that comes out of the sea.

NS: Did he just jump off the deck?

TS: Oh, he was stunned. But he swam around a little bit and then he took off.

NS: [laughter]

TS: I said, "Goodbye shark." [laughter]

NS: [laughter] Did you ever have a fish try to attack you?

TS: No.

NS: Yes?

TS: No, nothing like that. We've had whale swim with us.

NS: Yes?

TS: Oh, a good six, eight hours. We've ever had the black whales up by Nauset Beach that's off the cape.

NS: What was that like?

TS: I was very proud. It's a privilege to see something like that.

NS: How close did he come?

TS: The fact is we had a little white beluga that lived here for two years. He got to know the fishing boats. He would come and play with us. When we hauled the gear back, he'd come and bite the chains. He liked us to squirt him with the deck hose and he'd blow back at us. He hung around down by Fire Island when he hung around here. But it was one of the highlights to the day when the whale came alongside. We'd pat him on the head and squirt him with the hose and he'd blow us back with the water. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: He was a very smart creature.

NS: So, he just swam with you?

TS: Yes. He'd swim with us all day long. He wouldn't eat anything, though. We tried to feed him fish and whatnot, he wouldn't eat them. But we took tuna fish out of our hands, pulled the whiting over the side of the boat like that.

NS: [laughter]

TS: Just throw a few in the water. Dangle it. The tuna fish comes up from under the boat, rolls on the side and grabs the whiting out of your hand. So, besides earning a living, we have a lot of fun.

NS: Sounds like you get along well with fish.

TS: I get along well with everything.

NS: Did you grow up around the water? Where did you grow up?

TS: New York City.

NS: Whereabout?

TS: Flushing.

NS: What made you pick a life on the water? You could be your own boss doing lots of things.

TS: Sure. But there is no spirit of adventure involved in that. This is adventure. It's different every time you go out. That's another reason why I like it. Everything is different every day. Plus, there's a little bit of danger involved and I like that.

NS: You like the challenge?

TS: Yes. I can't live without it.

NS: What other things do you like about being a fisherman?

TS: Well, we ran across a number of items I already told you about. I have to think about that. Maybe I should write an essay.

NS: That would be great. You know Carmine?

TS: Excuse me?

NS: Carmine Marinnacio writes a lot.

TS: Oh, you know Carmine?

NS: Yes. I talked with him yesterday.

TS: I'm pretty good friends with his brother, Bobby. But there's a lot of things. The people who work with me feel the same way. It's kind of a camaraderie, kind of a closeness or oneness with

nature.

NS: I have an interesting question. Are there any women who are in fishing or is it pretty much men?

TS: Once in a while, a woman comes along here.

NS: Around here it is all men.

TS: Yes. The deck of the dragger is no place for a girl. In Australia, they use a lot of women on the boats.

NS: Really?

TS: The Russians take their women with them when they go to sea for six months.

NS: [laughter]

TS: But around here, I don't think the wives would like it very much if we had a girl (at the bay?) [laughter]

NS: [laughter] Your ancestry, where did your family...

TS: I'm Norwegian.

NS: Norwegian?

TS: Yes. I'm Norwegian heritage.

NS: So, were any of them ever fishermen or...

TS: No, they're farmers. They all come from the Dakotas. They're so happy there's a fisherman in the family.

NS: [laughter] I have a friend who works in North Dakota doing what I do, goes around interviewing people.

TS: [laughter] You're not bad at it.

NS: I like boats. I like fishermen. I grew up around boat, so I am used to it.

TS: This is quite a boat.

NS: I am just trying to think about nationalities.

TS: Oh, they run the gamut. They definitely run the gamut. There's no particular nationality.

Other ports there are. Like up in Provincetown, they're all Portuguese. Some other places, all Italian. Like in Gloucester, they're all Italian. Down here towards the city more, there's people from all walks of life that are fishermen. They all have their own reasons for doing it. Some stay, some don't. The mortality rate amongst fishermen is very high, because you can go broke in a hurry. [laughter]

NS: [laughter] You got to know what you are doing.

TS: You have to know what you're doing.

NS: What do you think about these charter fishermen?

TS: They leave me alone. I leave them alone. They don't try to hog all the fish for themselves. Don't get started on that.

NS: [laughter] Do you think that they are a different breed of fishermen, guys from these charter boats?

TS: They're more into (flashing crap and crump?) I think so anyway. Yes, they're different than we are. Very different. We're loners. We don't associate with them at all. There's a camaraderie amongst ourselves. We keep it that way.

NS: So, who are your friends along here?

TS: My friends along here? Well, you can go to every trawler up and down the street and I know them. Montauk, Shinnecock, Newport, Rhode Island, Venus, West Virginia. Cape May, Manasquan. I'll go anywhere and be well received.

NS: Wow. Been in the business a while, I guess.

TS: Seventeen years.

NS: One of the rewards.

TS: Yes, it is. It's nice being a man amongst men.

NS: Yes. Must be nice.

TS: It is. Some of the things that we do would give a heart attack to a normal person. [laughter]

NS: [laughter] Like what?

TS: Try going through a breaking inlet at 2:00 a.m.

NS: What happens?

TS: Huh?

NS: If you do not know what you are doing?

TS: If you don't know what you're doing?

NS: Yes.

TS: [laughter] Have you been really scared?

NS: Oh, sure.

TS: Scared out of your wits?

NS: Oh, yes. There were times I did not think I was going to live.

TS: So, you know that.

NS: On a boat, it was in fact. One time I was on a sixty-foot boat. It was a sailboat and we were coming down from Maine. We hit a hurricane coming off the coast. Sixty-foot boat, it is not enough boat.

TS: Excuse me. Come on. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: They've been trying to get that thing going for two days.

NS: [laughter]

TS: It's almost there.

NS: Anyway, there were about five of us on the boat. I was one of the people who was pulling in ropes and stuff. I was strong, but how strong can a woman like me be? I did not think I was going to live through that, but somehow, we did. [laughter]

TS: We do it on a daily basis.

NS: What happens when you come in one those inlets? What can go wrong?

TS: You could turn the boat over.

NS: Can you hit rocks?

TS: No, the waves are so powerful, you can turn the boat over.

NS: So, how do you overcome that?

TS: Through seamanship, confidence. Confidence in yourself and your boat and in your equipment.

NS: Are there different ways you maneuver a power boat through those inlets?

TS: Yes, there are.

NS: What happens if there is a southerly wind directly in front of you and you have to go north?

TS: You have a head sea. You have to know how much of a head sea your boat can take.

NS: What is a head sea?

TS: If you are going into the sea, that's a head sea.

NS: How far your nose is going down.

TS: Right. Are you going to break a plank? If you're pushing the boat too hard, you're going to pop a plank, you can break the window out, wash the nets off the deck. I'll show you a picture. But it can kill you.

NS: What are some of the other things you have to look out for that a beginner would not know?

TS: The wrecks on the bottom.

NS: How can you tell if there is a wreck on the bottom?

TS: With LORAN numbers, if they've been hit. When you hit them, you write the numbers down.

NS: So, you carry around a map that charts all the banks?

TS: We carry around a list of numbers. That's where we tell. Now I'm changing this net. That will make the net go down to the bottom a little harder.

NS: By putting chains on the end?

TS: Well just that little bit. Now I pull over here. Now we're catching vomit. Otherwise, we would catch it like this.

NS: Did it take you a while to learn where particular kinds of fish like to be in the ocean?

TS: Yes.

NS: How long would...

TS: I learned by just doing what the old-timers did.

NS: Yes?

TS: I did exactly what they did. I copied their rigs and I did what they did. I just watched them. When I got to know them, then they would start telling me some things. But the first six months I was in the business, they wouldn't even say hello. Very clandestine.

NS: Rites of passage, we call it.

TS: What do you call it?

NS: Rites of passage.

TS: I like that.

NS: They got to see if you are serious.

TS: That's exactly right.

NS: Who were some of the people that you learned from?

TS: Some of the people I learned from?

NS: Around here.

TS: Frank Cona and Charlie Cona. I learned a lot from those two.

NS: How old were they?

TS: Well, Charlie is sixty-five now and Frank just turned sixty.

NS: They are not much older than you. Well, twenty years.

TS: Yes, close enough. Billy Granau was another one. Billy taught me discipline. He taught me how to work on my own.

NS: What kinds of qualities did he teach you?

TS: Works habits. Work habits are so important especially when you're on your own.

NS: Discipline?

TS: Because there is no one to tell you to do this or do that. He taught me the discipline to know



what I have to do on my own. Takes a tremendous amount of discipline to be able to work on your own. There's a lot of fellows who would waste a day because there is no one telling them what to do. Now a person like that needs direction. A person like that shouldn't be involved in anything on his own.

NS: Who works for you?

TS: Cory Weyant? You know Cory?

NS: No.

TS: Cory does his smoking up the street here. He's worked for me for three and a half years. Tuesday, we have another job for him. My son is coming on the boat, I'm going to break him in.

NS: Really?

TS: I like that Cory understands that. The fact is, if a guy was going to have a son, Cory would make a great one. We get along famously. A little on the wild side, but so was I when I was a young buck. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

TS: So, let him be wild.

NS: You think it helps to be wild when you are first starting or you got to tame it down?

TS: No. It doesn't help to be wild at all. But Cory is just basically wild. No matter what he did for a living, he'd be wild. But he's growing up in spite of himself. He's thirty-one years old now, thinking about getting married. I'm very sorry he's not going to be on the boat. Told him if I was fifteen years older, I'd give it to him and Joey and let them run it. I'd step off. There are other things that I'd like to get involved in. But I don't want to do that until Joey is well trained. I want to get more involved in marketing. I pack all my own fish here and I sell them all over the place.

NS: Who does that?

TS: Excuse me?

NS: Do you take it around to all the stores and stuff?

TS: No. We have a trucker doing that. But I take care of it at home on the phone. I sell all my own fish at different markets. I sell to New York a lot, New York Fulton Fish Market.

NS: Some of these ropes look like they were genuine hemp, some of them? No?

TS: No. This is all nylon.

NS: That is nylon? I guess it has been weathered so much.

TS: Actually, it's a combination. See the little gloss in these, you know there's different stuff added to it. Straight nylon stretches too much, so they add Dacron to it to keep it from stretching. This has Dacron in it.

[end of transcript]