

Nancy Solomon: This is Nancy Solomon. Today is August 17, 1997. Your name, sir?

Joseph Gordon: Joseph Gordon.

NS: Your name?

Bill Gaffga: Bill Gaffga.

NS: This is tape one, side A. So, Bill, how old are you?

BG: Fifty-four.

NS: And how did you get into shell fishing and fishing?

BG: Well, I was born out here, and my father and his father and what have you were in the fishing business of one sort or another. I went into service, and I made nine years in there. I went to work for General Motors up in Lockport for about six years. I couldn't cope with wishing my life away that for twenty years I'd get out of there, retire. I didn't want to punch a time clock. So, I came back here, and I said, "Well, I'll give this a shot." Went pretty well until 1985.

NS: You said you were working on the bay, on the water. What kinds of things were you doing?

BG: Well, out here on this particular area that you got to be quite universal. Whatever was happening at a certain time of year, I had town nets is what we used to call it. Wintertime, we always scalloped through the whole winter, from the first day to the last.

NS: What was the scalloping season?

BG: Scalloping season used to – what do you mean, the duration? Used to be the first Monday after the third Sunday in September, and would run to the 31st of March.

NS: So, when you say in the winter was your major scalloping season, about from when to when would that be?

BG: When to when?

NS: Yes, yes. When would be the heavy-duty time for you to go scalloping?

BG: Well, it seemed like it was always the best time is December and January because the water is basically emptied out. The people who were actually there, the ones making the living, were left. Actually, it was more enjoyable and definitely more profitable.

NS: What year did you start working on the bay?

BG: I come back here in 1975. I still work on the bay today. But after the brown water came in 1985, it's kind of, through a month [inaudible] everything. And so, I had to change my ways. But...

NS: What kind of boats did you use when you were scalloping?

BG: Well, when I was scalloping I was – I started out with a wooden boat the first year. Then the second year after I'd seen what happens in the wintertime with ice and whatever, I went down and bought a fiberglass boat. People told me that I was crazy because I bought one out of the showroom there. I have set of counsel went in and seats and then all that goodies. I just tore them out. And so, I went to work. Guys with a wooden boat, they didn't go no place. It was probably one of the smartest things that I ever did in buying a piece of equipment. That boat was actually brand new, but it was a 1973.

NS: What kind of design was it?

BG: It was an Aquasport, a twenty-four-foot Aquasport, and that boat's still being used today.

JG: That was Pro-Line.

BG: Oh, excuse me. That's what it was, a Pro-Line. I have Pro-Line Aquasport, same thing. Yes, it was a Pro-Line.

NS: P-R-O-L-I-N-E. Were there any other baymen using something like that at that time?

JG: No, and he bought his.

BG: No.

NS: Did anybody decide to do what you did?

BG: Yes, well, if you've ever been out there, when you get the first ice, it's a skim ice, and it's like a razor blade. It'll cut right through a wooden boat so quick it isn't fun. It'll cut right through. You have two boats. People sink. People used to put copper sheathing around it to stop the cutting action. But I've seen them sink. Fiberglass is terrific.

NS: The wooden boats, what kind of design were they? Did they have a particular name?

JG: Sharpie Sloops.

BG: Sharpie Sloops. I'll tell you, at the beginning of any scalloping season, it was almost like anything that would float, okay? Basically, whatever they had available to them is what they used. Like I said that most of the people work on the water to make a living, they had to be quite universal. In summertime, you had guys going digging clams. They went conking.

NS: Well, we will get to that. I am interested right now in learning more about the scalloping.

What kinds of tools would you use?

BG: Dredgers. Dredging system.

NS: What size were the dredgers? How were they made?

BG: We have thirty-inch chain bag in the bottom with a net bag on the back. I think the water – the maximum size can be thirty-six, but I've never seen one at the thirty inches from opening.

NS: Where did you get them?

BG: Well, I got some from – well, originally, we bought some from a guy's basement that had to be about hundred years old.

NS: Whose were they?

BG: Well, they were originally built by Paul Blacksmith, before he – he didn't even weld the bales. They were riveted.

NS: What was Paul's last name?

BG: Nostrack. Nostrick. Paul Nostrick.

NS: Do you know how you spell that by any chance?

BG: I ain't got a clue.

JG: They've written books and everything else about Paul Blacksmith, from Greenport.

NS: That was his name?

BG: Right.

JG: That's all they called him.

NS: Not Paul, the Blacksmith?

JG: Paul Blacksmith. That's it. But I think it's Nostrick, N-O-S –

BG: T-R-I-K-S.

JG: Something like that.

NS: So, is that what you started out using from those two?

BG: Right. I still got them today.

NS: Do you ever use them now?

BG: When there's scallops, I go. Yes. We went last year and tried it for about four hours and never caught one. Not one. But, we went.

NS: How many scallop dredges did you have?

BG: I don't know. I probably got around twenty.

NS: How many would you actually use when things were good?

BG: In my younger days I used to pull fourteen, and in heavy grass that was. Because the more dredges you got in heavy grass, you run them close together, it gets clean. They act like plows.

NS: Now how would you run them? How did it attach to the boat? Can you describe that?

BG: I had rings on the gunwales, and you would—

NS: Would they be on the sides of the gunwales?

BG: Yes, on the side of boats, yeah. You would run them as close as possible. You'd hit the other one and back off a couple inches so that you would eliminate picking up a lot of garbage.

JG: Sort of like in tandem.

NS: Would they be parallel to each other, I guess?

BG: Yep.

NS: So, that you would have a gunwale here and a rake – and a dredge coming out this way?

BG: Right.

JG: You would use seven on each side and you don't pull all of them. You just pull every other one or whatever. You can see how much grass is in it and how to catch and clean. You wouldn't pull all fourteen.

NS: So, would you alternate, I guess?

BG: I'd go one right down the line. I would never pull the front ones because that didn't even have a bag in it. All it was was like a plow. It was a dredge, but it was blocked off. So, the grass would actually – would hit it and work around it and go off the sides of it. You pull it, pull a dredge. Put it on the color board. Pick it off. Well, dump it. Throw it back overboard. Pick it off, and you go pick the next one. You're only pulling one at a time, pull and pick.

NS: And how long would you drag one for?

BG: Well, it's probably about twenty minutes or so before you get back to the same dredge again because you go right down the line.

NS: You would put each one down for about twenty minutes?

BG: It all depended on what time of year it was, how thick the scallops was. If the scallops were thick, you could only use four dredges because you couldn't even keep up with them. They were full by the time you got back to it. But when you got down to the slim times, when you're counting the numbers of scallops in the dredge, then they're going twenty minutes or so, which you counted a lot when it got slim, ten scallops, twelve scallops. But beginning of the year when they were thick on, you'd fill the dredge up. Two minutes.

NS: Did you ever have to buy a new dredge or a new rake?

BG: Oh, I bought them new all the time. I had them built by different people and trying different tricks.

NS: Who? Who were some of the people that built them for you?

BG: Vinny Martin, he built me some. I got some from North Fork Welding. My son built a couple. Just, I don't know...

NS: How did they learn to make them?

BG: Well, you got the basic design from the original, okay? It's like the old thing, you kind of build a better mousetrap and you come back to the same thing. It's basically some work and some don't work. Some don't work because the blade makes a difference.

NS: For instance, what could be?

BG: A blade – well, it seems like the beginning of the year that the three-quarter type round blades seemed to work real good. I had scraper blades which were basically flat. They worked okay, but they caught a lot of garbage. But later on the season when things were slimmer, then you didn't mind handling a little more garbage because you were catching more scallops. So, the blades seemed to work particularly more or whatever. Because the scallop, when it's laying on the bottom, especially in the wintertime, it's basically dormant. It's almost like it's concave in the bottom where it's dormant and the tide keeps running over it and it makes a ring around. So, it's almost like it's partially submerged. You can still see the top is okay. But the ring around it, which could be this big, and the scallop is sitting down in it just from being inactive in the cold winter.

NS: Do you have a picture of any of this?

BG: No.

NS: Could you draw it for me at some point?

BG: Sure. I mean, I've seen them on the bottom that way with the...

NS: No, I'm talking about the blade and how it would go over it.

BG: There's something outside you can take a look at.

NS: Oh, good.

JG: But one thing I want to bring up was when I first purchased mine and Billy did too, I think we paid \$20 for one. We both bought last year, the year before, and we paid \$100 a piece for them.

BG: That's just for a frame. That's not for a complete dredge.

JG: A complete dredge is \$150 at least.

BG: That was \$250. Two-fifty.

JG: Yes, if they do it right. So, that's how price of scallops went up. Yes.

NS: The ones that you had recently, the people who made them, were they blacksmiths?

[talking simultaneously]

BG: I really don't know. No, they were not – no, not blacksmiths. They were welders, so welders there. Like I said, Paul's original ones. He was an old German blacksmith and – he was a blacksmith. He forged metals. He just didn't cut and weld.

NS: Have there been other blacksmiths since?

BG: Not around here. Not that I know of anyone.

NS: As the tools have not fallen into disuse or rusted or hit too many scallops, how have people replaced them?

BG: Replaced the?

NS: The dredges. The rakes.

BG: Well, the scallops, people go into other places. I didn't really get your question.

NS: If a rake got damaged or something, how would you replace it?

BG: I bought new ones. Now? With today's date?

NS: Okay, yeah. Where would they come from?

BG: Well, it's like I said, there're several people. You can go to welding shops and they'll make them. They'll copy. Just like you said, we bought some from a welding shop for last year, and they were just for the frame, a hundred bucks.

NS: Which welding shop?

BG: That was North Fork Welding in Greenport.

NS: Have they been around a long time?

BG: Not really. What, about ten years? Ten, twelve years.

JG: Did they make them for stilts? We got them for stilts.

BG: Yes, they made them – North Fork Welding.

JG: Oh, did they?

NS: So, the scalloping, you would have a coal rack. How would you get it to market? What were some of the next steps that were required in order for you to sell them? Where would you take them?

BG: I'd take them home to my garage, to a shopping shop, or that's what they call it nowadays. We used to call it an open shop. We'd sit there and whittle until 10:00 p.m., 11:00 p.m. Next day, you'd go do the same thing. You can't wait until Saturday because Sunday there was no scalloping, so that was dayoff.

NS: So, who would you sell the scallops to?

BG: It used to be Southold Fishing Station when Mike Morris was alive. He probably was the biggest buyer.

NS: Did the price change much?

BG: The price is – I think I can remember now in 1975, the price was \$1.80 a pound, which doesn't seem like...

NS: Is that shucked or unshucked?

BG: That's shucked. That was the highest price going at that time. They steadily went up, and there was a lot of products then. So, it was actually good money then, still good money.

NS: How many pounds would you catch on a good day?

BG: Eighty. Yes, eighty.

NS: Eighty pounds a day? About how many bushels was that?

BG: Well, you're limited. You're limited. The state wanted ten bags per boat, per man, twenty bags per boat. In other words, if you had two people on a boat with licenses or more, then you were allowed twenty bushels.

NS: Did you work with anybody?

BG: I used to work with my sister. Yes, she's to go in.

NS: So, was that how you were able to get the 20 pounds?

BG: Right.

NS: Did most baymen work in pairs for the scalloping?

BG: It all depends.

JG: Early part of the season they would, and they were thick. But as they thinned out, there was no sense of having two people because you have plenty of time to keep up with the dredges. It wasn't economical to have two people, two salaries instead of one. Like in the middle of the winter, Bill, January and February, when he was out there by himself, there was no sense having two people.

NS: Did you ever have any close calls while you were out scalloping? Was that particularly dangerous?

BG: I don't know what you call dangerous. I never panicked, I mean, let's put it that way. You get caught up in some icefalls once in a while, but it seems like you always find your way through, and you never – not really.

NS: How did you get through an icefall?

BG: Well, you've got to know where you're at, for one thing. You've got to know what is exactly up in the bay there around Robins Island. I was from New Suffolk, and we used to scallop on the south side a lot. Ice used to go through the north race, south race of Robins Island. You got to know the way the eddies were and the tides were and what have you. You could get crushed by ice, there's no doubt about it. But it wasn't nothing that you really were too concerned about, because, usually, the ice would stick it up, anyway, if you don't walk on it, and it flows. But it was pretty good up there because of the tide, the way the tide was, because it seemed to keep it open all the time. But there were areas that you had to go through that was - that open up one time and close up the next time. Okay? You got to do what you got to do.



That's basically what it was.

NS: When you say that you could get crushed by the ice, what exactly would happen?

BG: Well, ice would come from two different directions or, whatever. If your boat's there, you got ice coming from one way and ice coming from another way. You're talking a lot of ice. You're not talking little chunks, you're talking half-mile pieces of it. The pressure would just crush it, without a doubt.

NS: Would you have enough time to jump out of the boat?

BG: Oh yeah, sure. Oh yeah.

NS: Was that something that did happen?

BG: No, it never happened. But I always had it in my mind that it could have happened. There's no doubt about it.

NS: What about other baymen, did they ever get...

BG: Oh, I've heard of people falling overboard, heard people sinking. That's happened, without a doubt.

JG: What's his name? He died. He fell overboard. He went out to clean up his boat after scalloping. (Kuznetsky?), the young (Kuznetsky?).

BG: Yes.

JG: He fell overboard, and he drowned.

BG: Yes. It's wintertime. You've got to be very careful on the boat because everything ices up, and you've got to keep – I used to put bags down on the deck, wet the bags, put them on the deck, and they used to freeze. But they froze, but it was rough. It wasn't a slippery type ice, things like that.

NS: So, we were talking about in the wintertime, some of the different dangers. Were there other things that you had to watch out for in the wintertime?

BG: No, basically it was just common sense. That's all. Common sense.

NS: Did you usually work within eyeshot or earshot of another bayman in most of the situations?

BG: You did, but you really didn't like to. No, it seems like you like to be alone. The beginning of the season, obviously, there was plenty of company. But when it got in December, January, yeah, there's many times that you worked alone. I preferred it that way. Find a little spike,

throw a little buoy overboard or whatever. You don't do that with a lot of boats around. You don't throw no buoys.

NS: Were there any other techniques for scalloping besides the dredges around here?

BG: Strong back.

NS: What?

BG: Strong back.

NS: Throw them back if they were too small?

BG: Strong back.

JG: Strong back.

NS: Oh, strong back.

BG: Strong back. That's the only other thing that I know of.

JG: Strong back.

NS: What is that?

BG: Yes. But, really, it's no different than a guy going out and doing any other job. It was a job, but it was a job that you had a choice. You didn't have to be there, but you wanted to be there. So, that was your decision to be there as far as I – it's not easy.

NS: Did you ever do much scalloping when you were growing up?

BG: Oh, yes.

NS: How is it different?

BG: Well, when I was growing up with my father, we used to go – we sailed them all the time because powering was illegal here, and you couldn't use a motor. The difference was after I got out of service and came back, they passed laws where you were allowed to use power then.

NS: You said you were always using a motorboat as an adult?

BG: Right.

NS: When did people stop sailing?

BG: Geez, I really couldn't say the date.

NS: Just take a guess.

BG: I would say – and let me see. I was still sailing in the late – in the early [19]60s. I would say in the late [19]60s or early [19]70s.

NS: Is that sounding right?

JG: Yes. The other way – I remember doing it with my father, we used to drop an anchor and then let the tide take you back. Throw the dredges over, and then you'd pull the anchor, which would pull the dredges and everything with you, if there was no wind for sailing, or if it wasn't right. I don't know if you remember doing it.

BG: I remember doing that, but I used to have the motor button all the time.

NS: What were your father's names?

BG: Bill. Same as mine. I'm Junior.

NS: And Joe?

JG: Mine was Joe.

BG: Stulsky, though. He passed away, and my mother got remarried. So, the name got changed.

NS: How did you spell your father's last name?

BG: S-T-U-L-S-K-Y. He's my uncle, so his father was my grandfather.

NS: Your grandfather and your father were also...

BG: No, he's my nephew. He's my sister's son.

NS: Where was he from?

BG: My father?

NS: Yes.

BG: Well, he was born in Greenport. Lived in New Suffolk. I still live in New Suffolk.

NS: Where were you born?

BG: Greenport.

NS: You, Joe, were you also born in Greenport?

JG: I was born in Greenport, and so was my father.

NS: About how many people in your family were commercial fishermen?

BG: Most of them. All of them that I know – I don't know of any...

NS: What about in your generation, Joe?

JG: I have a brother and two sisters, and none of them are – my brother's in Maryland, and no one works on the water here. But my uncles, they worked on the deep-sea fishing boats – all my uncles on my father's side.

NS: On the dragger boats?

JG: Yes.

NS: Out of where?

JG: Out of Greenport. Or New Jersey, Cape Maine, New Jersey, depending on the season, et cetera. But they've all since passed. It's a dying breed, of course. I had another job, and I retired. But I always – it's in your blood. I swear, it's in your blood, like with Bill. I mean, he was in the Air Force ten years, and then he worked on the factory line. He loves to be his own boss, and he loves the water. He busted his can to make a living out of it, but he loved doing it. That was the thing. He hated doing what he did before.

NS: What were some of the other kinds of shellfish that you would harvest?

BG: Clam.

NS: What kinds of clams?

BG: Hard clams, soft clams. Whatever. Like I said, you had to be quite universal.

JG: You spring your mussel, too.

BG: Mussels for bait.

NS: Well, let us start with the hard clams. Well, we have not finished with scalloping. What were the best places for scalloping when things were good?

JG: You could go anywhere. It's right here from Orient Harbor, where we're located right now, to Flanders. The only difference was the quantity was every place. The quality was better in certain places.

NS: Where was the quality best?

BG: It seemed like when you got west of Southold, New Suffolk was fantastic, and up towards[inaudible] with a much better product. What I mean by a much better product is the yield of meat that came out of the shell was much greater of that much. They grew better.

NS: Would you generally find scallops in shallow water or deepwater?

BG: Well, the last couple of years when we had a few scallops, the only places we found them was in shallow water. But back when there was abundance of scallops, you would find them in thirty, forty foot of water. I don't know. I had scallops here a couple of years ago in one foot of water, which I never dreamed that I would ever do before. But that was the only place there was any. It was usually, I would say, ten feet to fifteen feet was a very common depth.

NS: I imagine it would be very hard to use the dredges in shallow water. Was that the case?

BG: Well, it's very difficult to use them, yes, so...

NS: So, were there other ways that you would try and do that?

BG: No. I've always used the dredges. The only thing about using them in shallow water is that if you've got problems, you get caught in the props. You tear your props up. You tear your dredges up. But the thing that really bothers me the most in shallow water is that you can't do any adjustment. It's just whatever the depth of water allows you. That's the only amount of rope you can put out to make any. There's no adjustment tips, whatever you can put out.

NS: What about in deeper water? What kinds of adjustments do you do?

BG: Oh, you adjust it all the time. You adjust it to what you're catching. You adjust it as the tide was coming up or falling.

NS: The depth that the rake was in, is that what you would adjust?

BG: Yes, you adjust the rope. You adjust the length of the rope. If the tide was falling, you're going to be shortening the rope up. Every half hour, you take in a couple inches, six inches. You're making small adjustments. You are definitely adjusting to try to improve your catch, to catch cleaner and to catch more.

NS: Is this the rope that was attached to the dredge, to the gunwale? Is that what you're talking about?

BG: That's correct.

NS: So, the deeper water was easier to work in. Is that it?

BG: Yes, well, deep to a certain extent. I mean, I worked in fifty foot of water. Working in

fifty foot of water is no fun. So, you've got to pull these things by hand. You can't use any mechanical means. It's a walk. But twelve, fifteen foot of water is the depth of water where you can regulate the dredge or adjust the dredge to catch the most product and less junk.

NS: Do you know why some parts of the bay were better than others, like why New Suffolk and Flanders were better than Greenport?

BG: Well, a lot of it's got to do with the setting. When the scallops spawn, there's a lot of areas that there was always sets of scallops as far as bugs. But they would never live due to the fact that there was nothing there really to hold and it was clean bottom. You get storms, and it gets sanded over and whatever. But there was a lot of areas where there was protected areas where there was grass. It held the product, and that was basically it.

NS: So, places where there was some sort of vegetation or eelgrass. Is that...

BG: Definitely.

NS: Were there other kinds of vegetation besides the eelgrass that would be...

BG: Oh, like up in the bay you have...

JG: Sputnik grass.

NG: It's all spaghetti grass. We call it Sputnik spaghetti grass. Yes. There's no eelgrass up there. No, it's not up there. There's no eelgrass up there. There never was that I ever seen. There's always spaghetti grass. Down to the east here, it's mostly all eelgrass.

JG: But if they're too concentrated, they don't grow well either. I guess there's only so much food or so much in the product isn't as good either. If they're too densely or too many scallops in one area, they don't grow as well either.

BG: That's true. Orient Harbor here, there used to be enormous sets of bugs here and they'd never grow. They called them (lupus?). They were a lousy product. The meats in them was terrible. There was nothing besides the (consular races?).

NS: Was it ever a good set in Orient Point around here?

BG: Yes, there was always good sets here. But up until a few years ago, there were so many that always sett here. Like you said, it seemed like there wasn't enough food to support all of them and they were all runts.

NS: This is tape two, side one. Again, this is Nancy Solomon. Today is July 17th. I am with Bob, talking with Bill, and with Joe. So, there were all these subsidiaries of Long Island Oyster Farms. Is that what they were?

BG: No, no. Long Island Oyster Farm is a subsidiary of Inmont.

NS: A subsidiary of Inmont. So, what were some of the local names of the oyster operations?

BG: You had Shelter Island Oyster Company, George Braun Oyster Company. Raydel.

NS: Raydel.

BG: There was several of them. I mean, believe it or not, that's basically back before our times. So, it was the 1980s. [19]85, I guess, this place here, Long Island Oyster Farms, basically went out of business. So, timing was good. They were in trouble.

NS: Where did they start? Does anybody know?

BG: I have no clue. I have no clue.

NS: Were there any natural oyster beds where they didn't have to bring over the seeds from Connecticut?

BG: We have a few oysters around, but there's not enough around to make it considered an industry of any size. We got a few creeks that's got oysters in them, but...

NS: It is mostly in the creeks?

BG: Yes. The bay has basically none natural in it. The creeks that we have, it's got some. That varies, too, from year to year. You might have a couple good years where there's a few around, and then you won't see enough for ten years. Nature works in strange ways, and setting oysters, and spawning, and all this is due to conditions – water quality and conditions of the weather. When they had the oyster companies, they made their own spawnings. They were in areas that sets were very easily caught. Then they brought them over these waters, see if they're going to grow out, purify and grow out.

NS: Do you have any guess when that started?

BG: No idea.

NS: [19]30s?

BG: 1800s.

NS: Really, that far back?

BG: Oh, definitely, yes.

NS: How would they harvest them?

BG: They'd dredge them.

NS: What were the dredges like?

BG: The only ones I ever seen were big ones. I don't know what they used in the 1800s, but, I mean, they were six, eight-foot dredges they used to do.

JG: That's when they had the sailing sloop.

BG: Yes, they had big sailing sloops in, but I have no clue what they used.

NS: Well, the ones that you have seen, what did they look like, and what kinds of boats were they?

BG: They were like a six-foot dredge there with a big bag in the back, and they just tow it until it filled it up, which didn't take long to think they were right there.

NS: How long would they tow it for?

BG: Seconds. Minutes. They were right on the ground. They put the oysters there, and they were planted pretty thick. So, it didn't take long.

NS: Were they concentrated along the shallow banks?

BG: They were concentrated on their lots, wherever their lots were, like I said, from twenty feet or deeper to six, eight foot.

[talking simultaneously]

NS: So, they went in deep water.

BG: They couldn't go shallow on big boats. Big boats couldn't go to shallow water.

NS: How many men would work on a boat?

BG: I have no idea. None, whatsoever. They were...

NS: How big were these boats?

BG: Oh, seventy foot. Sixty foot, seventy foot, eighty foot.

NS: Like dragger boats.

BG: Yes.

JG: But in more recent times, I think there was three deckhands and a captain. That's what the crew was when there was power.



BG: Yes.

JG: See, before, we didn't have a power. They probably had more manpower. But when they got into hydraulics and winches and all this stuff, so you eliminate the manpower, and use the captain with you.

NS: Do you know when they started using power boats?

BG: I haven't got an idea. Let's see.

NS: It was probably about the same time that baymen started having power boats.

BG: Not really.

NS: No? It was earlier than that?

BG: Well, right to this day, the oyster companies had it, so they were protecting themselves. The state still has it on their laws that you cannot dredge oysters with a prop on a boat. In other words, you can't use any power to dredge oysters. That's still that way today. Those laws were put into effect by the oyster companies to try to stop the piracy of oysters, which was a pretty good sideline, I guess, the way I understand it. I never did it, and the oysters were faded out before I really got into the water thing.

NS: We talked a little bit before about where you would sell the scallops. What about the clams? Who were your customers?

BG: I never had customers. I used to sell to just distributors and let them have the customers. I always...

NS: Where would the distributors take it?

BG: Southold Fishing Station used to be the biggest one around here when Mike Morris was and Mary Morris was alive. They bought just about everything out this way. Whatever it was, they bought it.

NS: Do you know when they started business?

BG: [19]60? I think it before then.

NS: So, what about your father? Who would he sell to?

BG: Well, I'll tell you who he used to sell to then. Billy Janovick in New Suffolk, he used to be a buyer of scallops and stuff like that. Clams.

[talking simultaneously]

BG: Jack Delaney. There used to be a Swezey pickup truck, not a pickup truck, but a truck and trailer. You put your baskets next to the road and they'd pick them up every day. They'd take them to New York City.

NS: Fulton Fish Market?

BG: Yes. Yes. That was the basic. Most of the stuff went to the city. It's the same now. You're at the mercy of the city.

NS: What about restaurants? Have restaurants always been big customers?

BG: Well, I'll tell you what. I never really got into selling to restaurants, so never wanted no part of it. I felt that was the middleman's job. I still feel today, if everybody sells to the distributor, everybody will get a higher price. Because you've got a lot of people who work part-time and they peddle stuff from restaurant to restaurant to restaurant, and they sell it cheaper. In the restaurants or any place else, they get used to that. So, it takes away – the bottom line is it cost the real fisherman money.

NS: I know it is a problem with a lot of things like blue fish and white fish, anything that the sports fishermen are catching.

BG: But you get to the point now where that's the way it used to be. The middleman was a pretty good deal, you know what I mean. It seems like the middleman now has got their own little union, and it's one of these types of things. Here's what you're going to get for it. This is what's going to pay you for it. That's it. Supply and demand, it's a thing of the past. We just went through that effect over this 4th of July here where lobster prices were decent, but we're coming into the season to drop the prices. The quantity was not there to justify dropping prices, but the prices dropped and it dropped drastically within a week's time. It's not justified. They're selling everything you bring in, but they drop the price. How can that be? Supply and demand has nothing to do with it.

NS: When did that start to happen?

BG: That happens because you get...

NS: No, when? When did it start to happen? I know why it happened.

BG: It started to happen when people – when distributors start talking to each other and making their daily phone calls to see what they're going to pay us today. It's almost like shipping something to Fulton Fish Market where they're all one. There's many companies, but they're all one. This is what we're going to pay today.

NS: But I was just saying about the whole competition between the recreational fishermen and the commercial fishermen in terms of selling, when did you start to...

BG: It's not the competition between the recreational and commercial, it's a competition between the middle people who buy this. They conform with each other. They check with each other. We're paying this price everywhere on Long Island. That's it. Lobsters, we're the cheapest place around for lobsters. Now, everybody says, "You go to Florida." When you go into a restaurant, your Maine lobster, okay, well, it's a known fact that a lot of lobsters from Long Island are shipped to Maine, and two or three weeks later, they're shipped back to Long Island as a Maine lobster. It happens all the time. We're the cheapest lobster around. I can show you the red sheet from last week. Believe it or not, the middlemen make a lot of money. A lot of money. It's unbelievable.

NS: Has it always been that way? Is that something that your father, your grandfather talked about?

BG: Well, not really. No.

NS: What changed?

BG: What changed? Communications changed. That's what changed. Communications. You got faxes now. You got all these internets now and all this stuff. Modern equipment has changed everything.

NS: If you had to pick a date, when did all of this really start to happen?

BG: It's happened gradually. But I would say in the last ten years, it's happened more dramatically than...

Bob: Once Mike and Mary died.

BG: I was going to say, I think it was when Mike and Mary Morris, when they closed their shop, then Braun Oyster became the only—

NS: Game in town, yeah.

BG: — game in town. He controls it. He controls lobster. He controls clams. He controls scallops. He sets the price. But like Bob said, when they passed away, they closed their shop down. He was the only place in town.

JG: They didn't conform. I mean, if Bill says, "Are you going to sell" — you're going to buy today for \$3 a pound. Mike says, "You ain't telling me what I'm paying. I'll pay \$3.50." And that's the way Mike was.

NS: How come?

JG: He came from the city, and I guess he saw enough of that. He always treated the fishermen well.

BG: Yes, he was...

JG: He was a sport fisherman. He didn't treat you well. He worked for the commercial.

BG: He works for the guy who busted his chops. He treated him like (doll?). He'd do anything for you.

JG: I'm a sport fisherman. I'll go out, and I'll catch a fish, and I'll eat it. Now the rest of the sports fishermen will go out, "Well, we'll only sell two to pay for gas."

BG: Yes, what is sport fishing?

JG: That's not sport fishing.

BG: What's a sport fishing? What is a sport fishing?

JG: Sport fishing, like I see in TV, it catches and releases it. We don't catch it and throw it in a box and ship it to New York City.

BG: No.

JG: Well, that's the only sport fishing we got out here. There's a difference between a commercial fisherman and a sport fisherman. The sport fishermen don't take stuff.

NS: How long was the Morrises in business?

JG: I think he opened up in [19]49.

NS: Who was there before him though?

JG: There was nobody. He'd come from the city.

NS: So, how did the commercial fishermen make a living and before him, his distributors?

JG: Paddling. New York City, mostly shipping.

NS: Would they drive?

JG: No. No, no.

NS: Would they ship it by train?

BG: Swezey truck. That was a big trucking output out here. Swezey.

NS: Swezey?

BG: Yes, Swezey was the name.

NS: Like the department store?

BG: Yes. The same name as that, yeah.

JG: Spelled the same way.

NS: And what would they do? Would they just go by and pick up?

BG: They would just cart stuff and they'd be pickup places. I know I remember father used to drop it off on the road at the end of the road there. They'd go by there all the time, and they'd pick it right up. You'd have a tag on there where it's going to. They'd take it to the food and fish market. Whatever tag said on it at a certain place, that's where they'd drop off at. They'd be paid by whatever package it was, how much a tub or whatever it was they ship in. They'd ship scallops that way. They'd ship clams that way, oysters, whatever.

NS: I am assuming that it was done at the time of the pickup or would it happen...

BG: What was done?

NS: That the fishermen would be paid?

BG: No. No, no. He'd get a check in the mail. They'd get it that way.

NS: Really?

BG: Oh, yeah.

NS: I thought that would be so silly of me to think.

BG: No. No, no. The freight would be taken out at the time of the shipping, which would come off the price of the product, and then the shipper would get their allowance.

NS: How fast would it get paid?

BG: Usually, within a week. It was pretty quick. It was pretty quick.

NS: Was it done once a week or how often?

BG: On a daily basis.

NS: Every day. Wow. That is pretty interesting. Were there ever any places you could sell locally? Did you sell to friends and family, people in the neighborhood?

BG: Oh, I'm sure there was, but it was not the out for an everyday guy that's going every day.

He went every day, and he planned on shipping it on a truck every day. Now, there might be times that arise that somebody needed something. And so, he wouldn't ship it that day on a truck. But the routine was the truck.

NS: Very interesting. Were there ever agreements among the baymen about who had which areas for their operations?

BG: Well, let me tell you. Baymen, they're very difficult to get along, okay? To work together, there's no such thing. Agreements.

NS: Unwritten agreements, maybe.

BG: Unwritten agreements, maybe today. I don't know about tomorrow, but maybe today.

NS: Like fifty years ago?

BG: No. It hasn't changed. There's such high competition because everybody is working for themselves. Whatever they put into it is what they get out of it. It's high competition, you know what I'm saying? Fishermen, it's very hard for them to stick together. Now, if fishermen could stick together today, we wouldn't have that problem about the middleman that we just discussed on prices, all right? Because if fishermen could stick together, they would tie their boats up and mow lawns. But they won't. So, the buyer has got what you call deal of control. They're running the game.

NS: Were there any incidents that you were involved with where you had a certain area that you always worked and somebody trying to move in?

BG: Of course. Everybody has that.

NS: How would you resolve it?

BG: I wouldn't want to discuss it.

JG: Nobody owns the water.

BG: Nobody owns the water. But you got certain areas that you want to fish pot-wise, let's say pots now. You've fished it. You've got somebody who's trying to infringe on you. You better take care of yourself, else you're going to be mowing lawns, and he's going to be fishing your area. There was an incident yesterday in the paper – I don't know if it was today's paper, if you read it or not – about a lobster boat that was burned up in North Port. It's got two boats. One was burned up and the other was attempted to be burned up, which relates right down to turf wars as far as that goes. You'll go to certain areas, and if you took some pots up to the sand now in certain areas and set them today, I can guarantee, you tomorrow morning, they won't be there. They won't be there. Guys got to certain areas. They fished, fished for a long time. They're not going to get infringed on.

NS: What about something like clamming or oystering?

BG: Clamming, there's no such an area as this.

NS: What about scalloping?

BG: Not really. Not really. No.

NS: It is mostly the pot fishermen.

BG: Yes, it's pot fishermen. It's fixed gear. Clamming, there's never been problems there.

JG: That's only up to the west, though. Out on the east end, don't bother us when you can set your gear alongside of mine as long as it's not on top of me. Well, if you set alongside of Mr. (Gaff?), he can cut you off. You better delete that one. No, I'm only kidding. That's just the way we...

NS: Have there been changes that you have seen in the formations in the bays? Have more sand bars come in? Have there been a lot of natural changes? We talked a little bit about the eelgrass.

BG: It changes all the time, the contour of the land.

NS: Have there been dramatic changes?

BG: Yes, my inlet's all filled in.

NS: How come?

BG: How come? Good question.

NS: Well, the simple answer, what happened?

BG: I don't know really how come, but these people down the end here that is about three-quarters of a mile away, they claim that they've lost all their beach.

JG: We know where to find it.

BG: It's right up here. Our town board told them that if they want their sand back, they can come get it, and it's okay with me. Why did it change?

NS: Yes.

BG: I don't know why it changed.

NS: Was it [inaudible] put in or anything like that?

BG: I have no clue. I haven't been down there. I didn't look at it. But things change all the time on the water. You take a storm, and it changes things dramatically, quick-like.

NS: Is there anything manmade that you have seen that has caused some of those kinds of changes?

BG: Anything...

NS: I have noticed that with a lot of dredging, the inlets get wider or the marshland starts to erode. Have you seen anything like that, big changes?

BG: I probably have, but I don't even pay attention to it that much. It happens usually so slowly, the changes, that you don't notice them as much as something more dramatic like a storm where there used to be something there. It ain't there no more, but a lot of those things, like you're talking about, dredging and things like that, you probably don't see the full effects for quite a while afterwards. I mean, if you've seen a picture today and looked at one, two years from now, then you'd probably see a change.

NS: Have you seen much dredging around here?

BG: Not really. They have the county dredge that maintains some of these channels here, which you see every year in certain areas. That's basically got to be done because they fill in.

NS: When were these channels created? Are they natural channels?

BG: Some are, some aren't.

NS: Which are the manmade channels?

JF: Gull pond.

BG: Gull pond, I guess, the...

NS: Gold or Gull?

BG: Gulf, G-U-L-L.

NS: Okay, like the bird.

BG: It's Gull pond here. You got Sages in Southold. That's manmade. That used to be a brick place. They dug a hole out there for clay and...

JG: Goldsmith's [inaudible].

BG: Goldsmith's Inlet. There's a lot of this. Not Goldsmith's Inlet.



JG: No.

BG: Oakyard. I'm sure there's several of them. I really don't know. You could probably go back further than that.

JG: I think Goldsmith's and Sages are Hurricane made. They were digging bricks at the time that [inaudible] the [19]38 hurricane came and broke it open. But you were talking before about the creeks that are closed. Worst thing in the world is to close them. If these guys got in there digging clams, they'd be aerating the bottom, making things grow again. You've got a bunch of dead bottom up there, and nobody's doing anything with it.

BG: They closed them. They closed them because they do not meet the criteria of the federal government, state government, state of the water qualities are the ones that are checked. Now, there's some that's not checked and have accounted the manpower.

NS: Is that where a lot of the clamming was happening in those creeks?

BG: Well, we had one shut down. We've got it to the point now where it's open seasonal, which is Mill Creek or (Hashmona Farm?), whatever you want to call it. But a good portion of it is open now under seasonal conditions, and that's the best we've had in like ten or twelve years. It was closed down permanently, then they opened it on a conditional basis.

NS: When did they close it down permanently?

BG: I think it was, what, 1985, [19]86?

NS: So, it was about...

BG: In the middle [19]80s, I would say, due to, they said, runoff then. That was our most productive creek, and it still is when it's open. It's one of those creeks where it's a creek that's never been dredged either. It's got a railroad bridge that runs over it. There's no depth of water going out of it to speak of at low tide. It's just about unnoticeable.

JG: It seems to be the more, it's worked, though. The more it's utilized, the better.

NS: The water quality it has been getting?

JG: The better the product is. The more they work it, the more clams are in there. Just like Bob was saying about these other creeks. If they were worked and got that dead bottom churned and everything else, then the clams and et cetera would start to grow there again.

BG: It's like a garden. If you don't cultivate your garden, you've got nothing but weeds. You lay it to a garden, and the bottom is the same way. Work it. A good for instance is right here, Sterling Creek. There used to be good clams there. They closed it. The clams died off. When they opened it, everybody thought they were going to get rich, and the clams died off. The bottom got so contaminated.

NS: We are talking about what can happen.

BG: They can't because there's more recreational sports fishermen than there are commercial fishermen. There's more votes there. Laws are made through legislation by votes. Okay? But you can replenish that...

NS: What do you think should be done?

BG: That's what I'm saying. I got frustrated because what should be done is like fighting a war against a country with one person. What can you do? How can you overcome enormous amount of we want it done this way, right, wrong, and indifferent? This is the way we want it done, and most of them want it that way. Most of it is not for the good of everything, it's for the benefit. It's not for the good, but for the benefit.

B: They've got the power. They have the power. It's just like the lobbyists they had. They have all the power. They've got lobbyists up there and everything else. I got nothing up here.

JG: But another thing is you're talking about planting something until you cure all of these fertilizers and stuff going in. It's just like throwing your money out the window. You think you're going to put it there, and it's going to die. Until you get some way to stop them from using all these fertilizers and chemicals around the water, then nothing's going to happen.

BG: Well, they're not going to stop that because that's big business. That's money.

JG: Well, they stopped (DDT?). They stopped (TEMEC?). There's got to be something that they can stop that's environmentally safe that they can use.

BG: Well, every time they change from DDT...

JG: Yes, they find something else wrong.

BG: They thought they were going to something better. DDT was great for one time. Then they come up with the (TEMEC?) where (TEMEC?) does the same thing, but it's safe. They found out it was too. But it's too late after they find out that because twenty years after they've used it and it's in the ground, and guess what? It's going to come out, and it comes.

JG: Back in the old days, horse manure, cow manure, and chicken, it all worked. But all of a sudden, it smelled too bad for these people when they spread it out there. So, now they come up with chemicals instead. But what used to work, there was nothing wrong with it, but it wasn't pretty.

B: The thing is, these people who are around here who live on these creeks and everything else, they have the money to afford these houses, so they have the money to spend on fertilizers, and they have the money to push the right politicians to get their way. It's all a thing with money, like Bill said earlier. It's money. It's the politicians. You got a hundred people here who want

this, and you've got ten here. Who the hell is going to get it? The hundred people – there's a hundred votes compared to ten votes. It may be wrong, but there's a hundred votes and here's ten votes. Common sense.

BG: That's the bottom line. That's what you've got to overcome. That's the point you might be missing. It's not the receiving part and all this stuff. It's the other part.

NS: [inaudible]

BG: So, it's like fighting war where we got a water gun and they got a machine gun. Fishermen for the win.

JG: Every year it's worse and worse as every new house goes up.

NS: Where are you now in terms of working on the base? Do you do any...

BG: I manufacture lobster pots, and I clam when I get a chance. I set a few lobster pots, keep my sand rich, whatever. But after 1985, I took different routes because the water quality with the brown tide and everything wiped out the scallops, and that was your basic income. That was your major income. No, I probably work more different things now in the water than I ever did. I do it because I like it.

NS: When your grandfather was working the bay, how many people worked the bay for (Logan?)?

BG: If he wasn't a farmer, he was a bayman, okay? We'll get back to politicians again. Every time there's an election that comes up, every politician says, "What'd she say, Joe?" We go back to our heritage. Our farmers and our fishermen. That's at election time. But after election time, guess what? You don't even hear that no more.

JG: I had a fisherman...

BG: It was all (rain?) to us.

JG: I had a fisherman down at marina complaining about the draggers out in the bay. I said, "Hey, I work out there." I lost it. They're trying to make a living. But thirty years ago when there was a couple of wars going on, nobody complained about the fishermen then because they were feeding the country. All the farmers was in a war. Now all of a sudden they want to close them off.

BG: Let's put it this way. No one gets rich. They survive. But no one gets rich working on the water. Like I said, you're your own boss, which is tremendous. But you don't get rich. You make a living, and you've got a life. It's in your blood. It's in your blood. Just like farmers. They don't make a lot of money. It's in their blood.

NS: Were there hundreds of baymen at the time?

BG: There definitely was, yes. If he wasn't a fisherman, he was a farmer. It was a couple of general stores, and that was it for the basic needs. But everybody revolved around those two industries. That was it. There's nothing else. I mean, you might have had other things, like I'll say that Swezey's truck that carted these clams and stuff to the city. They revolved around fishing. Because if it wasn't for the fishing, you don't need no truck. That's all it was. Basically, now, your model would pay nothing out here. This is a retirement area. Southold Town is over 50 percent of the people on fixed incomes. Most of them are retired people.

NS: Your grandfather, how many bushels of clams would he get?

BG: My grandfather?

NS: Yes.

BG: I barely remember my grandfather. He was in his seventies.

NS: Your father then?

BG: My father? I haven't got a clue. Never really paid much attention. No No. It was – never...

NS: Well, how many boxes did he have on the curb?

BG: Five, six baskets. I mean, that was – he got like \$4, \$3 a bushel for him, something like that I remember.

NS: There were two bushels on a basket?

BG: A bushel in a basket.

NS: Oh, one bushel.

BG: Yes. Fifteen dollars a day, I guess that was pretty good.

NS: Was there ever like a really downtime?

BG: In the water, there's always something to do.

NS: This is tape two, side two.

BG: He's been fishing these charters.

NS: No, but did he have like pound nets?

BG: No, he didn't have pound. The only fin fishing he did was the charters. That's in New

Suffolk. It was a hundred-and-some charter boats alone at our New Suffolk.

NS: What about seine nets? Did he do any boat seining?

BG: Nope. Nope.

NS: What about the other fishermen and baymen around here? Did they do fin fishing?

BG: Some did. Some did pound nets. Some did boat seining, gill nets, but not much site.

NS: They were mussel shell fishermen.

BG: Right.

NS: Was that unusual?

BG: Not really.

NS: Not in these parts?

BG: No. Oh, you got guys now that I think, man, you're going to see next. (Dougie?), that's all he does is trap fish. He and I go clamming once in a little bit, but he's pound nets. That's it.

NS: That is different than around the Hamptons, you know, East Hampton. Is there more fin fishermen?

BG: A little different over here, anyway, but okay.

NS: What were some of those differences?

BG: Their differences?

NS: Yes, the differences between you and them.

BG: I'd say their lifestyle is the biggest difference.

NS: Among the fishermen?

BG: Yes.

NS: For instance.

BG: Well, most of them, like in [inaudible] Hamptons, they're more like hillbillies. Really. You can see that probably.

NS: Like the Bonackers, is that – something like that.

BG: You got it. Yes. The way I look at it, a Long Island hillbilly. He would be – the guys over there, to me, they would be just as comfortable. They'd be just as happy if they were back in the hills of West Virginia.

JG: Well, they're very clannish. That's true. They do stick together a little bit over there compared to around here.

B: The other thing is they've got money supporting their associations over there.

NS: Oh, sure. (Billy Joel?) and...

B: And that means a lot when they're lobbying on this bill and that bill, that big bucks. Like you said, (Billy Joel?) is one example.

BG: Well, just his name.

B: Yes.

NS: Well, are you guys organized in any respect? Is there like a Southold Baymen's?

BG: We have a Baymen's Association, yes. But it's got limited power. It's only as powerful as membership.

NS: How many members are there?

BG: How many members?

JG: Thirty-five.

NS: Are they full-time baymen?

BG: No.

JG: No.

BG: You see that it's Southold Baymen's Association. Okay, you got some baymen, but mostly associates. It has a little bit more power now than it did ten years ago. It's being looked at with a lot more seriously now than it ever was, I think. There's a few reasons for that.

NS: How long has it been around?

BG: Oh, it goes back until, when was it, [19]40, [19]50? It's a long time ago. It was a pretty strong thing then.

NS: Do you know who started it?

BG: I've got a clue. But he could tell you probably. He can look up the records.

JG: Oh, I can look up the records, but I don't know. I wouldn't even be surprised if it was someone like Billy Janovick or something like that.

BG: Yes, I think [inaudible], they were some of the first ones.

JG: Well, I mean some store down there. (Old gravis?).

BG: Yes, he's back there now, too.

JG: He was.

BG: But I'll tell you what helps now a lot is our trustees in this town. They look for opinions from the Baymen's Association now. They take it a lot more seriously than they did before. We have more say in what's going on as far as that goes. Actually, it makes you feel a little bit good. Pete Wenczel, he's a trustee and he's a full-time baymen. That definitely doesn't hurt.

NS: I have talked with him several times.

BG: He can relate to people that really don't know a lot about the water. He can relate to them on a weekly basis or a daily basis about things that's happening. That definitely helps. If they're hearing it from somebody who's on the water, it'd be better. He's definitely an asset.

[end of transcript]