Nancy Solomon: Hold on. Let me just get it started. Okay. This is Nancy Solomon talking with Jack Kelly of Shelter Island. Today is September 11th, 1997. This is tape one, side one.

Jack Kelly: Okay. Back, say in the late [19]40s and [19]50s, there was a road that ran from Gardiners Point on Gardiners Island here to – there was a name to that fort. I think it was Fort Meade or something like that. The Fort, it's off the north side of Gardiners Island. That was a continuous road. After one big hurricane, that was cut through. Over a period of the next four or five years, that was all washed away. In other words, at one time, when you were running your boat, you had to go all the way around to the very end where the Fort was, if you were going to go on the other side of the island. Now, it's wide open.

NS: [laughter]

JK: Over a period of years, the erosion of the sand and all the boulders – you could see the boulders every year because they were huge boulders all along that road. Every year, you could see them getting lower and lower. Then finally, at high tide, you couldn't see them. Then over a couple of more years, even at low tide, you couldn't see them. Then the more daring people would slowly edge up on their boats to see if they could save that long run around, and they would just go through little channels there. Now, big boats, everything goes through. It's wide open. It's probably about 15, 20 feet deep there now.

NS: When was that storm? Do you remember?

JK: The storm?

NS: Yes, the original storm.

JK: The name of it?

NS: Or when.

JK: It occurred, I'd say probably in the very late [19]40s or beginning of the [19]50s. Most people are not even aware of the fact that you could drive out there. They used to see Jeeps running out there on that road from Gardiners Island. Obviously, in colonial times, they had to supply it with ammunition, troops –

NS: [laughter]

JK: – that manned the cannons out there to close off that waterway to the British. So, obviously, that was a roadway for probably a couple hundred years.

NS: Were there ever similar things that happened here on Shelter Island or any of the different coastal towns?

JK: Well, this area where we are, this place has the name of Hay Beach. It has that name because we understand that when the British troops occupied Shelter Island, they used to bring

their horses over here to eat the salt hay all along the beach. That's how [laughter] it apparently got its name. Well, the history of Shelter Island, I'm sure you can get that very well from [inaudible]. They have all kinds of interesting pictures, documents, letters, everything.

NS: What about in the last fifty years? Have there been some natural changes to the grasslands?

JK: In the last fifty years, yes. Well, just where you see all these houses on this side, when we came here in 1969, I bought this property. It was dense. This was a sort of virgin forest here. There were no houses along this whole waterfront, nothing, all the way to the causeway. Where you see a lot of houses there at Hay Beach Point, you know where that pond is?

NS: Yes.

JK: That was all wild. There were a lot of dead trees on the bank that runs up from the pond up to what they call Point Lane now. I used to go down there with my field glasses and walk along the beach and go down there. At one time, I counted seventy-five egrets, snowy egrets roosting in the trees down there. That's how wild that place was. That house next door right here, and this house, we were the first two houses on this side. The first two. Then came houses down at the other end. They, unfortunately, built a house out close to the water. They bulkheaded everything. They built it all the way out to the main high tide line. Bulkheaded, filled everything in with earth. But again, with no malice or forethought on their part, they created a mini dune road situation with all that erosion. They didn't realize that everything to the west of anything, [laughter] a jetty or a bulkhead, it creates back scouring. At that time, I was still working as a physician in the city. Every year, when we'd come down here in the early spring, we'd walk along the beach. You would find great big trees that might have been fifty, seventy-five years old had toppled off the bank from the erosion. What was I up to? [laughter]

NS: You were talking about how you used to walk along the beach and the erosion.

JK: Oh, yes. Every year, you would find the banks were being eroded, and the trees were falling out. You'd find big, fifty, seventy-five-year-old trees, where the banks had eroded so much under it that it fell out on the beach. So, what happened? All those people had a bulkhead to save their property. That became a domino effect all the way down the beach on this side. Now, fortunately for us, the beach curves out somewhat down here at Orient Lane. It curves out. So, we've escaped that, and I don't think we'll have it. All that erosion that took place down there, on the incoming tide, [laughter] it's all piling up here at sandbars. You can't see it now, but…

NS: Yes. I know exactly what you're talking about. [laughter]

JK: Yes. Any number of sailboats, especially with their big keels –

NS: That run aground.

JK: – they come around the deep water at Hay Beach Point here on the end. They come around there. It's about an 80-foot channel. They make the turn. Unless you have wonderful eyesight, the marker is a way up here. So, you have a marker that's a good mile away, – the channel

marker, the green flasher. They probably make that turn, wondering. I wonder where the marker is. They're sailing blindly along here, and bang. They run aground right in the front there. So, all that sand erosion is gradually deposited all along here.

NS: Have you always lived here when you were on Shelter Island?

JK: Have I what?

NS: Have you always lived at this location on Shelter Island?

JK: Yes. This is the only place we've lived. I bought the property and had to hack my way through it with a machete. Because I wanted to be sure they didn't have a 10-ton or a 20-ton boulder in the middle here. That would be an engineering problem trying to build [laughter] a house.

NS: [laughter]

JK: Or a big pit or something. I was amazed at the dents, and there were pheasants. Remember when we first lived here? We had a whole load of pheasants right where the house is next door. Over a period of time, of course, after all, we've been here…

Doris Kelly: Almost thirty.

JK: Twenty-eight years. So, over a period of time, the whole place has been converted to homes. All the woods are gone. It's just another place. It's like a suburb now. But we had been in Southold prior to that. I think I said to you before, I came out of the service in [19]46. I met a patient down here. He took me fishing off Robins Island. We had a big bucket of grass shrimp. We used that for chum. You put a couple of little grass shrimp on a little tiny jig with a little hook, and let it drift back with the grass shrimp. We thought, one week.

NS: Did they catch grass shrimp here in the estuary, or did they come from Southold?

JK: That's where they caught them years ago. You could see grass shrimp everywhere in the water at one time. That's what brought the great hordes of weakfish into this area, because that's their favorite food.

NS: Was this something that baymen caught as part of their livelihood?

JK: Well, yes. Catching baitfish, see, in those early years, there must have been at least a dozen, what they called boat liveries, where people rented boats and motors. All these areas now that you see are bulkheaded, especially along the North Shore side, Norfolk side. Even, for example, the Port of Egypt Marina, was a vast tidal wetland. The Port of Egypt Marina, in the beginning, was a tiny fishing station run by the same family that runs the marina now, the Lieblein family. They had a little dirt road that filled in, and through the tidal wetlands, that you had to run down to their little fishing station on the end. On either side, when the tide came in, it looked like you were out on a little boat in their fishing station.

NS: [laughter]

JK: They were completely surrounded by water. So, over a period of time, I got to know them very well. They used to go fishing with us and so on. But they're a big family. They have the big marina there now. The people that were little kids to me, they're now the adults, the children that run that marina now. At that time, they bought – I don't know how they got it, but it was regarded then as useless property. It seemed everybody hated tidal wetlands because they bred mosquitoes. The Suffolk County Health Department used to dig trenches in the tidal wetlands –

NS: Right. The mosquito ditches.

JK: – to drain them. Then to make matters worse, they used to spray them with oils to kill the mosquitoes. Of course, they killed all the crabs, all the grass shrimp, and all the – [inaudible].

NS: Yes, all the habitat.

JK: But nobody realized how deadly that was. Nobody realized that the tidal wetlands were the nursery for the whole marine food chain. That's where it starts, with the little marine creatures that…

NS: The plankton and the algae, yes.

JK: Yes. The phytoplankton and all the way up the chain, the copepods and dinoflagellates, all these creatures. This is where they lived. Of course, they were killing them off. So, over a period of time, the Port of Egypt, they had a sign outside [laughter], "Clean film wanted." So, everybody, when they were digging foundations for all the houses that started showing up, instead of running away over to the town dump, which is over on Sound Avenue and way over beyond Patchogue, that's where the Southold town dump was, a long ride – they went right to his place and dumped their foundation diggings in his place. Over a period of four or five years, my God, they must have had a thousand loads of clean films. So, they bought a little bulldozer, and they leveled everything off. Then after a period of several years of settling – there's a regulation about how long it has to settle – they started putting that marina up. They saw the handwriting on the wall that fishing stations were going to be replaced by privately owned boats. I believe there's only one so-called boat livery now down there at New Suffolk. I think it's called, is it Warren's? I think, maybe. No, (Copax?), I think. (Copax?). Anyhow, there's one boat livery down there, further way down, and there used to be a lot of fish traps in the Bay. When the Riverhead Sewage Treatment Plant opened…

NS: When was that?

JK: What?

NS: Do you know when that was?

JK: I'd say, I think it was in the early [19]50s. Wasn't it, Doris? The Riverhead Sewage

Treatment Plant?

DK: We were still in Southold when they started that.

JK: When it came in. Yes. Well, I guess that could have been in the early [19]60s, but I believe it was in the [19]50s.

DK: Well, it's the latter [19]50s.

JK: Yes. What happened when that happened, there were loads of baymen. There were just loads of baymen and fish traps everywhere. You know those –

NS: Yes. The pound traps.

JK: – perpendicular to the shore, the headings.

NS: Yes.

JK: There were lots of those everywhere. As a matter of fact, at one time, they laid claim that there was, between Riverhead and Montauk, and between Riverhead and Orient Point, they claimed there were 112 fish traps. Not in our time, but there were certainly a lot. I would say there must have been twenty or thirty or forty fish traps. That was a handful. But anyway, there were loads of these fish traps, and there was just a super abundance of finfish and shellfish. But once the Riverhead Sewage Treatment Plant opened up, within two or three years – we had a lot of baymen. I remember an old bayman that I used to know. I think his name was Olson. He had his little shack in Riverhead, right on the water in Riverhead. He used to just go out there on his little boat, and he'd harvest oysters down at that part of the bay, at Flanders Bay. He'd harvest oysters, scallops, clams, but plenty of oysters. He made a very good living doing that because [laughter] there were no oyster farms down there. These were the oysters that float over or wild oysters as we called them. Once that sewage treatment plant opened, within a year or two or three, his take of oysters had gone straight to the bottom. Our assumption is that it was probably due to the chlorine in the –

NS: The effluent, yes.

JK: – the effluent. So, that was the beginning of the – I'm not going to say that was the cause of it. But as the urbanization increased all along the bay here, we saw everything decline. But back in the [19]50s, up to the mid-[19]60s, this was the most fabulous bay. Because we had a house right on the bay, on the Great Peconic Bay –

NS: On Southold.

JK: – on the north side. It was a little piece of a potato farm, and everything was wild there. Never saw a car. [laughter] We had a cove behind the house. You could just go out there any time, and with a couple of rake pulls, you'd have a half a pail of little necks, cherrystone clams. You had all the wild oysters you'd ever want to find. You could fill a rowboat up with scallops,

just walking around, picking them up, and throwing them in the boat, in about a half hour. In other words, this was a time of [phone rings] super abundance of shellfish and finfish. Hello? Yes.

DK: The scallops were just marvelous. I remember going out with a friend one day. I was scared to walk out there because I'm very nervous about a crab or anything like that. I think I'd jump to the moon if one bit my toe. [laughter] So, I remember walking there one day with her, and because she was with me, it kept my mind off. I was so nervous about it. I just scooped up the scallops and dumped them in the boat.

NS: Did you have to go into deep water, or was it pretty shallow where you got them?

DK: No. I was walking. It was a wonderful place.

NS: What town were you living in at that time?

DK: That was Southold.

NS: You were actually in the village of Southold.

DK: That was in the summer, so our summer home. It was a very simple place, but it was marvelous for children because they had such a good time there. There was so much to see and absorb. They all remember it so fondly. They were very upset when we decided to move from there. [laughter]

NS: [laughter] But this is nice.

DK: Yes. Well, they realized that. But what they learned about the little things, the creatures that live just off the water, the beach there, is something that will always stay with them. I remember my daughter was out there one day. I was watching her from the living room. She'd scoop up these fish, billfish, and just dump them in the boat. [laughter] She'd turn and look at me and laugh. She was so cute. She was so little then.

NS: That is really neat.

DK: It really was an amazing place.

JK: But anyway, we had great schools of porpoises that would come in the bay, up to the mid-[19]60s. As you probably know, a porpoise is a very sensitive barometer of the quality of the water column. So, when we no longer saw porpoises – and even kingfish disappeared at that time – I think we began to realize something was happening in the bay. But when you looked around, you realized what was happening. When I first was down here fishing, I had an old fishing dory [laughter] which came off one of those draggers. When I used to sit out there with our little children, sit out in the bay, when you look shoreward, all you saw were farms, wooded lots, and the cave. No house. That was all. There were very few houses. Now, with the urbanization of the whole area, everything is bulkheaded. What is it bulkheaded with? CCA-

treated timber. What was CCA-treated timber? Copper chromium – yes, this is my grandson.

DK: He's nice.

Male Speaker: Hi. Nice to meet you.

JK: John Paul. Nancy Solomon.

MS: Nancy, how are you?

NS: Nice to meet you.

MS: John…

JK: [inaudible] of the area and all the CCA-treated timber, and the leaching of lawn fertilizers, cesspools, water runoff, point source, non-point source of pollution. I think that some of us began to realize that something serious was happening in the bay because we no longer saw the porpoises, the kingfish. There was an enormous decline. It was an incremental decline, year-by-year. Unless you fished and did what we did year-after-year, you probably wouldn't notice it. In other words, if you came down here, say, in 1950, and you'd go out fishing in a little boat, you'd catch a load of fish. If you came back in 1955, you'd say, "Well, I guess we didn't have just as good a day. We weren't in the right spot." You'd catch fish, but you wouldn't catch nearly as many as you did in 1950. Everything being the same. If you were shell fishing, you would notice the same thing. You'd say, "Well, I guess we didn't hit a good spot today." But the fact was, there was a slow incremental decline year-by-year. I'd say in the beginning of the [19]70s – [phone rings] Oh, my Lord. This is something.

NS: [laughter]

JK: – to realize that there was beginning some serious changes in the Bay. But not too many people noticed that unless you were a very keen observer of the bay. But actually, the only people that would have really noticed what was going on were the people who were the harvesters of the finfish and the shellfish. They keep saying, "Hey, fishing is not as good as it used to be five years ago." Because the incremental change was so slight. Now, in the [19]70s, on this beach here, I began to notice the eelgrass coming up on the beach. It started around mid-July. You'd see the eel grass with the outgoing tide. Pretty soon, a long, dark, green line of dead eelgrass would run all along the beach. It'd be about this wide and about that high, and that would smell. But that went on every year. It would occur about the same time. So, whether there was a connection with all the – this is a tourist environment – with all the people coming down, activating their [laughter] plumbing and their cesspools and fertilizing their lawns and everything, and all that leaching into the bay, whether there was a connection, all I can say is it's a possibility. There's no way we can prove that. So, I noticed a good ten years before the brown tide ever arrived, that, number one, the eelgrass was dying. We didn't have scuba divers to go down like they did in the past several years, to see what the status of the eelgrass is. But it was obvious, if you sat out there in a boat on an outgoing tide, seeing all these strands of dead eelgrass floating out, that the eelgrass was dying. But it was okay on this side of the island,

which you couldn't help but notice that. So, you knew that the eelgrass wasn't dying from this area. Since it was coming out on the tide, you knew it had to be coming from down the bay. How far down the bay? [laughter] Well, we couldn't tell that. So, we all noticed that. Now, what happened was, in 1985, the brown tide appeared. That was the catalyst that drew everybody's attention to the bay. Hey, there's something wrong with the bay. Then after a few years, we got this group going, with Gayle Marriner-Smith's mother, Jean Marriner, and Jean Lane. They were really the two people that got on the phone, called, I don't know, maybe a dozen of us. We had our first meeting over in the group of the Suffolk office. I'm one of the vice chairmen of that organization. We started from there. Now, the Suffolk County legislature, at the time, the reason we started was because the Suffolk County legislature had washed their hands of it. They told the public, "That's something in the water. You better talk to the federal government. We only have control over what's on the land." Well, we thought that was really asinine for them to do that.

NS: [laughter]

JK: So, we decided we should form our own group and do whatever we could. But we had no funds. We had nothing. At our meetings, we used to have to pass the hat around so the secretary could buy some paper.

NS: [laughter]

JK: So, we went on like that for about a year. Jean Marriner was a public relations lady, besides. So, she got a lot of publicity, and that embarrassed the Suffolk County legislature. [laughter] So, they decided that they were going to make us an official committee [laughter] of the legislature, and we'd all have to be sworn in by them. [laughter] For this, the carrot they held out was they'd give us $100,000 to help us start some research. Well, in a way, we said, "Well, we'll take that carrot, but we're not going to let you appoint the people on the committee. We'll appoint them and you can approve them."

NS: [laughter]

JK: Because we know that they'd appoint under-the-rug types. So, we went along. Then after a couple of years, we started a little bit of research. We then got the Suffolk County Health Department and the office of the [inaudible] vetoed them in.
So, a wonderful job. They started taking samples in the bay. Cornell Coop came in. I think they wanted to come in, but somehow or other, there seemed to be some opposition to them in the beginning. So, I can't say they were – [laughter]

NS: Well, they had what is his name to deal with, Jerry Schubel. [laughter]

JK: Yes, and the Nature Conservancy…

NS: That is probably what held that up.

JK: Sarah Davidson, she became part of us. We then eventually got the Nature Conservancy in

on this. So, everybody then jumped on the bandwagon. Now, we hired a marine scientist. I don't know. I have to say [laughter] the opinion about the marine scientists is that they're very difficult to deal with. They have opinions of their own, and they do not listen to what went on in the bay. I think this is where we've had sort of a revolt [laughter] in the ranks. The marine scientists have given out the impression that the brown tide created the whole problem of the bay, caused all the eelgrass to die, the scallop crop to disappear. Not all the eels of the bay. They more or less never triggered it to the eelgrass. All I can say is, it's not true.

NS: Well, one of the things I want to find out from you is what your experience has been and what conclusions have you drawn? Or in learning from other people as well, what have been some of the ecological things that you have seen change over the years? You have talked a little bit about some of them, the eelgrass beginning to wash up.

JK: Yes.
Well, if you mean, what do other people think?

NS: Well, no. No. From your own experience, how have you learned about the Peconic Estuary? What are some of the things that you have done over the years?

JK: Well, as I said, my experience was that there was a marked decline because I'm out there fishing all the time. [laughter]

NS: Well, what kind of fishing do you do?

JK: Well, I do all kinds. But basically, I'm strictly a bluefish and red bass fishing.

NS: Have you done much shell fishing, clamming?

JK: Yes, loads of it.

NS: We can talk a little bit about the shell fishing.

JK: Well, when we lived in Southold, you could walk out our house. You only had to walk 3 or 4 feet in the water.

NS: Yes. Doris was telling me a little bit about this. I want to get more information. [laughter]

JK: Yes. You take one of those shellfish rakes, and in five minutes, you'd have a half a bucket of little necks and blue points. Yes. That's a nice little…

NS: This is tape one, side two.

JK: So, that, I noticed, started to decline. Now, we used to have huge volumes of fish up the bay in Great Peconic. That's where I fish mainly. Although once in a while, I'd go all the way down through the Shinnecock Canal. I'd even fish in Shinnecock Bay for the fluke down there. But we used to catch every kind of fish in the Great Peconic Bay, in the region of Jessup, west of

there, over by Nassau Point, by Robins Island, and off around Shelter Island. We used to venture out to Plum Gut and fish out there because we liked to catch bigger fish. In those years, all the fish you caught in Plum Gut were bluefish of the 10 to 15-pound size. All the fish you caught out there were big.

NS: This is in the [19]50s that you were talking about?

JK: That was in the [19]50s and [19]60s.

NS: About how many full-time baymen and fishermen were around during those years, if you had to take a guess?

JK: In those years, this bay here, Gardiners Bay, must have been paved with the yellowtail flounder.

NS: [laughter]

JK: They're big flounders, yellowtail flounders, great big ones. You would see sometimes as many as six to seven draggers working in Gardiners Bay here. They'd bring in hundreds of boxes of these fish. Well, over a period of seven or eight or ten years, the flounders were wiped out. Now, whether that was just overfishing or whether pollution played some part in that, I couldn't say. But that bay was loaded with yellowtail flounders at one time. Now, the characteristic of the fishing, since we've had this decline of the bay, what has happened, because of the chlorine and all the CCA-treated timber, this CCA-treated timber has created a lot of arsenic in the water. Just taking a lesson from what happened in the Chesapeake Bay, down in the Chesapeake, they found – because, first of all, they're about five years ahead of us in research – they found that trace doses of arsenic kill the microscopic algae, which is the only food of the copepod. The copepod is the principal bait of the killis, the little, tiny grass shrimps, and all other little marine creatures that graze on the marine organisms. So, once the copepods disappeared, so did the killis and the little, tiny baitfish of other types, spearing and so on. Once that happened, well, they had the same problem in the Chesapeake as we have. Their finfish and shellfish went right down to the bottom. Now, this is probably what's happening in our bay. Although this is one of the failings of the program so far. They have done nothing about investigating what the role of chlorine is in the bay. Even though Carol Browner, the administrator of federal EPA, one of her first speeches, she said, "Chlorine must go." Then she listed why. It kills fish eggs, causes alteration in the small marine creatures, kills all those small marine creatures, and is causing [inaudible]. Nobody has paid any attention to that. They have done nothing about the chlorine because we have ten sewage treatment plants that empty into this Peconic Estuary.

NS: Where are they?

JK: Well, they start all the way with Brookhaven Laboratory. I have a map that shows them. There's several along the Peconic River of communities. There's a bunch of housing developments all along there. Riverhead is one. Well, Shelter Island, we have one here.

DK: Greenport too.

JK: Well, Greenport, I believe, empties into the Sound. Then as you go up on the other shore, you have Sag Harbor. I think you have Springs and those other places on Three Mile Harbor and Montauk. On this other side, I think that…

NS: Do you know when they were mostly built? What time period that the treatment plants were built?

JK: When were they built?

NS: Yes.

JK: I couldn't tell you the time, but there were no sewage treatment plants when we first arrived out here. There were none.

NS: So, the chlorine was coming from what kind of plants?

JK: The chlorine has only been coming from the sewage treatment plants as far as we know. Now, there's another possible source of chlorine. Well, we have a septic system of our own, so do all the houses on this side. The only sewage treatment plant we have is that small one that services the Heights. That's the only one. Everybody else has septic systems. What happened is that, in the beginning, they were using detergents that had chlorine, phosphorus, and so on. When you had your washing machine run its overflow or run its water into your septic system, that gradually leached into the bay, so did all the nitrogen. So, that was probably the start of maybe chlorine. I'm just supposing that. I don't know if that's a fact. But we do know [laughter] it's probably a fraction of 1 percent compared to what the sewage treatment plants do. Because the sewage treatment plants, in order to achieve the effect of killing all the bacteria, they have to use large quantities of chlorine. When they do, it's really overkill. There's a great deal of chlorine that goes out into the bay with the effluent. Now, I don't know if they're doing it in the Riverhead Sewage Treatment Plant, but some places, they use a counter to that. Some kind of sulfate that is a counter to the chlorine. It neutralizes it. But then [laughter] you have that chemical in the water, which is just as bad as chlorine. Now, every single sewage treatment plant uses chlorine. I recently got the estuary program – it took me three years, but I got the estuary program to run a demonstration project of ultraviolet for treatment instead of chlorine. The reason for that is that ultraviolet adds nothing to the water column. Ultraviolet, as the bacteria and the viruses pass by the ultraviolets – they have highly specialized tubes of ultraviolet. It's a fraction of the ultraviolet that they use for killing bacteria and viruses. As it goes by, it alters their RNA and DNA, which kills them. As it slowly passes by, this works. See, chlorine, it has to settle in a big tank. It has to stay in contact for a long time before they regard it as being bactericidal. Anyhow, this is the first of Long Island. Long Island, for some reason, has been backward in the use of ultraviolet light as a bactericidal for pathogenic bacteria in sewage treatment plants. But our neighboring county of Westchester, they have ten sewage treatment plants that are using ultraviolet light. The whole New York State throughway uses ultraviolet light. New York State has [19]46 sewage treatment plants that use ultraviolet light. I'd say there's probably somewhere around 20 percent of all the sewage treatment plants in the

United States that use ultraviolet light, and there's more and more coming online.

DK: Plum Island just put that in too.

JK: Yes. Plum Island recently – this company that did this for me, the Estuary program, I should say, they did Plum Island last year so that Plum Island, instead of discharging all that sewage treatment effluent from all the cattle they have out there – an awful lot of E. coli in that, E. coli down there, they're now using ultraviolet light instead of all that chlorine in the water there.

NS: I want to get back to some of the shell fishing activities and resources from your first years, when you were first out this way. That is what I have been asked to really try and learn more about. For instance, was it pretty commonplace that no matter where you were at your end of the bay, that you could go down to Peconic Bay and be able to find oysters and clams and scads? Or were there certain particular places that were known for that?

JK: Yes. Well, where we were living at the time, if you want to know that. We had a little piece–

NS: Yes. Well, you showed me on the map.

JK: I'll show you on the map. We had a little piece of a potato farm that was on the North Fork west of Jessup's. You know where Jessup's is? I'll show you. I'll show you where it is. Oh, wait a minute. Wrong map.

NS: Yes. I was just about to say. [laughter] I think it is the East map.

JK: These are the old maps. I have the brand new one. Now, they're waterproof paper. I can tell you about this side. Everything on these maps, it's on both sides here. These are ancient.

NS: Yes, but they are more detailed.

JK: But I have them on my boat. Now, here's where we lived at the time, is Jessup's. You see this little spit of land here. Let's see. Yes, we were in that little spit of land right there on the bay. This was a lot bigger [laughter] than it seems on the map. Oh, I'm sorry. Right here

NS: What is that called?

JK: Well, that's Cory's Creek. See, there's Cory's Creek right there. We were right on the – where the channel for Cory's Creek here. They don't seem to show it, but there's a channel right there.

NS: There is a piece of land just above you that says something neck. I cannot read it from here.

JK: Yes, there it is. See, Cory…

DK: Is that Hogs Neck?

JK: That's Cory's Creek. Yes. There's Cory's Vineyard now over there. See, there's a place here called Laughing Waters. We were opposite that, right here.

NS: What is that big piece of land right where…

DK: This?

NS: Yes. What is that called? I cannot read it from here. [laughter]

JK: Well, this is Cedar Beach on the end.

NS: Yes. What does that say where Doris just pointed? [laughter]

JK: Well, this whole thing is Great Hog Neck.

NS: Okay. That is what I was wondering.

JK: Yes. Great Hog Neck, and this is Cedar Beach. This is where the Cornell Cooperative Extension, their little aquarium is right out here. Right out on here. Yes, we were on Cory's Creek here. See, there's a cut where the channel went through. We were right about there.

NS: Was that a place that was really known for having great shell fishing ?

JK: Well, it was wild. Every place here had great shell fishing.

DK: We knew them. But there were only four houses on there, so.

NS: Yes. But did a lot of baymen work in that particular area?

JK: Oh, yes. There were baymen working here all the time in Cory's Creek. Remember how they used to be harvesting shellfish there?

DK: Yes.

JK: In the fall, they used to come right [laughter] at 4:00 a.m. or 5:00 a.m. We'd be asleep on a Saturday morning, and they'd be running [laughter] their trailers over our lawn to launch their boats into the water. [laughter]

NS: Wow. Were these full-timers or were some of the part-timers?

JK: Well, they were like the scallopers, almost all. I mean, how could you make a living just on scalloping and, seasonally, only lasted really a couple of months when they're readily available to harvest? You could harvest scallops in the winter, but my God, [laughter] can you imagine going out on a winter day harvesting scallops? But these people were like most of these baymen.

They did something else for their real income.

NS: So, they were part-timers mostly that came.

JK: Yes. There were full-time baymen though, but they were versatile fishermen. They had…

NS: Did other kinds of shell fishing. They did clamming. They did kingfishing.

JK: They clammed. They caught crabs. They caught bait. They caught porgies. They caught all kinds of fish. They had a fish trap maybe. Maybe had a couple of fish traps. So, they were versatile people. They had to be. They had to catch everything in season because most of these fish we're talking about are seasonal. The flounders come out in the spring. Then they're usually followed by the mackerel, followed by the weakfish, followed by the bluefish, and then other species come in. Then when you get up around the end of May, middle of May, you start seeing the fluke and the seabass. Well, the stripers, they come in in the early spring. We used to catch all those fish in the bay. In those years, scallops were everywhere in the bay. You'd be standing in the water…

NS: They were not just in that particular part of the bay? You could find them down in this direction, for instance? Or were there certain places that were known for being good scallop areas?

JK: Actually, you usually find scallops in the water up to about maybe your neck or your head because –

NS: So, about six feet.

JK: – once the light diminishes – because the scallops are filter feeders. They need a lot of plankton and stuff. So, you need light to create plankton. So, you would find scallops everywhere. I would say in water from about 10 feet and less you would find lots of scallops. Once you got into real deep water, you'd find scallops, but less of them. But the water around 10 feet, 12 feet, 8 feet, 6 feet, that's where you'd find most of the scallops.

NS: Were there certain parts of the bay that were better than others?

JK: Yes. There were lots of them.

NS: What were the really good parts?

JK: Well, it depended on your own local experience.

NS: Where you were, it sounds like it was a pretty good…

JK: We would find that the water in Cory's Creek was just loaded with scallops. Now, the deepest water in [laughter] Cory's Creek at high tide was only up to your neck. Cory's Creek was crystal clear. You think you were down on the Virgin Island. Where you stand, the water up to

your neck, you can see your toes. But Cory's Creek was like that. It was crystal clear, and it was just paved with scallops.

NS: Was there much eelgrass?

JK: Loads of it everywhere, loads of eelgrass, and anywhere where you saw the scallops. Because in the beginning, they have what they call buttons, little, tiny scallops. They' cling to the tops of the eelgrass. As they get a little bigger – they only lived two years – as they get up to the end of their first year, [laughter] they'd start jetting around. They'd hit you in the leg. You'd feel them hitting you in the leg as you stood there in the water because they –

NS: [laughter]

JK: – just jet along blindly. Not that they go fast, they only move about like this. The waters were loaded with the blowfish. We had tons of blowfish, lots of crabs, blue claws, loads of them. Eels, scallops, wild oysters, loads of clams.

NS: I want you think about this. Was there a difference in the things that people used to harvest the scallops? If they were a bayman versus somebody like yourself, was there a difference in how you would get scallops?

JK: Well, yes. We had so many scallops that we'd just walk along in water up to about our knees, just picking them up and throwing them in the boat. We'd get bushels of them in about a half-hour.

NS: You would just use your hands?

JK: Three or four of us just walking along, picking them up. Now, the baymen…

NS: At low tide, I guess.

JK: What?

NS: Was this at low tide on the beach?

JK: Yes. We'd walk along at low tide because you'd have much more water to cover. You'd be able to see them far easier. Now, the baymen, the real serious scallopers, [laughter] they'd use their boat. They have a dredge. Matter of fact –

NS: So, they would be using the dredges?

JK: – I have one in the cellar. I have one in the basement. I have a dredge that's about this wide. I have it [inaudible].

NS: That is what I figured. I know that Raleigh was just telling me, he would have four or five dredges.

JK: Yes. Some of these baymen, they put out a bunch of them. They put out one on this side, one on this side, one off the transom. They'd just keep culling them in, and they have a big culling board on the boat. They'd dump what they'd pull in on that there, and they get rid of all the rocks and empty shells, and so on, and keep the scallops. Then they'd throw that one back. They'd pull the next one in, and they'd do that. They'd harvest loads of scallops.

NS: So, Cory's Creek was one of the really good places?

JK: Well, Cory's Creek, the baymen used to come there because it was so easy to harvest scallops there. But I rarely ever saw them dredging for scallops there because they were mostly, we might say, recreational type of people that lived there –

NS: Or part-timers.

JK: – who decided they wanted to get a couple of bushels of scallops and have a few meals. But the baymen usually worked on the outside and…

NS: Directly along the shoreline.

JK: They worked along the shores. This bay here had loads of scallops. But over a period of years, when you got up to the middle [19]60s and [19]70s, and especially in the [19]80s, the baymen from Shelter Island were not going down the bay to get scallops. Because they would get scallops, but they'd have to work hard to get far less scallops. They were staying in the creeks, West Neck, Coecles Harbor, and over here by [inaudible], Northwest Harbor over here on the mainland. They were doing almost all that scalloping and doing it on this northern side here. Along this front here, we used to have a lot of scallops. Oh, we had tons of scallops right here on this side, right in front of us. We used to have scallop shelves this high, this wide, a huge endless belt of scallop shelves.

NS: So, the baymen that were working along here, where did they come from? Do you know?

JK: Well, most times, /they try to go as short a distance from where [laughter] they started as possible. Everybody had his favorite place where he found that he got the best scallops because maybe he knew a little more about how to harvest in that spot. But most of the baymen tried to harvest scallops close to where they came from. So, if they came from back this way, they harvest the scallops in all these little bays and little creeks around here. It was the same on the South Shore. We noticed though, as I say, when we got up to the [19]80s, mid-[19]70s even, the Shelter Island scallops – because we had lots of them on this island. They work on ferries. They do other things. They're carpenters and so on. But on this island, it's a supplementary form of income for everybody that lives here. After all, this island didn't always have a population like it has now. They were people that were the descendants of the original settlers mostly. They were people that had farms here on the island. They did carpentry and built houses and plumbing and wiring [laughter] and everything like that. They used to, on weekends, and when they had time off.

DK: You remember, Jack, they used to say, "That's our Christmas money."

NS: Yes. That is what I have heard too. [laughter]

DK: Yes. They looked forward to that because of it. Lots of the people who are natives here will tell you what it was like. They'd go out in the cold weather. They'd freeze all day. Then come home and open all those scallops and shelled them. They worked very hard, but that was their Christmas.

JK: Yes.

DK: It was hard to do without that. [laughter]

JK: During the depression, the islanders here found that it was tough. They used to scallop almost the entire winter. They'd be out on the water at dawn, and they wouldn't come in until it was dark. Then they had to clean them. That's how they managed to keep themselves together at that time, keep their families fed and so on.

NS: When did you move to Southold? When did you live in Southold?

JK: Well, we came there –

DK: Around 1950.

JK: – around 1950, didn't we? Yes. We came there about 1950.

NS: Was there a lot of oystering going on at that time?

JK: A lot of what?

NS: Oystering?

DK: Yes. Everything. The bay was very rich in produce for everyone.

NS: Now, were the oysters also very close to the shoreline, or were they in deep waters?

JK: Yes. Now, in those years, the
Shelter Island Oyster Company in from Greenport, they had these great, big vessels. They had whole areas plotted out. They used to…

NS: That were theirs, right? [laughter]

JK: Yes. That's what they had rented from the government. They had these big oyster stakes in the water. I think they were big locus boats. They were everywhere. They were all over the bay.

NS: Were they pretty close to Shelter Island, or would you find them down here as well?

JK: They were down here. We used to see their big dredges down here.

NS: So, you would see them in –

JK: Yes. They used to come down here.

NS: – Cory's Creek and that…

JK: They used to plant the little, small oysters at one time in the year. They'd plant them. I think they'd plant them in the fall. Then a year or two later, they'd be harvesting them. They had…

NS: Did you find oystering in the western part of Peconic?

JK: Down here, I didn't bother much down here, but there was good oystering down here because I knew…

NS: There was. There were other people who did it. Yes.

JK: Oh, I knew a lot of baymen down here. They used to have very good harvesting of oysters down here. This was before the Riverhead…

NS: Was this also where the company…

JK: What?

NS: Was this also company oyster lands, or was it for anybody?

JK: Yes. This was rented. In other words, –

NS: It was leased.

JK: – the oysters were harvested by companies that had rented the bottoms from the government.

NS: Was it that same company that leased the lands near Greenport, or was it a different company?

JK: I think it was the only company. That was the Shelter Island Oyster Company in Greenport. They had the big boats, huge boats. They would sew all these small oysters. They used to trace sew them as little, tiny spat, I think they called them. They'd sew them out in the Sound, somewhere near the Connecticut River, in that area. Then they'd harvest them when they got maybe that size. Then they'd sew them here to give them – they used to sew a lot of them off Robins Island because they had oyster in those days. I remember going to some fancy clubs in

New York where they used to serve Robins Island oysters. They were famous for that. They were beautiful, big, tasty oysters. All back in this area, they had lots of oysters.

NS: When did that stop?

JK: Well, what happened? We noticed over a period of years, starting in the [19]70s, I'd say, we noticed that they were no longer harvesting oysters where we could see them from our house. We could see their boats out here. Because we drove into Cory's Cove, and we were right in the middle there. We could watch them, and we began to notice that they weren't coming there anymore. Then the oyster stakes that we always had to avoid when we were going to go fishing at Jessup's, we noticed that they stopped harvesting them as you got up into maybe the [19]70s. They stopped harvesting. Why? Because they were [laughter] getting a poor return. Most of their oysters were dying.

When they sew the little oysters, they'd come back a year or two later, they've got a very poor harvest. So, they began to realize that something was wrong. So, then they started moving out. Now, we've began to notice them out the front here. They were sewing their oysters out in the front and sewing them over by Long Beach. Well, we can't see it now, but the State Park, and out in Gardiners Bay. In other words, they moved their entire operation out here.

NS: Was that, do you think, because of pollution that they were not getting as many?

JK: I think what was happening was that the chlorine and probably toxic chemicals were – because oysters are extremely sensitive to any kind of pollution. I think that was what was killing their oysters. They were getting a diminishing harvest of oysters. They had still some oyster farming done here because I used to see them here. We'd see them. They used to harvest around here. Then they had a couple of places around right in front of us here and then a couple of places in Gardiners and a couple of places around here, where they would harvest. In other words, their oyster operation kept slowly moving east out of the bay.

NS: How did they harvest the oysters? What kind of boats were they?

JK: They had big boats with big, big dredges.

NS: They were dredges.

JK: They were enormous boats. They had great big dredges around big steel cables that they lowered over the side, and they dragged it along the bottom.

NS: Those big cages almost. The offshore clam boats is what I am thinking of.

JK: Yes. It wasn't a net. It was a big steel cage.

NS: Yes, the steel cage.

JK: Yes, like a big cage.

NS: Not like the scallop dredges.

JK: They would bring that up on deck. It only took about three or four men. This whole thing was run by buttons. They lower the dredge. They would drag it along for a while. They pull it up. I guess, at one dredge, they must have harvested many, many bushels of oysters. Because on that deck, they have wooden barriers built up, and they keep throwing the oysters in that. So, pretty soon, it'd be about seven feet high along the whole deck, solid oysters. They used to harvest, though I'm sure, hundreds and hundreds of bushels of oysters on that boat in an afternoon or a morning.

NS: Now, if you were a regular bayman who spent part of his time oystering, what kinds of tools would they use? This is tape two, side one. I am talking with Jack Kelly.

JK: Yes. If you were harvesting the oysters as an independent bayman, you couldn't obviously harvest in their farms, or you'd be in trouble.

NS: You would get arrested or worse. But if you did do it in local non-leased waters.

JK: Well, you could harvest near their farm because naturally, a lot of their oysters, from storms and so on, would be washed out of the area where they planted them. So, they'd be scattered. There'd be quite a scattering of their oysters on the outside of where they had their stakes. So, if you wanted to, you could harvest there.

NS: How would you do it?

JK: Well, we just walk around in Cory's Creek. We never harvest oysters on the outland because –

NS: No. But what kinds of tools would you use?

JK: We didn't have any equipment, but we'd walk around. We'd see oysters. We just picked them up.

NS: During low tide?

JK: Yes, generally at low tide. You'd see them lying on the bottom there. You just walk over and pick them up.

NS: Is that what the baymen also did, who was not working for the company?

JK: Well, the baymen did a lot of that, too. But they had tongs

NS: They did use tongs?

JK: Yes. But the main harvest of oysters was done by the boats. I'd say they harvested

90 percent of the oysters. Now, they didn't have any farms down in this area. But before this Riverhead Sewage Treatment Plant, there were some baymen down here.

NS: In Flanders.

JK: They had a very good harvest of oysters here. Because my knowledge of oysters, which is not great, but I think they like slightly brackish water with some fresh water. They always seem to congregate around the mouths of tidal streams and ridges and so on. That's where you'll find them down at Chesapeake, too.

NS: Were they mostly in shallow or deep water?

JK: There were a lot of oysters right around here.

NS: Were they in shallow or deep waters?

JK: Say that again?

NS: Were the oysters in shallow water or deep water?

JK: Well, they're in both. Because you'll find them down the Chesapeake Bay they harvest oysters there.

NS: I am talking about here. [laughter]

JK: Oh. Well, back here, well, I don't know. These men had tongs. They could go down, I guess, 10, 15 feet and harvest them. But I didn't really know too much about them, other than the fact that I knew that there were oystermen down here that made a good living just harvesting oysters. But after the Riverhead Sewage Treatment Plan came online, that all disappeared.

NS: Yes, that was the end.

JK: Then gradually, with the urbanization, houses going up everywhere, bulkheading, tidal wetlands being filled in, just saw the oysters all being gradually moved out here. Not because they didn't like the territory, but because they all died back here. There was nothing to harvest. So, they just kept moving out. Then, of course, when the brown tide started and the scientists came in after it was running for four or five years, they sent scuba divers down. They found that this bay and this bay was like a desert. It had just about no eelgrass. So, you have to have eelgrass to have scallops. So, they concluded, in my estimation, erroneously, that all the eelgrass was killed off by the brown tide. I'd say the brown tide was the catalyst. There's no question. It killed off eelgrass. But this process had been going on for ten to fifteen years before the brown tide ever appeared. I think the brown tide is nothing more than a symptom of a seriously stressed bay. I think the brown tide is just a diversion of everything here that they're spending all their time investigating. So, what they should be investigating is what is the chlorine doing to the finfish and the shellfish. They have toxic levels of arsenic in this bay and this bay. Where is that coming from? Pesticides, and I think a great deal of it. Again, this should be investigated. I'm

only guessing. I think though, a great deal of it is coming from the CCA-treated timber, which is leaking out into the bay. You only need trace doses to break the food chain, to kill off the copepods, et cetera. If you have no bait fish, you have no predator fish. What we find, when you go here where we used to have the bluefish here, morning, noon, and night, huge hoards of them, we find out the bluefish, with their genetic imprint, that this is the place where you come in to fatten up in the spring. They come in and they rush around with the birds diving down and the few killis that might be around. Because after all, there are some killis, but nothing like it used to be. They go in a few minutes, and the school departs because there's no bait.

NS: Now, clams, I know they are very similar, another type of shellfish.

JK: Clams are tough.

NS: Were there differences in some of the things that you have learned about the clams in different parts of the bay?

JK: Well, what I noticed is that the clams are not near as sensitive as the scallops and the oysters. They're not as easily killed off. They'll get thinner. When you open up a nice fat clam, it'd be right at the top of the shell. When we had the brown tide for five or six years running, we noticed that the clams were very thin. The people that made the clam chowder, they'd always be moaning as they had to use twice as many clams to make the same amount of chowder. So, the clams got thin, but the clams survived. The clams are tough.

NS: Are there certain kinds of clams that have done better than others, for instance, the soft clams versus the butter clams versus the littlenecks or the chowder?

JK: The soft clams, this is not an area noted for soft clams. We don't have many soft clams. There are some over here. But again, the soft clams that I'm familiar with, we got soft clams when we lived up in Cory's Creek.

NS: There were a lot more soft clams over there?

JK: But whether there's any soft clams over there now, I don't know. We left there in around 1968, I think, [19]67. That was when I was beginning to really notice the decline in finfish and shellfish. Now, soft clams are not a big thing in this bay. You can get soft clams, but it's a minor type of shellfish crop.

NS: What about the other kinds of clams, the cherrystones and the littleneck and the butter clams?

JK: Yes, the cherrystones, the littlenecks, the quahogs, the big chowder clams, surf clams, skimmer clams, they're in very short supply. We used to go over here to the State Park, Hallock Bay there. Now, unfortunately, with the rain, you can't see a damn thing. We used to go up there. We'd come back with a half a washtub of clams. Just myself, and my kids are wonderful clammers.

NS: [laughter] I hope this is not boring. You lived through all this.

Doris Kelly: It's interesting to me, too. I feel badly to see this happening. It's sad.

JK: My wife is not a person like we are. We're always in boats and fishing and all of that. She doesn't go with us, but she loves to see us do it.

NS: [laughter]

JK: She loves to participate in the harvest. [laughter] The eating part of it.

NS: Anyway, you were saying that you used to go over to the State Park, to Hallock Bay?

JK: Yes. We used to go over there, and we'd get a washtub of clams in no time. We used to share them with the Natives around. Sometimes the Natives would come with us because we had such harvest over there. But because the clammers, the people who get a fair and a substantial amount of their income out of clamming off the bay, they were no longer getting anything up the bay. So, they kept moving out this way. The first thing you know, that place was cleaned out. It takes a clam a long while to get to be a big clam, quite a few years. Or even to get to be a clam of this size takes maybe three, four years. So, after they harvest many bushels of them, they were just pretty near cleaned out up here.

NS: Were the clams usually intermingled with each other? Were there some places where you go for littlenecks and another place you would go for soft clams and another place for chowders?

JK: Yes. Well, the other soft clams that I recall that we ever dug was when we were over in Cory's Creek, where we had a spot there where we used to get some soft or littlenecks, soft clams. But we never bothered too much with that because that was a pretty limited harvest.

NS: So, the hard clams are easier, more plentiful?

JK: They were hard to get and hard to find. You have to wait at very low tide. The kids used to find them. They'd throw rocks along the intertidal mark there, just by the edge of the water. The little clams would squirt when they're being disturbed. They'd say, "Ah, there's one." [laughter] That's how you'd find them.

NS: That is a good trick.

JK: Throw a rock. Just make any little vibration or disturbance, and they –

NS: [laughter] But where you would find hard clams, you would find the whole variety of hard clams together?

JK: When we harvest the other clams, the cherrystones, the littlenecks, we find them where we always found them. Again, I'm talking back in the [19]50s and the [19]60s.

NS: Now, for instance, if you knew that you wanted littleneck clams, was there a special place that you would go for littlenecks?

JK: In front of our house, we had mountains of them. We had more college boys that put themselves through college by – they used to be in our bay all the time.

NS: [laughter] I know one of them.

JK: They'd have a big bushel basket and an inner tube, and they'd have their little old truck.

DK: They'd feel it with their feet.

NS: Yes, treading.

JK: They'd harvest five, six bushels a day. They'd be doing that seven days a week. A lot of them told me that's how they put themselves through college, just the harvest they make. They do that every day while they were on their summer vacation. We used to watch them. I used to say, "I can't understand how this bay has that many clams," but it did. That was Cory's Creek . Every part of Cory's Creek, you could stand and rake. Or stand and use your feet, pick them up.

NS: So, if you were going clamming – again, I am just trying to find out – did littlenecks and chowders and the butter clams –

JK: Well, you'd find that they go together.

NS: They were all together.

JK: They were all together. They were just spread pretty much together. Although, in Coecles Harbor here, this end of Coecles Harbor, you'll find mainly chowder clams. Those big things we called chowder clams, those great big ones. We have spots marked off on the map where we find the small clams, just three or four spots in Coecles Harbor, that I know of. I'm sure the Natives know of a dozen spots. I haven't done much clamming in the last ten years because they're so sparse. Then on Gardiners bayside here, near the causeway, I know a couple of spots where you can get the soft clams and where you can get other clams. I know a lot of spots in Coecles Harbor where you can get good clams. But I haven't done much clamming because it's gotten so diminished. But again, urbanization, let's face it, when we were first out here, as I said to you, you'd sit outside in the bay and see the huge schools of porpoises just floating out of the water and racing towards the bay. A kid's saying to the pop, "Pop, did you see that?" Pop would be jumping out of the boat, the same as they were. I mean, how could you miss seeing a thing that weighed 600 or 800 hundred pounds, making those incredible shellfish they make. It was so different.

NS: Did you have porpoises down in Cory's Creek or in the western part?

JK: They didn't come in the creek. But you see, since we lived down here…

NS: It is more on the open water?

JK: Our area of fishing usually ran around this way. We fish generally in this – because why run away from this area when you could get the most incredible harvest of fish. We had all the bluefish we'd ever want, or all the weakfish, all the porgies. Sometimes we'd fish up here with the ferry. They showed up around the ferry over here, where it crosses from North Haven right here. We used to fish in that channel. My God, you'd get mountains of porgies there. Sometimes we'd fish up the corner here. We'd catch red bass. We'd catch red bass here. We'd catch red bass off Nassau Point over here.

NS: Were there big differences between, say, this area of the bay and your area of the bay?

JK: Well, again, I couldn't tell you too much about this end of the bay other than what was told me because we do not fish down here.

NS: Yes, I know. What was told to you that you think was a big difference?

JK: The people that lived down here that I know, they used to tell – because all you had to do when we were fishing here on a good clear the day, you could look all the way down the bay here and see droves of boats out here fishing. The boats used to come out of the Shinnecock Canal here. They'd only come out here and fish. So, obviously, there were loads of fish here. You could see them when you were riding along the road. You'd see the party boats. They had a whole bunch of them in Shinnecock Bay here. They just jump through the canal and take their customers in here. They'd catch weakfish. They'd catch flounders, flukes, seabass. I guess they'd catch an occasional striped bass. They'd catch lots of little bluefish. Well, they have very good fishing here. But we didn't bother because, why did we have to?

NS: When you were right there.

JK: It's just outside. We could catch all the fish we could ever want.

NS: Were there fewer boats, too, where you were living at that time?

JK: There were lots of boats that fished.

NS: There were.

JK: But now, the change is incredible. At times, we used to fish – we used to have regular traffic jams here at Jessup's on a weekend.

NS: [laughter]

JK: People yelling at each other because they were like you and I here. You were trying to fish, and here's a boat right alongside of you, saying, "Hey, give me some room." [laughter] Because there were so many boats. It was incredible. You'd have thirty, forty boats all piled up in one spot here at Jessup's. All over the bay here, you saw different colored boats. Like the Port of

Egypt boats were red. There were a lot of other fishing stations that had different colors like green, brown, yellow, and so on. You'd see their boats, the people that came out from the city, I guess, and rented them. You can see them fishing all over in this area. They weren't interested maybe in the jigging that we used to do for the bluefish. They were bait fishing for porgies, seabass, weakfish, flounders, flukes. There were so many fish to catch. They'd be everywhere. There were so many boat stations that rented boats. In the spring, the weakfishing was so great and the fishing was so great in this bay here where we lived, we'd see the party boats that came all the way from New London to catch. This place had such a reputation for weakfish and fish. We'd see two- or three-party boats come all the way from New London, all the way down into the bay, down here to fish. They'd anchor up, and they'd stay there until about 2:00 p.m. Then they'd start their boat back home by 3:30, an hour and a half or two.

NS: During the weekends, would you see much commercial shell fishing going on? Or was that predominantly during the week when the bay was [inaudible] weekend?

JK: Well, too much of shell fishing, as I say, was done, basically, by the – oyster fishery was done by the big dredges. As far as the commercial shell fishing, most of the commercial clams and so on, there was some commercial men that just did clams in this bay, not many.

NS: But they did a variety of things.

JK: South Bay was where there were hundreds of shell fishers.

NS: I am not saying that they only did clamming, or all they did oystering. There were a lot of baymen that did a variety of things, including scalloping and oystering.

JK: Yes, they did scallops.

NS: I am including that. Did they work when you would have all these recreational fishermen around? Or did they try and scare them away?

JK: Yes. Well, there weren't any great numbers of them. But here, we'd see them doing their work in the weekdays. Well, I didn't see them so much on the weekends. They just have lots of times on the weekdays. I would see some on the weekends, but I'd say you'd see – because I guess they were more visible on weekdays because there weren't nearly as many boats.

NS: There is nobody out there.

JK: Yes. Then on weekends, my God, the people that would come out in the boats to fish, there's legions. Now, whether fishing is sort of a passé thing these days and people prefer to just cruise around or water ski or what have you. Now, Plum Gut, when the bluefish were running up there, which was almost all the time, we'd go up to Plum Gut. My God, there'd be thirty, forty boats up there. I fished up in Plum Gut lots of days during the summer, beautiful days, sun, no wind. We're the only ones there, but there might be one or two other boats. Because there's no bait here, all the small fish now have gone up to Plum Gut, and some of the little bluefish this size. We're always amazed because those are the fish we used to catch here at Jessup's back in

the [19]50s and the [19]60s and the [19]70s. But they're not there much anymore, practically not at all. They're all up here. Now, they all gravitated out to Plum Gut because there's no bait in the bay. There's very little bait. Of course, the finfish have diminished tremendously. Today, even the party boats, they go out, they come back, and they say that they caught thirty flukes or thirty flounders. Then we used to think, "Thirty a piece?" "Oh, no, that was what the whole boat caught." Now, we'd say, "Well, let's see how many customers get off." You'd find maybe twenty-five customers got off the boat. So, then you'll figure out, what, they caught on the average of one and a fraction a piece. A good fisherman might have caught four or five, and half the boat didn't catch anything. So, the diminution in the amount of fish out here has been tremendous. But again, unless you've been fishing for about fifty years like I have, you wouldn't be aware of that. If you're only out here four or five years, and you go fishing, and you catch a few fish, you say, "Oh, that's pretty good." Sure, that's pretty good if you think so. But it's nothing like it used to be. That's the big thing that I've noticed. That's true of finfish and the shellfish. There are some areas here now that have become just about sterile to fishing.

NS: What are some of those areas?

JK: Well, unless you know spots, you'll always find some fish that managed to make a living [inaudible].

NS: Well, where have they disappeared completely?

JK: Well, Jessup's here.

NS: If you can think about shell fishing in particular, that would be good.

JK: Well, for example – [phone ringing] Hello. Here I am.

NS: Clams or scallops or oysters, where they have completely disappeared now. What are some of those places?

JK: Well, as I've mentioned, Cory's Creek was just loaded. I don't know what Cory's Creek is like now because we've left there in 1968. So, I couldn't tell you. I have never gone over there since. I can tell you that when we lived here, the amount of shellfish all along this area and the amount of fish was just tremendous. I can tell you, you can go there now and catch nothing. At certain times that you would go there, you'll catch a few fish because the fish run in, looking – genetically, they're implanted to say, "This is the place you come in to fatten up."

NS: [laughter]

JK: Then they come in. They look around. They might only find a few bait fish, but that's not enough for a school. So, they run around looking and looking. Then they just disappear because they have to have food. So, that's the big difference. When we lived here, the bait fish, you could see tons of them in the water, swimming in big schools. Well, here's the food for the bluefish. Let's stay with them, and we'll get a harvest. There was bluefish everywhere because the whole bay was alive with bait fish, with squid, with all the things that they like. Now,

blackfish like crabs especially. There used to even be lots of lobsters in the bay.

NS: Yes, I heard that.

JK: There used to be lobster pots all around, all through here, all the way out even to Gardiners Bay. They were all gone. We don't have them anymore. The other lobster pots that we –

DK: There's two the other day.

JK: The only lobster pots we have now are up here out in the Sound. We fish out in the middle of the Sound, too. Then I fish on the north side of Plum Island. You'd find a lot of lobster pots there and a lot of pots in the middle of the Sound. But all the lobster pots that used to be on this waterway, I'm going out to fish in Plum Gut, they were all gone. There's a few, but they're really trying to catch those whelks. They make that conch chowder, but these are not conches like you get them in the islands. They're sorry tough.

NS: [laughter] Yes, they are pretty small.

JK: Yes, they're very tough and chewy. They're not conches. But they catch them, and the people buy them. They're like conches. They make, I don't know, soup or stew or something.

NS: Now, I hear what you are saying that there used to be a lot of bluefish, a lot more finfish, and all these other shellfish, along throughout the estuaries, especially where you used to live. Are there any other specific places where you yourself or know somebody else who used to go to, shell fishing, and there used to be all kinds of things, and they are not there anymore, or they disappeared?

JK: Well, we used to have lots of scallops right in front of the house here.

NS: On Gardiners Bay.

JK: Practically none now. If you go turn the corner now, even for years, prior to the brown tide, the scallops had diminished considerably in the bay, long before the brown tide. Because after I retired from practice in the city, I became the acting director of a big health center over in Shirley, if you know where Shirley is.

NS: Yes, I know where Shirley is.

JK: Right off [inaudible] the South Brookhaven Health Center East. It's sort of a satellite of Stony Brook. Well, I'd be crossing on the ferry in the morning when the scallop season would start. They will talk to me, and they'd say, "Don't waste your time going down the bay for scallops, there's hardly any."

NS: This is Gardiners Bay right here we are talking about, or Peconic Bay?

JK: No. Going down here in Peconic Bay. So, here we are in [inaudible]. Here I am crossing

the ferry.

NS: Oh, on South Ferry?

JK: Yes. The ferry is in North Haven.

NS: I am thinking North Ferry. So, I was getting oriented towards that.

JK: Yes. Then they're telling me, "Don't go down here," where they used to go for years, because –

NS: There is nothing there, yes.

JK: – ten years or so before the brown tide, they would get scallops but not near as many as they'd get on the east side of the island. In other words, the harvest was diminished considerably. So, they said, "Don't waste your time going there. Go here, go there." So, everything had diminished over a period of time.

NS: When we were talking about the sewage treatment plants and the overall development, do you recall any other big things that may have happened over the years that really affected this?

JK: Well, the only other big thing…

NS: I mean, like a storm or a big construction project or an accident.

JK: Well, we've lived through –

NS: Five million storms, I know. [laughter]

JK: – nine hurricanes since [19]68.

NS: But is there anyone maybe that affected the shell fishing?

JK: Well, the storms did not affect the fishing. For a day or two or even a week.

NS: But not long-term.

JK: No, they had no real effect on the fishing, other than the destruction that they created. But they didn't do anything to the shellfish or the finfish that I even noticed. So, no, I didn't notice –

NS: What about any big construction projects or big dredging projects?

JK: That's one of the interesting things. The big difference between this bay and Chesapeake, not only its size, Chesapeake is about three times as big as the Peconic. But we don't have any industry to speak of. We have that industry in the Sag Harbor, Crowe Industries or whatever it was. They discharged a lot of toxic materials into the harbors over there. That's been stopped.

NS: Do you know what kind of industry they were?

JK: I forget the name. What's the name of that industry? They were in that [inaudible] factory there.

DK: I don't know.

JK: Some industries, Crowe or something like that. But I forgot the name of it. I hear it mentioned once in a while, but they sometimes got active. Then they were discharging a lot of toxic chemicals and stuff into the harbor. That's the only industry that I can think of, about here.

NS: That comes to mind.

JK: Yes. Other than sewage treatment plants, there's no industries out here that have discharged into the bay. Really, there are no industries out here that I can think of that's fishing. The big industry here is tourism. That's the industry. We have loads of boats.

NS: Were there ever any oil spills or anything like that?

JK: No. We've never had an oil spill here that I ever recall. I don't know. We had the big gas tanks, I remember, in Greenport. Natural gas, I think they contained. But they're gone now. They got rid of them. I don't think they created any contamination. At one time, they used to have an unloading zone for tankers out in the water there, I guess into a pipeline to the shore, just west of the ferry. But the tankers that came in were very small. I think it had something to do with the big tanks that they have there. I'm not too sure. But that's gone. We have the oyster factories. Well, there's a whole lot of condominiums in Greenport. Not the one on Sterling Harbor, but the one west of the ferry when you're crossing the ferry.

NS: Yes, I know exactly what you are talking about.

JK: There used to be an oyster factory there, believe it or not. Then that became a restaurant. Remember, we used to go there, Doris?

DK: Yes.

JK: That became a restaurant and that…

NS: This is tape two, side two. So, you were talking about the oyster factory that is now a condominium.

JK: Yes, that became condominiums.

DK: I don't recall any industry [inaudible].

JK: We never had anything destructive or big that ever happened in the bay, nothing that I can

ever recall, any kind of a disaster of a massive oil spill. No, we never had anything like that. Because we have no industries where they'd be using a lot of oil or anything. We don't even have any generating plants here. Greenport has a very small one. But there's nothing in the bay here, on these land masses that would act as a serious pollutant. People claimed the golf courses. We have a big golf course, eighteen-hole, around the island and a nine-hole. Of course, Noyack has a golf course. Going back at Shinnecock, they have Shinnecock Hills. They have the South Hampton Golf Course. Then they have another golf course called the National Golf Links of America. It's up there at Conscience Point, up in that area. They claimed the tranquilizers they used to leach into the bay. Probably true because if it leaches into the bay, it leaches into the water tank.

NS: [laughter]

JK: So, you go from the better to the worst as it were.

NS: When you are talking about numbers of baymen over the years, at a time, about how many baymen worked in your area fulltime, year-round?

JK: Well, there were a lot of baymen here. The numbers, I'm not too sure.

NS: Yes, if you had to pick a number.

JK: Well, I'd say there were a vast number of part-time baymen.

NS: Yes. Like hundreds?

JK: They had to have a license.

NS: Are we talking about like hundreds or dozens?

JK: Yes. They were carpenters maybe most days of the week. Maybe when there wasn't anything to build. A lot of times, they'd spend the whole darn winter, for that matter, the whole fall, the spring. Maybe they did when the summer visitors were down. Maybe they did a lot of work with them. But they worked by the day. On the days they weren't doing that, they were doing bay work.

NS: Are we talking like dozens? If you had to pick a number.

JK: Oh, I'd say in the early years, there were hundreds of them, hundreds. Because you would see them there with their little boats and they'd have the equipment. They were clamming, or they were doing something in the water there that you know that they were trying to make some money, whatever they were harvesting. Then you'd see them with their sacks of their clams. They used to take a lot of them to the local restaurants and sell them there. Even our kids, remember, they sell the bluefish to the restaurants. So, everybody, in a way, that did anything for any gain was, in a way, a part-time bayman. But it might be a very minimal part-time bayman. Some of them, maybe they were half the time, baymen.

NS: How many fulltime bayman, if you had to pick a number, on Shelter Island, for instance?

JK: I would say, from the dredges – I would regard a bayman whether it's a fisherman, or a clammer .

NS: Yes, exactly.

JK: Oh, there were dozens of trawlers down here that fished every day.

NS: How many lived here on the island that you know?

JK: Oh, they lived in Greenport. We have trawlers right now on Shelter Island, over in Coecles Marina. (Riley Parks?) and (John Tutuola?) and other people. There used to be a lot more trawlers years ago.

NS: So, were you talking like a hundred, fulltime, year-round?

JK: They were fulltime, most of those.

NS: Well, I am trying to pick a number here about how many.

JK: Well, I would say there must have been several hundred fulltime trawler men and clammers, too. There must have been several hundred because the bigger boats operated with two or three men on them. Well, there were a lot of small boats that operated with just one person. They go out and fish for the day, bring their harvest back. They [inaudible] up in Sterling Creek here, and go out and fish again the next day. If it was a terrible day, they take the day off. But they fished almost every day.

NS: By the time the brown tide hit, what were the numbers like?

JK: When?

NS: When the brown tide hit up until ten years ago.

JK: Well, as I said, the bay had already been diminishing for fifteen, twenty years by increments. So, they were dropping off all the time, getting full-time jobs, doing something else. They were dropping off. They were greatly diminished. Then when the brown tide came, even the part-timers all run out of business because they were scallopers mainly. If they were harvesting oysters, well, the oysters died off with the brown tide when all these –

DK: What happened to porgies? No, not the porgies.

JK: Well, the porgies are still there. The bluefish?

DK: Do you remember they had the wonderful trawlers over there, and they had these big boats?

They would send the small boat and have them play.

JK: Yes, the mossbunkers. That, of course, is not an eating fish type. That was a commercial fish. They pressed them for oil and fertilizer. We used to have massive schools that would come into the bay up here. They'd come in here right in front of our place here, up in this bay and in this bay here, in Little Peconic and then Noyack Bay. They had a little plane that would sight the school. Then these huge mossbunker boats would come in. They were manned mainly by Black men. They have a white captain and officers. I used to love to watch them. They put these enormous boats over at the side when big a school of mossbunkers would come in. Then they put a small skiff over, and he would estimate how many of these bunkers they could take. Then he'd cut through the school, just row through it. Then he'd stand up, and he'd bang his oars on the water. They have to be the dumbest fish in the world. They'd stop still. Then the rest of the school would move away. He'd stay there until they put these big 40-foot boats, and they have about a milelong net. These boats would go side by side up to him. Then they would park there. They would drop their net. Now, the net had weights on the bottom and big floats on the top. It only went down about 10 feet. But this fish eat plankton, and the only place you'd find the plankton is up sunlight level. So, they would stay right there. They didn't know enough to swim under the nets. Now, they would come all the way back, and these men were powerful. My God, they had arms like that. This net was pulled back half a mile on each side, and the big bunker boats would wait right here, right with them. They'd close the net. The boats would come together. Then they sang chanties. They had keywords. Then every keyword, the whole thirty or forty of them would give one tremendous heave. Because remember, they were pulling maybe 20,000 fish –

NS: Thousands of pounds. [laughter]

JK: – that weighed about anywhere from 6 to 8 pounds a piece that are trying to go the other way. It would take them over an hour. But it was the most incredible sight to see these powerful guys, these big Black men. They had arms. They had wonderful baritone voices. Then they would sing. Every time they came to the keyword, everybody would heave.

NS: Did they live around here? These Black men, did all these fishermen live around here, or were they from out of state?

JK: I don't know where they came from. These boats mostly came from down in the Virginia river.

NS: That is what I was thinking because I know about the Carolina [inaudible].

JK: I don't think any of them were recruited from around here. Maybe the captains were. There might have been a couple of…

NS: But they would come all the way up…

JK: I know one captain lives on the island here, but he was originally from the Carolinas. But I think most of these boats came out of the Carolinas. They came up here, operated up here in the

summer. They operated in the Sound and wherever their little plane would find the schools. They'd often find them in here. It was so picturesque to see these powerful men singing, and with the keyword, everybody would fall back. That would take about an hour. Then the bunker boat would lower like a massive vacuum cleaner over, a big, big pipe that went right down into the water. They would turn this powerful pump on. You would look, and there would be a column of water this wide, just almost solid fish being sucked up right into the hole. It would just fly right out. One of the greatest sights I ever saw.

NS: How long would they be up here for?

JK: Huh?

NS: How long would they be working on these waters?

JK: Oh, they'd work these waters all summer. They worked here all summer, but you wouldn't see them every day. Because after they took the school, they'd have to wait for another big school.

NS: They'd take a few days off? [laughter]

JK: They'd go and get another school, maybe in Gardiners Bay. Then they'd go out into the Sound. Their little plane flew around looking for these schools of bunkers.

NS: When was the last time you remember seeing them around?

JK: Not since the mid-[19]60s. That's the last time I ever saw them. Yes, that was the last time the bunkers came into the bay here. Up in the [inaudible] they call them porgies. Most bunkers are porgies. But here, we call them bunkers. They're really officially called menhaden. These bunker boats were huge. Then, of course, after, you could see the boats slowly sinking down because there's water, and there's fishing up or sucking the fish out of this monster net. It would go on for twenty minutes, a half hour, that huge column, so naturally, with the fish and the water.

NS: [laughter]

JK: Then they turn the pumps on in these big holes, and the biggest squirt of bloody water would come out of the side. Then as we'd sit there in about fifteen, twenty minutes, you'd see fins raising everywhere through this bloody water. There were big sharks. Sharks' olfactory sensation that's so highly developed, they claimed they can sense blood from miles away if the current is going in their direction. They would come from everywhere. You never saw so many sharks would come around that boat. They would be in a frenzy because the blood would get them excited, but there was nothing to eat. I sit there with the kids, and the kids would say, "Look at that shark."

NS: Were these sand sharks?

JK: Oh, these were big blue sharks, Mako sharks, gray sharks, all kinds of sharks. They drove,

racing around. Then after a while, they give up and disappear.

NS: [laughter] God, that is incredible. I have a tape for you. There is actually a cassette that was done of those chanties that the men would sing on these boats.

JK: Yes?

NS: Yes. There is like a whole group of men got together and made a recording of their chanties who worked on these boats. It is a beautiful thing. I know what you are talking about.

JK: Yes. So, that's the world that we knew out here years ago. It's so different today. But I'm still out there fishing as often as I get out. I've been out about forty times this year since May. I go out a lot. In the spring, we fish up this way because the school still come in here looking for bait. But they eat each other. The bluefish, when they can't find the bait, and the big weakfish schools come right in with the bluefish. The weakfish are only about this size, the young ones that come in the bay. Every bluefish we catch has one or two of those holes inside of them because it swallows them whole. The bluefish we catch up the bay now, they're big 5, 6-pounders in the spring. After a couple of days, they've eaten all the weakfish, and they're gone.

[end of transcript]