

Nancy Solomon: This is Nancy Solomon, talking with Bob Bourguignon, also known as Goulet, on May 30, 1997. Bob is a clammer and bayman in Flanders.

Bob Bourguignon: The business comes in flourish. They all come at once, and then you'll sit there for half an hour and nobody will stop. It happens all the time.

NS: Well, you were just telling me the boats that come to a point. What do you call those?

BB: They're sharpies. They originated from early, early colonial times. Flat bottom, straight sides, no flare, boats that work in shallow water, steady platform to stand on, work on. You can stand up in the boat and move around without the thing tipping. Operating in shallow water, in the shallow bays, that's what they were designed for.

NS: What do you use it for?

BB: Well, I use it for clamming. I use it for running my nets and things like that. I like to have two boats in operation because I do so many things. Usually, in the summer, I have one boat rigged up for running crab traps and have my crabbing gear in that. The other one, I use for clamming and musselling and mostly everything else. Then when scallop season opens, I have one boat set up for scalloping with all the dredges in it, because I tow ten dredges. To take them in and out of the boat every day is a lot of work. So, I like to keep one boat just for scalloping, and the other I use for everything else.

NS: What kind of boat do you use for the scalloping?

BB: I got a garvey, an eighteen-foot garvey with a fifty-five horse outboard on it.

NS: The clamming, what kind of boat do you use for that? The sharpie?

BB: Yes, the sharpie. Must have saw something he liked.

NS: So, when you go out clamming, do you have an average take on the number of clams that you are getting these days?

BB: Well, not really. I work for my stand here. I don't do much wholesale in the summertime. I mostly catch what I need on the stand. So, I'll go out and I'll catch what I think I'm going to sell on the weekend. That's what I basically do.

NS: So, how much is that? Just so I can get an idea.

BB: Well, it all depends on the weather, how late into the season you are. As you start to get into the summer, business picks up, and then it drops off after Labor Day. This business is basically between Memorial Day and Labor Day. That's when the heavy volume of business is. Before that, you're just kind marking time, sort of. It's the vacation land out here. Everybody comes out to the Hamptons and they want the Long Island seafood and all that sort of thing. So, we try to provide it for them and make a living in the interim.

NS: Well, how much did you sell last week? I know it was a holiday weekend.

BB: Don't you think that's a kind of a personal question? [laughter]

NS: No, I do not. [laughter]

BB: Well, I do.

NS: What would you consider to be a good harvest for a day, if you were to go out?

BB: A good harvest of what?

NS: You tell me.

BB: A good harvest of what? The hard clams?

NS: Yes.

BB: Around here? Clamming is terrible around here. Hard clamming is terrible. I'm going to have to get out of this town this summer to get enough clams for my business, I think. I'm probably going to have to go up to Huntington or something like that to go clamming this summer a couple of days a week. Either that, or I'll have to buy clams. I won't be able to catch them up here for the stand, the way it looks.

NS: Had it always been like that?

BB: No, it's been just in decline.

NS: When it was good, what kind of harvests were you getting?

BB: Well, there were times when you could do three count bags or something in a day, but you can't do that anymore.

NS: Have you always had to have a combination of things?

BB: Now, you're lucky now if you catch five hundred, six hundred littlenecks by count a day on the average now, around here.

NS: When you first came out here, what brought you out to Flanders?

BB: I don't know. Any number of things. I was looking for a place that had some property and was affordable. That's about it. I own three acres of land. Owning three acres on Long Island is unusual for a moderate-income person. But in Flanders, it was affordable. So, that's why I came here.

NS: Is this part of the bay better than other parts of the bay?

BB: What do you mean, this part?

NS: The Flanders area.

BB: Well, Flanders Bay, for shell fishing, it's what we call a seasonal – not a seasonal area, but a conditional area. It's only open in the winter, and it's only open if there's no rainfall within seven days. So, this bay is closed more than it's open.

NS: About how many days out of the year is it closed?

BB: I don't know the exact number. It's how many days is it open. You'd have to get that figure from the Conservation Department. I don't know exactly. Some years, it's wetter than others.

NS: When you go clamming, what are some of the basic tools that you use? Do you use different kinds of tools depending upon what kinds of clams you are harvesting?

BB: Oh, sure, yes. Clamming is no different than farming. I mean, you need all different kinds of tools and things to do different jobs. It's basically the same thing.

NS: What are some of the different tools that you use?

BB: Well, you use rakes and tongs, and you can catch clams any number of ways. You can feel them with your feet, treading, and you can...

NS: Do you do that?

BB: Not much anymore. I used to years ago, but I mostly use a rake now.

NS: What kind of rake is it? Is it a hand rake?

BB: Yes, hand rakes, with a little bit of extension handles. Around here, the water is reasonably shallow. You don't need too long a handle. It's good for old guys.

NS: How shallow is the water? What is the depth of the water where you are clamming?

BB: Well, some places, at low tide, it's only a foot deep or so. Other places, it's a little deeper. But we don't work here much over ten or twelve feet of water. Most of the clamming is under twelve feet of water around here.

NS: Are there different kinds of clams in different types of water?

BB: Different kinds? Yes. We've got these little things that are called butter clams out here that you don't see too much. I sort of developed a market on them. Nobody bothered with them around here until I came here. People thought you couldn't eat them, but you can eat them if you

cook them. They're quite tasty. If you get a little bit creative, you can make a nice dish out of them. I sell quite a few of them every year. So, I sort of developed an underutilized species that, as of yet, nobody else has really cashed in on. But it's all right.

NS: Where do you find the butter clams?

BB: In these local bays. There are certain areas where they're more plentiful than others. Mostly in the deeper water you find them. You don't find them up on the flats much. In the muddy bottom, you'd see the most of them.

NS: About how deep is the water there?

BB: Ten feet, nine feet, eight feet, like that.

NS: How long have you been out here?

BB: Since [19]84.

NS: How come you ended up here, besides the affordability of the land?

BB: We sort of came like the pilgrims on a boat. We landed here at Shinnecock. I was on a dragger, and we were fishing out of Newport, Rhode Island, and out of New Bedford, working on yellowtails and stuff in the winter, me and a couple other guys. The price of fish was better here. We put in here. We sold a couple of trips of fish down in Shinnecock, and we got more money than we were getting up in New England for our fish. So, we started fishing out of here. At the time, I was in the process of getting divorced, losing my home. I was living on the boat and was looking for another place to settle down. The fish prices were good here, and I had some relatives in this town. I know some people out here. Maybe I'll look around here and settle down here. I was going to buy a place up in Rhode Island. I was looking at a farm up in Rhode Island. So, we decided to stay here.

NS: What are the main activities, shell fishing, things that you harvest and that you sell?

BB: The biggest thing out here on the east end has always been scallops. The Long Island Bay scallop is – Peconic Bay scallop is known all over the world. Restaurants in Paris, in London, Rome, it's known worldwide, and this is where they come from. Unfortunately, in recent years, the brown tide and stuff has depleted the stocks, and the harvests are nowhere near what they used to be. Matter of fact, last year, there wasn't even a harvest. The first year in anybody can remember that there wasn't any scallops. That has always been the big mainstay of the baymen out here. That is the reason that there aren't many baymen left is because the scallops are gone. That was what everybody thrived on. That was where they made most of their money every year.

NS: When you would go scalloping, where would you go?

BB: Well, wherever you found scallops. They usually turn up in the same places from year to

year within – certainly in Peconic Bay here. There used to be, right outside of Flanders Bay here, what they called a cow yard. It was one of the big hotspots of scallops. Sag Harbor's another good place. Greenport, up and down the Peconic system. Sometimes, they turn up in Shinnecock Bay, sometimes in Moriches. Here's a man you should talk to right here. This guy's a shellfish dealer.

NS: Oh, no. I am not talking to dealers.

BB: Oh, no? He's a bayman also.

NS: Then I will talk to him.

BB: He's a school teacher. He's a retired school teacher.

NS: Were scallops – did they favor shallow water, deep water bank areas?

BB: In recent years, they've been mostly in the shallow water. Years ago, you used to see them more in the deeper water. I think the reason for that is that the sunlight hasn't been able to penetrate the water. The clarity of the water hasn't been very good in these recent years with one thing or another, algae blooms and so on and so on. We used to find scallops in some of the deep channels and things like that. But now, they're mostly out in the shallow water. You don't see them in the deeps anymore much.

NS: Were there particular channels that you would see them in?

BB: Yes. There were areas out in Sag Harbor on deep edges and stuff were they used to set. Sometimes, when you found them in those deep edges, they'd be really thick, too. You could really whack them.

NS: Do they have names, those channels, those edge areas?

BB: Yes.

NS: What are some of the names where you would find them?

BB: Black Dog Rock and the Ferry Channel and things like that. I'm not really that familiar with the – because I'm not from out there, I don't know the names of everything out there. Most of the stuff isn't on the chart. They're just local names. But that Black Dog was a big spot. I haven't seen scallops there in quite a few years, but that was an area they would show up on. Noyack Bay, some of the deep spots off those edges there, there would be scallops. But they haven't showed up there in quite a few years either.

NS: In those days, when the scalloping was good, what was considered a good catch for a day?

BB: Well, ten bushel is the limit. You could only take ten bushel, and it was how quickly you could get your limit. If you could be in by 10:00, 11:00 with a limit of scallops, that was good.

NS: About how many days of scalloping was there in a good season?

BB: Well, the scallop season runs from – well, it used to start in the second Monday of September. But now, it opens in October and it runs up until March.

NS: I am talking about like ten years ago when you first came out here. What would have been a good number of days that you could go scalloping?

BB: Well, it varies from year to year. If you had a good year – and it depends on the man too. I mean, some guys will persevere. You got like opening day, and everybody's out there. There's a million boats out there and everybody's out scalloping. After the first couple of days, the cream is just taken off the top. Then all these part-time guys will go back to their jobs, back to their town jobs, they're banging nails or whatever else they do. Then the hardcore baymen will settle in for the winter and see how long you can work on it. In a good year, you can go right through the season, right up until March. I mean, you won't be catching your limit or anything like that, but as the catches declined, the price goes up. So, dollar value, you'll still come out. As long as you can make a day's pay, pay your expenses and come out with a day's wages, it would keep going. So, sometimes, if the price would get high, you could work only on three bushel. You'd take them home and open them yourself. If you've got good money for the scallops, that's all you needed to make a day's work.

NS: Has it been as bad a decline in the clamming as it has been in the scalloping?

BB: The clamming in this town is in serious, serious decline. I don't know why. It's the worst I've seen it since I've lived here, right now. This summer here, the summer of [19]97, is the worst I've seen it since I've lived here. It's getting to the point where you've got to work almost all day to catch a bushel of littlenecks, and maybe a handful of other stuff along with it. So, that's not good. I mean, the average guy around here now is catching six or seven hundred necks a day and working seven or eight hours to do it, seven hours – six, seven hours anyway. That is not good.

NS: We were talking about how the butter clams you would find in the deeper waters?

BB: Yes.

NS: Where would you find littlenecks?

BB: They could be anywhere. They could be in shallow water, deep water. It can be anywhere. Certain types of bottom that they seem to set in and stuff. But we had a little set here last year along the real shallow water down the south side of Shinnecock along the beach. At low tide, it was almost bare. There was a little set of necks there. But there's scratch raker's that have been working on them pretty steady. We had another management area over in North Sea Harbor where we were only allowed to go there one day a week and take two bushel. But that was a blessing, because you could go there on Tuesday morning and get two bushel of littlenecks and be out of there by 10:00 or 11:00, which was great, and then go ahead and do something else if

you wanted to. But that's pretty well depleted now. You can't catch two bushel there if you work all day. It's still only open on Tuesday. That's just about the same as every other spot. There's not much left.

NS: The scratch rakers, are those other baymen or they are...

BB: They're baymen.

NS: They tend to be part-time or they are full-time?

BB: No, they're full-time scratch rakers. That's all they do. Some guys are kind of like – they don't like to work out of the boats. They like to walk, wade around in the water. That's what they do.

NS: Are they old-timers, newcomers?

BB: Yes, there's some new and some young. It's different guys. That's the very, very basic bottom of the pile, whereas you don't need any investment, except maybe you need a scratch rake and an inner tube. You don't even need a boat. You can just drive your car or truck or whatever you got down to the shore and wade off and scratch around. however many clams you get, you put them in your basket and take them up to the dealer and get your money. You got basically no investment there other than a license. You got to have a license. Is that something that a full-time bayman who's in it for the long haul would do?

BB: Yes, some of them do it. That's all they do. They eke out a living at it. It's not a great living, but it's survival is basically what it is. They're surviving.

NS: How many guys do that full-time? Just a rough guess.

BB: Oh, there's maybe half a dozen guys that do that in this town full-time.

NS: So, it is a small portion of...

BB: We all have, but in this town, clambers, I don't think there's ten guys that make a living clamming here strictly the whole year around. I don't even think there is ten guys. I mean, I don't consider myself a clammer. I mean, I go clamming, but I do everything else too. I have a retail business. So, I don't know. I don't know what you'd call me.

NS: A traditional bayman, diversifying. [laughter]

BB: Yes, I'm diversifying. I'm very diversified.

NS: The chowder clams and the – what is the other clam that I forgot the name of?

BB: Butter clams?

NS: No, no.

BB: Cherrystones?

NS: Cherrystones, thank you. Do you find those in particular kinds of waters or particular areas of the estuary?

BB: Well, they're just the older clams. They're the same as littlenecks. It's just that they're older and bigger. They just tend to turn up where they always were – older beds that haven't been overharvested. They tend to turn up chowders. There's not a lot of any hard clams in this town. It's very difficult to make a living here on the water. That's why there aren't many guys who –

NS: I notice you have some oysters. Are those grown from the seeds that they have been planting or where...

BB: Those oysters, I harvested last winter in Long Island Sound. I put them on a lease that I have. I ran a little piece of bottom from a trawler, and I keep them there. I just take out what I need every week for the stand. I take a couple of bushel up to sell on the stand. So, I basically harvested them last February or January. They came from over by Smithtown, Smithtown Bay. That's where they came from.

NS: So, how many duck farms were around here? Do you know?

BB: I don't honestly know. There were a lot. There was one right across the street here. I honestly don't know how many there were, but there's only a handful left. There's only four or five left on the whole island, I think. I have a friend that owns one down in Eastport. They've been in it for generations.

NS: When did the one across the street close, if you had to guess?

BB: I don't know. It just closed before I moved here. I've been here thirteen years. It was probably eighteen years ago, maybe, give or take.

NS: So, we were talking about duck farms and the shellfish beds.

BB: Yes. Well, a lot of the local baymen around here think that when they closed up the duck farms, that was the end of the good clamming. That's sort of consensus of opinion among a lot of the baymen. I don't know.

NS: Were the clam beds near the duck farms?

BB: Yes.

NS: How big were the duck farms?

BB: Acres or duck? I think they go by how many ducks they raise. I don't know those figures.



NS: What about acres?

BB: Duck farms aren't really that big acres as compared to a vegetable farm or a dairy farm or chum farm or something like that, because you can raise a lot of ducks in a confined area. I don't know. I guess an average duck farm would probably be, what, five acres, six acres or maybe something like that? Less? I don't know. Whatever. Ten acres, maybe. They were all different sizes according to how many ducks they raised.

NS: Were there particular things that the clams liked that was on the duck farm? What was happening that you would think the clams...

BB: I don't know. I mean, I don't know if it has anything to do with it. It's just a coincidence. A lot of people think that it has something to do with it.

NS: About how many clam beds were around at that time?

BB: Well, the beds are still there. The bottom is still there, but they don't produce like they used to. You don't get the sets of seed like they used to get. Why? I don't know.

NS: Wow, look at the size of that crab.

BB: Yes, he's a nice one.

NS: About how many clams traditionally would come out each year? Care to take a guess?

BB: I don't know. I mean, I haven't lived around here that long.

NS: From what you hear and what you know.

BB: It's hard to go by what you hear, because stories have a way of getting built up as they're told from one person to the other. But I know my uncle worked on the water here years ago, and they did some pretty good clamming. The equipment that they had to harvest, which wasn't the best – they had these old Shinnecock rakes and wooden handles. A lot of them didn't even have motors. They'd row out or whatever, and they seemed to be able to make a living in those days like that. But if you had to use that equipment today, you couldn't catch enough clams to eat. But like I say, there are areas around Long Island that there's plenty of clams. For some reason or other, over the North Shore's got a good set of stuff, oysters and clams over there. We don't seem to get the set on the South Shore here in recent years.

NS: What was your uncle's name?

BB: (Beaky Kazovsky?), but he's been dead for years, from Hampton Bays.

NS: What kinds of shellfish did he harvest?

BB: Clams and scallops and mussels. He'd use it all around the bay. He caught eels and he caught gillies for bait and shiners. They did pretty much everything there was to do. They were fishermen too. They were swordfishermen. In the summer, they used to go swordfishing right off the beach here. They didn't have to go far. They had a little boat, and they would just ride around here with a harpoon and stick enough swordfish to get the week's work out of it.

NS: Did he use the same tools that you use?

BB: Well, their stuff was a little more primitive. Ours is a little more refined. In those days –

NS: What are some of the differences?

BB: Well, they had those old rakes that they made with a hand forge. They didn't have the electric welding equipment, the stuff that they have today, and the heat-treated teeth – they're thin, and they last a long time. They didn't have the access to that kind of equipment. Nobody did. A lot of the guys made their own rakes in those days, and dredges and things.

NS: Did your uncle?

BB: No. There was a fellow here in town made them. Ray Jackson, his name was, in Hampton Bays. He made a rake they called the Shinnecock rake. Most of the guys around here bought his rakes.

NS: What was the Shinnecock rake?

BB: I have a couple of them hanging into barn. They're antiques now. They were hand-forged. Actually, the tooth of the rake was made with a basket too. It was all one piece. The basket and tooth were all one piece of metal. It's just the way it was shaped. They were shaped by a blacksmith on a forge with an anvil and a hammer. That's the way they made them.

NS: About how wide are they?

BB: Well, they went by the number of teeth. They made them thirty, forty, fifty teeth like that, as much as you could pick up. They were pretty heavy.

NS: Did your uncle use all three sizes or did he prefer one?

BB: I guess he had all different kinds of stuff. I don't have any rakes that he owned, actually. But some of the similar ones made by the same guy, I have hanging in the barn. They're antiques.

NS: How many teeth do the rakes you use have?

BB: Well, I'm getting old, so I don't pull the big ones any more. I have them up to thirty teeth, but I don't use the thirties too much anymore. They're kind of hard on me. I use mostly a twenty-two tooth. In that range, twenty, twenty-two, twenty-four, twenty-six tooth rake now.

NS: Do you make them?

BB: No.

NS: Where do you get them?

BB: They're made by different factories. There's a fellow up in Babylon makes them, (Armor Instrument?) in Babylon. Then there's a guy up on Cape Cod that makes them, Ron Ribb. There was another fellow over in Huntington that made rakes. What the heck is the name of that outfit? Houston Engineering or something like that. He's out of business now.

NS: Is the guy in Babylon still around?

BB: Yes, he still makes them in Babylon.

NS: What is his name?

BB: Ray Schmidt, Armor Instrument. You should go talk to him. He's a nice guy. Tell him that you know me. Pretty much everybody around Long Island that has clam rakes has got one of his rakes.

NS: Besides Ray Jackson, were there any other people around here who made some of the tools for baymen?

BB: There was an old blacksmith that made scallop dredges out in Greenport. I don't know, I think he's dead now. He made the best scallop dredges around for years and years. Everybody's got his dredges. They're big, heavy, sloop dredges. The Greenport dredges, they called them.

NS: Do you know his name?

BB: No. He was a little old guy. He had a shop in Greenport. I think they took his shop and they resurrected it someplace or other. The place was so old, it was sinking in the ground. He had a forge and an anvil and that too. He's only been out of business maybe eight, ten years now, that guy.

NS: He is still alive?

BB: We had a guy in Freeport that made stuff, (Ted Videl?).

NS: Yes, Theodore Videl. He has been dead for a long time.

BB: He's been dead for a long time. In my lifetime, I bought stuff from him when I was young. I had Ted Videl spears and anchors and grapples and stuff like that from Ted Videl. I wish I still had it. They're worth money now. I think my girlfriend has some of his eel spears in her collection.

NS: Did you find that there were certain tools worked better than others for the shell fishing?

BB: Oh, yes.

NS: What worked best, for instance, for clamming?

BB: Well, one thing will work here and another thing will work there. There's different types of rakes with different types of bottom, different depths of water, hard-bottom rakes, mud rakes, different areas. Same thing with dredges. There's different types of dredges that will work in different areas. Some will work better in grass than others. Some will work better in deeper water. A lot of guys improvise, and they modify existing stuff, too, to try and get at the fish better.

[audio break]

NS: This is side two of my interview with Bob – how do you pronounce your last name?

BB: Bourguignon.

NS: Bourguignon, okay. Today is June 1, 1997. This is Nancy Solomon. You were talking about there are hard-bottom rakes and mud rakes. What are some of the other different names of different rakes?

BB: Well, a lot of the names of the rakes are named after guys that kind of had an idea and went to a rake maker and told, "This is what I want." If the thing worked out pretty good and that design caught on, that guy's name sort of stayed with the rake. There's what they call a German rake, which didn't come from Germany. The guy that kind of had that idea's name was John German, so they called it a German rake. Then there's a Spike rake. The guy's name was Spike something or other that invented that. They had what they call a (Butera?) rake. The fellow that made those rakes was John Butera. His son took over the business. He was from Fort Jefferson, and his son took over the business. He moved out the riverhead here. Now, he's out of business, so he doesn't make rakes anymore. They were good rakes too. They were good mud rakes, Butera rakes.

NS: The German rake, what kind of rake was that used for?

BB: Well, that was sort of like the forerunner of a hard-bottom rake. Now, the rakes they got now, they have real short teeth. They only work in certain areas. They only work up the clams that are really up too. They use them around Patchogue a lot.

NS: In appearance, did the scallop rakes look like the clam rakes?

BB: Well, they mostly mainly take scallops with dredges. They don't look anything like a clam rake. They're totally different. They're designed scrape over the top to the bottom. The clam rake is designed to actually dig in and dig down.

NS: So, what would a scallop rake look like – or the scallop dredge?

BB: The scallop dredge, it's a frame with a blade, and it has a bag on the back of it. The bottom part of the bag is made out of chain link, and the top part is made out of twine. It's called a twine top. It has a bridle or a bail that forms a V and an I up in the front where you attach the line to it, and you tow it. They're generally towed in gangs of dredges. The front ones usually lay the grass down, and the back ones are the ones that usually catch the scallops best. The further back you go, the more scallops they catch. That's if you're working in grass, and then there's different types. If you're working in rocks, they use different dredges. If you're working in mud, they use a different type of dredge. You've got roller dredges and chain sweep dredges. It's just all different kinds of stuff according to what type of bottom you're working in. A lot of guys use their own ideas and things. If you want to see scallop dredges, go in my barn there. My barn is so full of stuff, you can't even get in the door, equipment. There isn't a nail or anything in there that hasn't got something hanging on it. [laughter] You can't even get in the place for all the junk that's in there. In the loft, it's got another pile of stuff. It's stuff you acquire over the years. You think, "Well, I'll put this away, and I'll use it in sooner or later." Then we got crab dredges that we make that dig the crabs out of the mud in the winter when they bed in. They look like a scallop dredge, except they're a lot heavier and they've got big teeth on them.

NS: What size are they?

BB: Well, a scallop dredge, by law, can't be any wider than thirty-six inches in New York State. Most of them are thirty inches. There's other kinds that we got too. We called them Sputnik dredges that have roller sweeps and have diving pans on them that hold them down. It's just on and on and on with different variations of whatever, whatever. Somebody will get an idea and that will work, and it catches on. Everybody's catching more than the next guy, and everybody's trying to get the same kind of thing or do him better. [laughter] That's the way it goes.

NS: Do the older things work better than the newer ones? How old are some of the tools that you use on a regular basis?

BB: Well, the scallop dredge has been around a long time. Some of the old stuff works good, and some of it doesn't. Some of the new stuff works better. I don't know. I got one of those old Shinnecock rakes that I use for raking mussels. I like the way it rakes mussels. You can use a shorter handle, and it seems to work good on beds of mussels better than the wire rakes that we use today. So, I still use one every month.

NS: How often do you replace the things that you are using? I gather that with some of the blacksmiths...

BB: Oh, they wear out. Yes, they have to be replaced periodically. I buy several new rakes – well, at least one or two rakes a year, I buy new rakes, or have them retooled. Scallop dredges last a long time. You've got to change the bags on them, but the frames last a long, long time, especially if you put them away out of the weather in the summer and you don't leave them just laying out in the yard and rust. I keep my stuff in the barn and try to get a little time out of it.

NS: Is that something that most baymen do, keep them out of the sun, or do you find...

BB: Well, some do, some don't. You know how it is. Some people take care of their car, and some people don't. Some people, when they're done with it, they just fling it in a pile. Other people will try to take care of it. I think that's more just the way a person is than anything else.

NS: Do you ever work with somebody?

BB: Yes.

NS: On a regular basis?

BB: No, occasionally. Occasionally, we go two-handed. I like to work two-handed in the wintertime because just the safety element. There isn't that many people around in the winter. If you get in trouble, if you get broke down or something in the winter, I mean, it can be life-threatening. The summertime, if you've got to spend the night out in the bay, well, all right. So, you're a little uncomfortable for a while, but you can get home. But sometimes, in the winter, if you're working in a lot of ice conditions and stuff and your motor breaks down, and you can't drive that boat through the ice to get to shore, you're in trouble. You could be out there on a night when it's ten degrees or eight degrees or something like that, and a lot of wind. You're iced in and your motor won't run, you're in a bad shape. I live alone, so there ain't anybody waiting for me here at night when I get home. So, I try to buddy up with somebody. Even if we don't work two in one boat, at least we work in the same area and try to keep an eye on one another. If somebody gets broke down, you can haul them in or whatever, tow them in or go for help or do something or other. You've got a better chance like that. But I never used to. When I was young, I never thought about it. Just used to do all kinds of thing without thinking about it. But now, as you get a little old, you start thinking, "Holy cow, some of the chances I took." I don't know.

NS: Over the years, as you have been working on the bay, have you seen something that you knew was really going to damage the shell fishing or the fin fishing?

BB: Absolutely.

NS: What are some of the things that stand out in your mind?

BB: One of the worst things that did in the bay is hydraulic dredging. That's when they pump the bottom up on the land and build houses on it, and they just leave a big dead hole where nothing ever happens. I mean, it's one thing if you take the shellfish off the bottom. A new set will come sooner or later. Something will turn up there. At least the bottom is there. But when you take the bottom, there's nothing. There's nothing. It's just like a farmer letting all his land wash— not using proper farming methods or soil conservation methods and letting all his soil wash away and blow away down a river or across the road. I mean, once you take the bottom, that's it. Bottom's gone, everything's gone. You can't put the bottom back.

NS: Where have you seen hydraulic dredging like what you just described happening?

BB: Mostly in Nassau County. I mean, it's terrible what they did down in Baldwin and Bellmore and Merrick and down through Massapequa and Oceanside and all down through there. They just destroyed the bay. They just put it up on the thing and built houses on it.

NS: What about out here?

BB: That never should have been allowed. Then filling in the wetlands – I mean, the wetlands is where life starts. That's the beginning of it all. That's the cradle of marine life is the wetlands. When they pumped the bottom up and put it on the wetlands, they did two things. They not only destroyed the bottom, they destroyed the wetlands too. I can't believe that the government let them do that. It was just greed. They just wanted more room to build, more houses to pay, more taxes, and just destroyed the whole ecology. That's a terrible thing that they did.

NS: Have you seen that happen around here?

BB: Well, it hasn't happened here, because this area got developed a little bit later, and conservation measures and ecology measures were sort of becoming vogue. They were in vogue more when this place was starting to build up and get settled. This area here has traditionally been a summer resort, and they like to try and keep it as pristine as possible, because they're making money off it. I mean, that's what keeps this area going. Whereas down in Nassau County and Western Suffolk, they don't have the tourist influx of dollars. So, it's a little different type of situation out here.

NS: Have you ever seen anything along those lines happen out here? I am thinking anywhere in the estuary.

BB: Oh, it's happened. Sure, it's happened out here. But it's happening now on a smaller scale. I mean, the Baymen's Association is constantly fighting new development on the wetlands. But we just about lose every case because we're a small group, and we don't have much money to fight with or anything. Our voices isn't heard above the real estate people and the developers and the people like that. You have to look at the other side of the coin, too. If you're a person, and you own a piece of land and you're paying taxes on it, you should be able to build on it or do pretty much what you want. I mean, not totally what you want, but you should be able to build a house on it or a dock or whatever you want to do with it. I mean, after all, you're paying taxes. It is yours. So, that's the other side of the coin, too. If the government is taking tax dollars from people, they can't tell them, "No, you can't build here. You can't do this. You can't do that." It's a catch-22. I know if I owned a piece of waterfront property and I wanted to build a house on it, I'd be damn mad if they said I couldn't do it. I'll say, "What the hell have I been paying taxes on his property for all these years?" So, what are you going to do? That's why I say it's almost impossible to stop what's happening. It's just there's too many people on the planet, and it's just a sad thing. But that's the way it is. That's life. So, I don't lose any sleep over it. Believe me.

NS: Can you think of just one place where you saw them doing some dredging or some – what do you call it – bulkheading where there was an important shellfish bed of any type, in your

experience? Is there one example you can say, "See this place over here?"

BB: Well, we've been fighting dredging projects in Shinnecock Bay there. They call it maintenance dredging. They're dredging existing channels so that people can get their boats in and out.

NS: The navigational dredge.

BB: The navigation channels, right. But when they do that, they always cut a little this way or a little that way, and they take some bottom. They're doing a big piece over by the inlet there, and they're put a lot of bottom out that they weren't supposed to. The guys running the dredge there, I don't know what the hell they're doing, sleeping at the switch or something like that. The trustees are supposed to be watching, and they're not always there. One, two, three, these dredging companies get paid by cubic yards of fill that they pump. So, if they get a spot that's easy to pump, they just let her go. It's money. It's all dollars and cents. It's all about money. Everything's about money.

NS: Are there other parts around the estuary where they have been doing this that you have lost a shellfish bed?

BB: Well, I just told you, over in Shinnecock.

NS: Are there any other places that you know about?

BB: Well, they haven't been doing too much dredging lately. Everybody's been hollering about it, trying to stop them. So, they haven't been doing too much around here.

NS: Have you heard stories from people that were here before you about a place that used to have really good shell fishing, and then something happened?

BB: Yes. The whole area between Moriches Bay and Shinnecock Bay, in that Quogue Canal area, used to be a lot of clams in there. Before I moved here, that was a major place where everybody used to work. Now, there's nothing. The whole Quogue Canal system, Quantuck Bay, Moneybogue Bay, into the eastern end of Moriches Bay, there's nothing there now. Why? I don't know. Just coral grows there now. I think it's something to do with some kind of pollutants that come maybe from – there's a large laundromat up there. People have swimming pools. I think chlorinated water and things like that kill more shellfish lands than anything. Raw sewage just doesn't do the damage like chlorine and that type of thing. People pump at it swimming pools is one of the worst things. All those people up there have gorgeous lawns. I'm sure all that fertilizer ends up in the bay too. It's a small piece of water there, and it's right in the middle between the two inlets. So, there's no real flush out into the ocean.

NS: Where do you go shellfishing? What are some of the areas that you work at?

BB: I fish in the town of Southampton all over. All town waters, wherever I can catch something.



NS: Within the town of Southampton, are there particular areas that you have heard about were once major areas?

BB: I just told you, that area in the Quogue Canal, that was a good area.

NS: What about the scalloping? What were some of the big areas for that?

BB: Right here across from my house is one of the best areas. We haven't seen scallops there in years since the brown tide came. It's what they call a cow yard. That was always a good place for scallops. There hasn't been any scallops caught there in ten years now.

NS: Has there been any major development – these houses, for instance, do you know when they were built?

BB: Nothing really major. I mean, they build a couple or three houses every year around, but I don't think the houses had anything to do with it. I don't know what caused the brown tide. It's just one of those things. They got all kinds of theories and one thing or another, but I don't think anybody really, really knows. They got some kind of studies on it. I hope they figure it out and they're able to turn it around, because it could be the end of the bay scallop if they don't.

NS: What about oystering? Had there been any oystering when you first came here?

BB: There's always a few oysters around in creeks, but not enough to make any kind of a commercial harvest. The oysters are on the north shore now. Long Island Sound is where the oysters are.

NS: Lobsters, the lobsters that you have here, where do you get those?

BB: They're from the sound also.

NS: Again, thinking about some of the stories that you have heard over the years, were there any particularly bad storms that people talk about that may have affected the shellfishing?

BB: Well, the storm we had here about six, seven years ago was a good storm. I mean, [laughter] it blew about fifteen houses off the beach. It made an inlet over there.

NS: Oh, that northeaster, yes.

BB: After that inlet broke through, we had a nice set of clams over there. We had a set of scallops in that bay. There hasn't been a set of scallops in there in years. But they went and closed it up. Now, they're building their houses back up again. It wasn't a bad storm. That was a good storm. It should have been a little worse, took a few more of them. [laughter]

NS: What about things like Hurricane Gloria? Did that have an effect on the shellfishing out here?

BB: Hurricanes are hard on the scallops. They blow a lot of scallops up on the beach and stuff like that.

NS: Why scallops?

BB: If they get rolling bad enough, they roll the eelgrass right up, and just roll up eelgrass, scallops, and everything else, just rolling up and washing up on the beach.

NS: Why the scallops? Why are they so vulnerable to storms?

BB: Because they're not in the bottom. They're just laying on the top. They're just kind of laying there. They swim around. Scallops get up and swim. If they don't like it where they are, they'll leave. Especially the smaller they are, the more active they are. They'll move around until they find a spot that they like.

NS: I remember when I was here on Friday, you were talking about the different kinds of clams that you find around here. Are there different kinds of scallops?

BB: I don't think so. Just the only two kind of scallops I know of around here are bay scallops and sea scallops.

NS: That is all I know. But on the consumer end, they do not tell you.

BB: That's the only ones I know. Maybe the scientists got different names for some species, but I don't know what they are.

NS: Have you seen much erosion of the marshlands and the wetlands or heard about a lot of erosion in the estuary?

BB: No, mostly just beach erosion. Erosion in the marshlands is – usually, you'll find that where you have a busy channel or something where you've got a lot of boat wakes washing the banks away. Certain islands and things are cut away by ice and stuff like that, but everything that leaves ends up someplace else. I mean, it doesn't go away, as everything is somewhere. It just ends up somewhere else, that's all, in a different form.

NS: Where is the major boat traffic besides Shinnecock Canal? I would imagine it is the most intensive...

BB: In the summertime?

NS: Yes.

BB: Well, we get a lot of pleasure boaters here on the Peconic Bay. A lot of sail boaters too, because it's a large body of water and it's deep water. They're not running aground all the time. They get to be able to stay on one tack for a long period of time before they have to change

course. So, you get a lot of sailboats over there. Shinnecock Bay is – I mean, it's not as heavy as it is down west. I know Freeport and stuff, the boat traffic is horrendous. We don't see that kind of traffic out here. You'll see on the weekends some boat traffic. But during weekends, even in the summer, it's not that busy. You get a lot of these kids running around on jet skis and stuff like that.

NS: Has that affected things like killi-ing and shellfishing, the jet...

BB: I don't really think it's affected that too much, but I do think it's affected the bird life. Because the kids, when the tide is high, they race through the marshes on these jet skis, and a lot of the birds that are nesting in the marshes are distracted and they're frightened away. They won't nest or they leave their nest or something like that with the racket of these jet skis. So, I don't think it's good for that type of wildlife.

NS: The little creeks in the marshlands, are they widening because of the jet skis that you have been able to see?

BB: I don't really think so. I think the ice does more effect on them every year than the jet skis. Jet skis don't do that much on them. Like I said, they scare the birds. They scare the fish out of the creeks too. There are a lot of fish going up in those creeks, spawn and feed and one thing or another. They chase everything away. Too many people, that's all. There's too many people on the planet.

NS: Are there things that, in your experience, I do not even know to ask about that come to mind in terms of the shellfishing and the Peconic Estuary? Things you have heard about or things that you know firsthand.

BB: I can't think of anything.

NS: Have you seen a lot of baymen leave this area?

BB: Oh, yes. Yes. A lot of them want to go down south because they think it's better down there. It's definitely cheaper to live. They're getting away from the high cost of living on Long Island – taxes and utility bills and one thing or another. Baymen are kind of like on the lower end of the income scale as far as Long Islanders go. They think they can do better down there, but I don't think it's any better, because salaries are lower down there and they get less for their product and stuff like that. In my idea, it's pretty much one place is as good as another. It's just where you want to be. I don't like the heat down there anyway.

[end of transcript]