

Nancy Solomon: Hey, this is Nancy Solomon. Today...

Jean Rogers: [inaudible] camera off.

NS: No, that is okay.

JR: You all right?

NS: Yes. Today is July 17th, 1997. I am talking with Doug Rogers, senior, and Jean Rogers, senior.

Doug Rogers: Doug Rogers. Senior. Well, that's all right. You can flush that out if you get that.

NS: Okay. It is okay if I just put this in here.

DR: Sure.

NS: Okay. Do you have a mug?

DR: Yes.

NS: Okay. Yes. Where were you born, sir?

DR: I was born in Brooklyn, New York. I had two brothers, one older and one younger. My father came from East Marion. My grandfather came from East Marion.

NS: How did they end up in Brooklyn?

DR: Well, during the depression, it was hard to get a job around here. My father was a professional painter, a house painter, spray painter. He got a job at Reynolds in Rockville Centre. You have to have been there about three months. They made him foreman. He got my grandfather a job and lost his job. So, all I had worked on and it made very, very good money.

NS: Were they born in East Marion?

DR: No, he was born in East Marion.

NS: Your father?

DR: Yes, my grandfather was born in East Marion. I was about eight years old. My father's mission on place for young children. So, he moved out to East Marion and he commuted for two years after that on a job in New York. Of course, after he got established out here, people wanted their houses painted and stuff. So, he came back out and started his own business to paint the houses all the time. He started when he was sixteen, painting here. Almost every house in this town he's painted.

NS: What did your grandfather do?

DR: He was a farmer.

NS: What kinds of things did he grow?

DR: He was more or less...

JR: He was a gentleman farmer.

DR: He had horses, had no tractor. I remember up on horse stable one time and it was gone with a horse and a winter time. I'd be up in a logging camp and roll down a [inaudible] get up. At the end of the day give me a horse. [laughter] So, he was a nice man, a gentleman. He died very young with appendicitis. In those days, they couldn't cure it. They didn't know what it was. But he enjoyed his life. He was good. My father died at seventy-two and he never was sick a day in his life. But he had testicular cancer and I took a year or so and he died.

NS: How is the son of a painter and a grandson of a farmer end up being a fisherman?

DR: I was a building contractor, and I got out of the U.S. Marine Corps 1946. I know about thirty-five houses in this old town. Then the health department got into it. The zoning boards started up, and this restriction and that restriction, you couldn't get nothing done because it was too much for me. I started to go fishing and I'm fishing for thirty-five years.

NS: Who taught you?

DR: (Mr. Racket?) and (Mr. Ryan?). He was very good, but...

NS: Do you remember his first name?

DR: (Raymond Racket?). He was a fisherman all his life. His father was a fisherman all his life. Most of the people in this whole town were fishing when I was a youngster. Forty-five families in this town were fishing. Some of them went to Montauk, Amagansett, Chrono's Island, all around, up the sound. They didn't all own their own business, but some of the families worked for other fisherman. So, there was only three farmers in this town. All the rest were fishermen.

NS: And your grandfather, was he considered one of the farmers or a gentleman farmer?

DR: Well, he made enough to make a living, but he never paid anything money.

NS: Oh, okay. Did you do any clamming or oystering? What were some of the shell fishing things that you...

DR: Only because to get something to eat. I did scalloping a good many years.

NS: Well, let us start first with the clamming. What kind of clamming?

DR: Hard clams, soft clams. There was a period of time in 1930s I did skimmer clams, which we didn't eat at that time. They were used for bait, for bait houses and party boats and stuff like that.

NS: Where would you get the skimmer clams?

DR: In the bay.

NS: In the bay. What part of the bay would you go?

DR: Well, the shallow water. You couldn't walk two or three feet without stepping on it. Then they all of a sudden disappeared.

NS: Do you know why?

DR: Well, some say that some of the oyster company brought in a plant in Japan. I can't think of a name right now. It was multiplied real fast, covering all the grounds. Killed the seaweed and sort of got natural ground to the plant or the feed on anymore. That multiplied, multiplied. So, it almost wiped out everything. But then they die. Well, I have no idea. Now to see what is fact. Of course, we've had brown tie here for quite a few years. That kills the sap. Trying to have a spawn that. Wow. Try to excite the liver right away.

NS: How would you harvest the skimmer clams.

DR: The skimmer clams is by the rake?

NS: Was it a special kind of rake that you would use?

DR: It's a clam rake. It's when you pick them up, you could see them in shallow water.

NS: How wide were they?

DR: Well, they was covered the bottom. Of course, I was a youngster then.

NS: No, I am talking about the rake.

DR: The rake was just about a foot wide. You could use a scoop neck.

NS: Are the skimmer clams mixed in with other kinds of clams.

DR: No, just skimmer clams. Skimmer clams lays on the top, soft clams in the bottom and the hard clams in the bottom. The soft clam, we really, ourselves natives only eat them in March, February or March after the snow has melted and the fresh water has gone down into the holes,

and they come flat and they're delicious. Other than that, they're skinny. People still buy them and eat them as steamers like that. But they have no flavor.

NS: The skimmer clams, about how big an area would they cover?

DR: It's hard for me to say because I don't know anything about west of Greenport.

NS: Oh, but around here.

DR: Five miles square or something.

NS: Were they mostly on the North Fork or were they also on the side?

DR: It was all over a few years back out of Mattituck, down to Greenport, those areas where there was skimmer clams up there dredging them and getting fifty, sixty for sure a day. They were planted not by nature. I believe fishermen bought them and bait shots. The whole clam alive took them out when fishing had some leftover. So, I took them over. So, they spawned and made natural sets of clams around the area there. There's no scientific proof of it, but there's no other claim anywhere as skimmer claims on Long Island stuck at one spot at that time.

NS: About what time period are we talking about?

DR: It was long after World War II.

NS: And how long were they around for?

DR: They was around for about ten years. Now they're quite scarce, and nobody goes after them anymore. They multiplied some long build up and they go after.

NS: So, it was just for those ten years that they were around?

DR: Yes.

NS: They were from Mattituck to Greenport, that area?

DR: That was a great fishing area for fish and striped bass and porgy and flounder and fluke. So, a skimmer clam is a good bait. Now, they were all imported after World War II from Jersey. It's an oyster shuck in Greenport. They opened up there. minced clams, clam chowder, canned and all that kind of stuff. The only company I know of that had real hard clams and clam chowder was Campbell's. They had a contract with a clammer around here. He went into Long Island Sound halfway to Connecticut and got the biggest chowder clams anybody's ever seen, like fish. Of course, he got a hundred bushel a day dredging it. The clammers bought them all from over the years. Now they have to go scrimmage. The scrimmage is a good down south.

NS: So, the soft clams, what were the best places that you used to go for the soft clams?

DR: Soft clams, you have to get in bed low tide. The tide acid rocks, and you walk on the beach, you see a whole freshwater. Then you know there's clams underneath. Now, the bigger the hole, the bigger the clams. So, you just pull them out with a soft clam rake and be careful not to bust them. Put them in a bucket of salt water, leave them overnight and purify themselves of sand. Then you open them up. The next thing is clam chowder or clam stew and fried clams, clams casino, clam [inaudible], anything, make different types of clams that you could eat.

NS: How many bushels would you get at a time of the soft clams? What was considered a good take.

DR: A good take would be five or six bushels a day.

NS: Were there are two counts in a bushel.

DR: We never say we didn't go by count.

NS: How did you?

DR: They were one inch long and the minimum. Anything over that you could take.

NS: So, about how many clams were...

DR: Regardless of what size, are all considered soft clam. The smaller ones they used for steamers, the bigger ones they used for fryers. Now you have [inaudible] only on the hard clams. The count is how many a bushel a [inaudible] and they call out a count, whatever the number happens to be. My son has done that and my grandson and I never did it. That's not my cup of tea at all.

NS: What was considered the season for soft clams?

DR: Oh, you can get them any time in the fall from November to early June or something like that.

NS: What was the best time as a commercial bayman to do that?

DR: There wasn't too many commercial soft clams taken out here. We generally went to get food for ourselves and everybody went. Everybody had a family go down to the bay or the creeks and the ponds and begin with the clams tomorrow. You had too many of them to be a neighbor.

NS: So, it was more for your family and for your friends. What were the main things for selling?

DR: Scallops is a big thing, millions and millions of dollars of scallops. Hallock's Bay scallop is probably the best scallop in the world. Best flavor and [inaudible] well. All our food restaurants wants Atlantic bay scallops.

NS: Now I am going to ask you, you were telling me before about how you could tell the age of a scallop. Could you repeat that for the tape recorder?

DR: Well, when a scallop is spawned, presumably, it rises to the surface of the water, millions and millions of them. They all spawn in the early spring, April, May or June, in that period of time. They lay on the top approximately three days, and is strong enough to move to the bottom. It's nature's way of preserving them. We probably have bad weather when they're on top, but they all spawn in different types of different months and different week. So, they are not all one at one time...

NS: Right. It is not on a calendar.

DR: Yes. But seagulls eat them, fish eat them, go ashore. So, if you had probably ten percent of the spawn, you have a very big crop of scallops. Go down to the bottom, it packs themselves seaweed, stones, rocks and anything else. Even fish nets from fishing when you catch yourselves some fish. Then they grow to about probably a quarter to a half a dollar size. They're strong enough to break away and swim up and down, up and down. They feed them when they do that.

NS: Are they generally in shallow water, deep water?

DR: There are all kinds of depths of water. I've caught them in fifty foot of water falling to three quarters. They call it bay scallops. They're only in bays, of course we say Gardiners Bay and Atlantic Bay. I caught him in a little pond like Alex Bay, East Grand Dam Pond, great place with scallops, huge, great big scallops. So, that's a small area, and too many people got in there and wiped them all out. It's tough for me was a good trade in the wintertime.

NS: I want to distract you from the process here. So, the scallops will float during a certain amount of time?

DR: They get strong enough to knock them down and feed them. If the tide is coming, they were born here, they might drift during the four hours of tide 5 or 6 miles away. Then they might go down to the bottom and stay there. The next time they go another four or five miles or maybe come back again. We've had scallops born in one area out in the bay here and to dredge them, that's all illegal. You see there's always one year [inaudible]. Next year, if you go there you, wouldn't find one. They were all migrating someplace else. So, nature. Why don't they do?

NS: So, after this initial period of being pulled to different parts of the bay, what happened next? And you are showing me that little...

DR: When they get to be one year old, they spawn the next spring. They're born one spring year. They're born one spring and spawn the following spring. Then that same winter, eighteen months or twenty-four months, they die. If they're not caught, they all die. There's no such thing as a two-year-old scallop. After two years, none of those past three or after three years.

NS: How could you tell how old the scallop was? You were showing them to me.

DR: They have growth ring on it. A growth ring is usually around two inches from the hinge. The next year it might grow another inch. Two inches depends on a lot of tide and were passing, which is [inaudible]. Second year, they have 3, 4 inches to the lip. After that, actually March, the season ends. Every March is scallop season and that's the same rule of scallops.

NS: Was that a natural cycle as well?

DR: Oh, yeah. Like I say, they die. If you were dredging scallops in March, come up there, a bunch of some of them would be dead with some [inaudible].

NS: Well, what were the best places in your experience for scallop? And you mentioned...

DR: Hallock's Bay.

NS: Hallock's Bay. Where is that?

DR: That's an H.

NS: H-A-L-E-X.

DR: H-A-L-L-O-C-K.

NS: Oh, Hallock. Okay, like the family.

DR: That's right.

NS: Okay. Hallock's Bay, where is...

DR: Is about, I'd say 5 or 6 miles long, 1 to 2 miles wide. Probably in my time, more scallops were caught there than any other place in Atlantic bays.

NS: Where is it?

DR: Orient.

DR: Orient.

NS: Where on Orient?

DR: So, in state park, run all along the south shore and the north shore, long narrow river road and all the [inaudible] and stuff like that. Quite an undeveloped spot. The state owns most of the land on the north side and the south side. That's the town waters. When you get into a creek like that, it's town waters. [inaudible] go there the time you [inaudible]. The state waters are outside all these little tributaries and bays and drifts and stuff.

NS: Is it still under town jurisdiction?

DR: Yes. Well, any town, even so, around town. You can't go over there as a resident. You can't go from there over here. Only in state waters. Everybody can go.

NS: Okay. How many baymen would harvest scallops when you first started?

DR: Oh, probably a thousand or more.

NS: How many of those were full time baymen? Right now, there is a certain...

DR: Very few full time baymen.

NS: Yes, about how many?

DR: I'd say probably two out of a hundred, soft clam, scallops –

NS: Oysters, whatever.

DR: – or a fight for a clamming. Making a living out of water all the time.

NS: So, it was always maybe a couple of dozen?

DR: Yes, maybe a dozen in this town. In the winter time, scallop season opens in September, first week of September or something like that. Everybody had good jobs on the police force, the guys working on Plum Island, guys working at Brookhaven, all took their vacations. So, they get out on the water and go scallop fishery and they could kill. They still got paid on their vacation. They had to go out. Not that I mind them going out and getting something to eat or making it, but they sold down on the market, which brought the price down. The man making his living out of the water. They still do that today on fishing and everything else. You have no control over that.

NS: How far back did that started to happen?

DR: After World War II.

NS: Not long ago.

DR: They get around this place before World War II.

NS: Who would you sell the scallops to?

DR: I sell most of mine to Bronze Oyster Company for sure. But before that, before World War II, there was [inaudible] called (Harrow's Fish Market?). It also had [inaudible] companies and bought them, cut size them and packed them and ship them throughout the country. [inaudible]



had been doing it for forty, fifty years, [inaudible] scallops. They even buy them from new Jersey, came out here in the shell and the local people opened them up. Recently tremendous trading scallops, millions and millions of gallons.

NS: Now, when you sell them, would you sell them shucked or unshucked?

DR: You buy them in shell, you have to shuck.

NS: You would have to shuck them yourself.

DR: Yes. You have to have a license to catch them. You have to have a license to have the scallop shucked. The health department gets in there and inspects everything so it's sanitary and everything is okay. Put them in plastic bags and things like that. They buy them, then they process themselves or put them up sometimes freeze them and be shipped all over.

NS: Has it always been that way?

DR: Not before World War II. I don't think.

NS: What was it like before World War II?

DR: Well, there was very few people doing it to start with. You saw them to the local markets in Greenpoint, and they would sell them for the local.

NS: Who were those local markets? Do you know?

DR: No. [inaudible] was one of them. In fact, I think [inaudible] company bought them and West Spring bought them. Ellsworth bought them.

NS: Who is Ellsworth?

DR: It's a company.

NS: So, the oyster companies would also train in scallops?

DR: Compared to a minimum there wasn't a big amount, but there wasn't many people doing it, so there wasn't a big amount to be sold.

NS: Would any scallops get shipped to other places?

DR: Oh, yes. You shipped them to Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington.

NS: To New York?

DR: Yes, mostly in the North because they only had ice. No refrigerated trains or trucks at that time. They were all shipped by railroad ice down.

NS: So, how would you get it to the railroad?

DR: People onboard.

NS: So, there was always a middleman?

DR: Oh, yes. Always a middleman.

NS: What kind of boat would you use when you were scalloping?

DR: We were using Sharpies, lots of different kinds.

NS: Yes. but what are the different kinds?

JR: Well, some were big boats. Some were rowboats.

DR: Rowboats. We call them Sharpies, outboard motor. It used to have to have a sail to catch scallops, but then people would come down with a rowboat and paste up a shade on an oar in front of the boat. That was a sail. You go with the wind down and dredge, and you have an outboard to go back. Everybody was using their outboard with dragging, going back. So, conservation couldn't catch everybody. You find that one day use outboards.

NS: When did that happen?

DR: Well, after World War II, around the early [19]50s.

NS: Did everyone pretty much go to Hawke's Bay? Was that like the place to go to?

DR: Every town had their own bay and every spot.

NS: I am talking about from around too.

DR: People around here one for each man where we went to Pelican Bay. Majority of them. We also had them in Orient Harbor here. I remember that state waters. I remember one year when I was fishing out there crabs. It was probably a hundred or a hundred-fifty boats every day. All went along from all over south of [inaudible], from Brampton, from Riverhead, for North Port. Come out like on sailing boats and go.

NS: What was the dividing line between state waters and town waters? Was there much of it? Was it a clear cut division?

DR: On your chart, you have town waters and state waters.

NS: What about when you are out there on the water? Did most people know which body of water they were in?

DR: When you're in state waters and you're living in the area automatically tells you that. So, Palisades town waters, [inaudible] was town waters.

JR: People know the difference.

DR: [inaudible] was town waters.

NS: Did you grow up around here, too?

JR: I was born and brought up in Orient.

NS: Okay.

DR: We've been married over fifty years too?

NS: No. You are not old enough to be married all those years. No way.

JR: Oh, yes.

DR: Yes.

NS: Were there any people, any fishermen in your family?

JR: My grandfather was a fisherman. I think it stopped there.

DR: All his children were farmers, mostly.

JR: Yes.

NS: What is your family name Jean?

JR: King.

NS: King.

DR: Old, old family and all.

NS: Do you remember much about your grandfather?

JR: No. Not a whole lot.

NS: Yes. You said it's hard.

JR: He was a pretty old. I can remember going out into his shop where he made nets. I was not allowed to touch anything. I was allowed to come in and look around. That was it. But other

than that, I don't really remember anything much about it.

DR: In the old days, you see that fishermen had to make their own nets and everything was cotton. It didn't take real good care of them. They'd get mildewed and rot.

NS: Right. So, you always...

DR: All went along. The family would take nets and delivering them to a parlor with a boom across the ceiling would hang them from ropes. They thought that off whatever size they wanted. The women worked and men worked and children worked. Make a nets for the next year.

JR: That's what I was talking about. That was what I was allowed to see. Not touch. Go in and look. At this big roller thing where they were making the nets back and forth, back and forth. But I was too little to...

DR: If you got four or five years out of a net, that was a long time in those days. Now they're all nylon and sometimes you get twenty years out of them if you take care of them.

NS: With the scallops, once you had bushels and bushels of scallops and you had to shuck all these, was that something that was done as a group or did you do it by yourself?

JR: [inaudible]

NS: You did it by yourself?

JR: I would never ever have opened scallops.

DR: She went out with me sometimes, and my boys would help me open them up.

NS: Oh, okay. So, your whole family would help?

JR: Yes.

DR: Yes. The way to make a living in the winter time.

JR: The kids were – children were in school, and we'd go off in the morning, and scallop.

DR: At night, we'd come out there and scallop shop and opened up scallops.

JR: And the boys, when they were young, helped open.

NS: What were the busiest periods for the scallop and for you?

DR: If you didn't have any ice, it all went along busy. I would scallop up to Robbins Island around there and over to Sag Harbor, all state waters. Anybody can go there. But you have to

go across the bay. I was about seven miles away, and the wind's blowing kind of rough, and it was kind of sloppy coming back with a boatload of scallops. They allowed ten bushels. That was one. That was enough.

JR: Oh, yes it was.

NS: What would happen when the ice came? What would happen?

DR: You couldn't get your boat in the way. We've had dredging at Hallock's Bay, I can remember some years.

NS: Tape 1, side 2, Nancy Solomon talking with Doug Rogers again.

DR: I can remember. Bayman [inaudible], I used at Hallock's Bay to make a channel, maybe 3-foot, 4-foot wide and 20, 30 feet long.

NS: What would they saw it with?

DR: I saw it. I saw it a month later on that chainsaw. Then they put a trench.

NS: How would that work? I am trying to picture this, sorry.

DR: You know what, I saw is.

NS: There are those very, very long things. It looked like you could cut down a tree.

DR: Yes. It's shorter, I found, and I took action to put it up and push it underneath the ice or take it out on top of this. Then they had a channel that could throw a dredge and go to 20 to 30 feet, whatever they wanted to go and pour the scallops on top of the ice. A very slow and very tedious job, and you couldn't let the scallops freeze. You had to get them ashore before they freeze.

NS: So, how long could you be out there?

DR: An hour or so, that's all.

NS: How long would it take you to saw through the ice to get to it?

DR: Oh, probably half an hour before you start to scallop.

NS: Would you use the same kind of dredge?

DR: Yes, same kind of gently pulled it by hand.

NS: Instead of on the motorboat? Was that a one-person job or a two person?

DR: That was a two-person job. I would get tired very fast pulling on the trenches with my hand.

NS: So, who was your partner? Did you have somebody?

DR: It's a local fellow. That's all. We went 50/50 and pulled up together.

NS: Is that what most of the baymen did?

JR: I went.

NS: What? You went, too?

JR: Oh, yes, a lot.

NS: Did other wives also go and help you?

JR: Sure. Yes.

DR: Well, they don't make people like that anymore. [laughter]

NS: Did you have to have special gloves, hats.

DR: Rubber gloves, those are warm. I never wore a hat. One of the times we're out there snowing, I got snow on top of my head. It didn't bother me a bit.

NS: Were there ever any accidents during this?

DR: I don't recall anybody ever having an accident.

NS: Nobody ever fell in.

DR: Not that I know of. I remember once, after the war, my oldest son, Matt, he was going to go down off East Marion here and get a message college for Sunday evening dinner. We got in my pleasure boat. I had at that time I was a builder then. We went down one of the local houses here. We were ready to go over the dredge and get a mess to eat, and he had a man very close by hanging over the side of the boat. He had [inaudible] boots and freezing. He was about done. I jumped into his boat, pulled him in and I wanted to take him back to Greenville. He said, "No, I can make." So, he got up his motor, went back [inaudible]. He's dead now. He worked the water all his life.

JR: He almost didn't.

DR: Right. But I was his own...

JR: Almost to the end of his rope.

DR: That was his own fault because he had been drinking and he worked on the water his own. You, all his senses and all the skills and inflections and everything else. But he lived through it, died several years ago. His two sons have worked in the water and [inaudible].

NS: Did you ever have any close calls?

DR: The closest call I had was up around Robins Island. We went up there and had boats on a beach about maybe 3 or 4 miles away for middle grounds. We called it scalloping. We go out there and we scallop and scallop and I'll take you all day long. You had taken a lot of fish. I should push your boat off the grounds we want to be on. You had to dodge this and dodge that. Finally, about 4:00 a.m., we started back across the bay to get into where we had had our truck. I was coming around the point following two of the boats, and the ice closed in front of me, so I couldn't make any headway.

NS: I am sorry. What happened? The clock is ringing. You came around the point.

DR: I closed in front of me so I couldn't go any further forward. I had to turn around, head back. I was very lucky, I got in between ice cubes and ice posts down about 2 miles down the beach, I saw an opening and went in, and I had him about there, walked back to where my truck was. It's about 5 miles away from my truck and came back and pulled my boat up, got my scallops out and the motor off. That was back of the night. That's close to cold. It's getting dark.

NS: The two guys in front of you did not see that the ice...

DR: They went through it. They got through it. Yes.

NS: But they did not see...

DR: They didn't know I wasn't coming. But I made it.

NS: You were just using a Sharpie at this time.

DR: Sorry.

NS: You were using a Sharpie?

DR: Oh, yes, 18 foot.

NS: Did you build it? Where did you get?

DR: I built several boats. Yes.

NS: Was there anything special about the scallop boat?

DR: No, ordinary row boat would do anything. It would hold an outboard motor would work. If you're going to do it commercially, you had to have a big enough boat to have two persons in it. Me and my wife went and got ten bushels of scallops, two persons and ten bushels, plus gas tanks and other gear you had and filled up the boat. That was it.

JR: We've opened up a lot of scallops.

DR: A lot.

JR: So, when I didn't go with him, he had a lot of scallops, we had a lot of scallops. I'd stay home and start opening in the morning and he'd go out for more. It just it just went on and on and on. [laughter]

NS: Would you go every day during the morning?

DR: Every day, yes.

NS: What time would you start?

DR: Oh, daybreak in the morning. So, it got lined up to say you can't go for a daybreak. [inaudible] and you have to quit on sundown. When I was a youngster, I knew a man in town who had captain Jack Mueller, which lived up in New Suffolk. He went scalloping around Robins Island and he had a [inaudible]. He put twenty, thirty bushels on. There was no limit in those days. This was back in the [19]20s and [19]30s. Bring them into the scallop shops and...

JR: New Suffolk.

DR: New Suffolk, unload. If they had some left to the next morning, they shovel them on a wheelbarrow, dump them back on his boat. He'd take them back, throw them overboard, start getting new ones. That's how wonderful they were.

JR: They put them back. They didn't want them day old.

DR: They hard to open with a day old. They dry out and hard to open. So, the openers didn't want to mess with them.

JR: They put them back in the water, and they're still alive. But not easy to open and so forth. So, they just put them back.

DR: In a couple of hours and have another boatload come in, open it, open right up.

NS: I am imagining in the wintertime. You probably, it was pretty much the hard core commercial fishermen who were scalloping at that point.

DR: Yes. You had a pretty rugged. It was cold and you couldn't put too many clothes on. He couldn't work. Yes.



NS: Did you have your area that you worked in or did everyone just go wherever?

DR: They usually scallop and you saw a bunch of boats, you went there and you got in on.

NS: Really?

DR: Yes.

NS: Were there ever any fights?

DR: Not that I can remember. Sometimes you'd find a little spot by yourself and nobody would know it, and you got your early morning with four or five books on. Get out of there so nobody could see. But usually somebody for a long time, you drive around with trucks, look out with glasses on the water, see you there. Dumping your dredge and putting your thoughts in your bucket list. Then you're doing it the next time you go out there with a couple of books and we never fought.

NS: You mentioned that there was also some oystering, that there were a lot of oyster houses in this area. What is some of the history of that? Did you harvest oysters?

DR: I never harvest oysters.

NS: How come?

DR: I was probably too young.

NS: It had stopped by at that time.

DR: Greenport was the biggest oyster place on Long Island. Greenport. I can remember shells, oysters, probably three stories high and hundreds of feet wide. When I went to high school, we walked down the main street where Mitchells Restaurant used to be. That was an old oyster shop down there.

NS: Now, where were the oyster beds?

DR: Oh, Oyster Company went to the state and got leases on grounds, and they had them often with buoys Four Corners, wherever their acreage was.

NS: How many oyster companies were there?

DR: Probably ten, fifteen.

NS: That many?

DR: Oh, yes. Barrels and barrels of oysters went out in the shell.

NS: Now, where were the beds? Were they all.

DR: All different spots along. The oyster company had to clear the grounds, like the Starfish Wharf and all the obstacles that might be there. They plant the shells the oyster had to set on.

NS: When they say plant the shells, I do not understand.

DR: Well, oyster only set on something white, spawn. An oyster can get it on something else. But if you go say a rubber tire whitewall, throw it overboard. An oyster grounds there. The next year, you hold that tire in. Oysters would be all on the white all the way around, but none on the black.

NS: Okay. But where would you get the spawn? The eggs?

DR: With natural water all over. Just like south. Blow here blow there.

NS: So, when you are talking about planting oysters, I do not understand.

DR: How their plant had their grounds. They leased. So, after they opened up their lunches, they took the shells out the next spring and planted them on their grounds.

NS: Would they ground up the shells? Is that old shells? They would plant a whole shell and that would help spawn new oysters.

DR: Right. They try to take some time, two or three years before they were big enough. I have taken shells from here over in Connecticut. They had grounds over there, too. You find shells over there. Sometimes I'll bring shells from over there over here.

NS: Really?

DR: Yes. It's a very, very big industry, the oysters.

NS: Well, where were the most productive beds? Do you know?

DR: I think they were about the same. Every company had good spots. Heard them saying they couldn't put them on mud.

NS: Okay. So, would it be in shallower water, I guess?

DR: No, deep water.

NS: It was in deep water?

DR: Using 18, 20 feet of water.

NS: Who was it throughout the Peconic Bay, or were there particular areas?

DR: Mostly in Peconic Bay, Gardiners Bay or Orient, Upper Peconic Bay, any oriental, Riverhead, South...

NS: If you can imagine going out on a boat, is there one place that you can think of immediately that says, oh, this was a great oyster bed?

DR: Oh, I knew where they used to be. Yes.

NS: Where were they?

DR: Well, I was one off Orient. The lighthouse seeing a front light, north of that, it was a big oyster gram in there. That's where we have two trucks today. Big trucks and boats used to come by. Bunch of boats for dredge and go and pick it up and dump them, and then get out of there. Get a free restoration. But they also had watchmen, is what they had spent the nights anchored a rowboat to come in and steal their lights.

NS: Are there other parts around here that have that same quality?

DR: A lot of them, dozens and dozens of them.

NS: If you could think of five.

DR: I wouldn't know what the names of them would be.

NS: That is okay.

DR: I set off one light was a big area up off Marian Manor, There's another big Marion.

NS: How far off Marion Manor was?

DR: Oh, probably 1,000 feet or more. You have to look on a chart and see where the beds are at sandy beds out there in the water.

NS: So, they were in the flat beds?

DR: They didn't want to get in a channel. The tide would go to a path of the righteous and be where the slack tide was part of the day anyhow. Off the breakwater in Greenport was a big bay and off Southold was born all around Shelter Island, hanging.

NS: How far off Shelter Island?

DR: On 18 to 20 foot of water. That's the trouble with shallow water oystering is the tide gets low in the wintertime. It's cold, it freezes crazy oyster and they wouldn't live.

NS: So, it had to be somewhat in a deep water.

DR: Usually, eight to ten feet of water for lead.

NS: And ideally 18 and 20 foot.

DR: Because if you had a lot of ice, sometimes two to three foot of ice in those days, and they have to take it down to get what, they call a force big moisture. It died, too cold.

NS: How long would it take an oyster to mature? And we were talking about scallops.

DR: Well, scallop oysters, I have no idea, probably twenty years, thirty years.

NS: Oh. That long?

DR: And clams, all clams do the same thing. They really don't know enough about them how long they do live.

NS: No. What was the ideal place for the hard clams?

DR: Usually, in mud because it was easy digging. You could call them there, you could rake them there, and you had to be a hard bottom. That's where you get stones and rock hard. Very hard to get in mud. It's hard to find this clams. So, you had something. You know you had claims. Bring it up them.

NS: What kind of depth were the muddy?

DR: Anything from 3, 4 feet up to 18 feet. Concrete, 18 feet, 20 feet. You can do that.

NS: Is that what most of the commercial baymen use tongs for clamming?

DR: Not too much around here, but in the Great South Bay?

NS: Yes, they use a lot of tongs.

DR: All the time up in the Mercers Bay.

NS: What would they use around here?

DR: It was a clam, right? It wasn't a lot of commercial clammers around, oyster and scallops that was in.

JR: Those are the big cash things, anyway.

DR: Great South Bay is great for clamming. We still do it a what today over there. I brought a boat down once from the Rockaways. We came down the inland waterway and it must have

been 100, 150 boats at one spot, wall climbing. But there was a lot of places like that. Every time you hit, there was a bunch of clams all in one spot. But after a while they get thin. Somebody goes out to another area to find a better spot, and sometimes they can't find a better spot. So, we'll go back to the old spot. Don't get better clams. That's all.

NS: So, when you think about changes in the bay, are there certain events where you can say, that was the beginning of a bad thing that started to happen? Natural or manmade, is there something that...

DR: Some kind of old fashioned and I believe the outboard motor is [inaudible]. Oil industry is big and strong, the outboard motors is big and strong, oil marinas, all your repair shops or your salesman shops all over, thousands and thousands of them. That's, to me, what pollutes the water more than anything else, oil on top of the water. You have that discharge today. They have that water doesn't do that. It's too late now. It's gone. So, the oil from the exhaust comes up, puts a film on the water.

NS: Yes. I have seen it too.

DR: Millions and millions of gallons a day. How many boats are this? No end to it. No. But now is no time to stop it because everything's died off. I think that's what killed them.

NS: Are there any other things that may come to your mind?

DR: Well, of course, you know starfish, which is a natural thing, it kills oysters, kills scallops, kills clams. The horseshoe crab, each clams, each scallops, [inaudible]. They got a mouth and right to a shell in no time at all. You don't want to put your finger in it or take your finger off. It's too many people. Get right down to it.

NS: There have been any major storms or dredging projects that you think have impacted?

DR: Well, any hurricane that disturbs the bottom surface. Tremendous undertone moves things around. Of course, they used to dredge years ago to dredge water channels and stuff that had a free flow of tide in and out, which helped grow things. Now they're not allowed to do that. Environmentalist today is that disturbs that natural marshland and this and that. So, things aren't going like they used to. You can get stagnant water you know, and salt water with in and out tide. I just get the algae on top of it and it doesn't seem like. There's natural ways. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad. Sometimes nature needs a little help.

NS: What about the closing of some of the inlets? Do you think that has been a factor?

DR: I only can speak for Dam Pond down here. Of course, it's been open all my life. Going out with a rowboat. You couldn't get in with a big boat.

NS: Dan's pond?

DR: Dam Pond between here and Orient.

NS: How do you spell that?

DR: D-A-M.

NS: Okay. As in a dam.

JR: Right at the causeway.

NS: Yes. Now I know what you are talking about.

JR: The bridge goes under the road.

DR: It's not a big spot, but I dredge it out once in my life, and they dredge it out. Everything goes crazy all over the place. The tide is coming in and out good. Now it's all filled up again. So, they're very little slow tide in and out. That's the high tide. You get getting water coming in. You have to get low tide for the water to come down. But I don't want to toy with it so it stays there stagnant. Pete Neck is somewhat the same way, which is...

NS: Pete's Neck?

DR: Pete's Neck at Hallock's Bay. Pete's Neck is the entrance.

NS: Yes, I've seen it on the maps.

DR: And that was a young [inaudible] I had a channel through there and had pilings to mark the channel. Brownstone on one side to hold the channel open. The boats went in there, and loaded Hallock's dock, the Yacht Club dock in Orient [inaudible]. I worked there as a kid loading boats. They go in and out of the channel. After thirty-eight hurricanes, something like that, they fill the channel in. Painters went to Houghton and they never opened it up again. It's still winning out, but only with a small boat.

JR: And high tide. Yes.

DR: When do you get at low tide, you got to go very slow. I know where the channel is, the little channel. [inaudible] You don't want to do it in the nighttime. You'll get lost.

NS: Do you remember any blacksmiths around here that made some of the rakes?

DR: Well, Paul the blacksmith is very famous in Greenport.

NS: Do you know his last name?

JR: Can't remember.

DR: He was a German. He came over after World War I and lived with a German widow in 5th

Street, I believe, in Greenport. My mother was very friendly with the lady he roomed with and used to take her shopping all the time. Paul was a good friend of mine. I knew him quite well, but he was a modern blacksmith.

JR: Well, he was an arc welder.

DR: Right. He made all the dredges for every building on Long Island.

NS: Do you know who made them before he came around?

DR: No idea. Very seldom do you ever see a hand full of stretch. I have one. I probably had 40 or 50 dredges. They're all welded.

NS: Who made the ones that you have?

DR: Well, probably Paul. I don't really know. I got it from someone that got it from someone else, and some of them go back before my time.

NS: Is that what you used when you were scalloping? Is that what most baymen use?

DR: Everybody uses the same thing. I have heavy dredges and light dredges. Heavy dredges. They have also mud dredges and sand ridges. The mud dredges has a chain across the front and the hard bottom of the blade of.

NS: And that was for the scallops?

DR: Pardon?

NS: You are talking about the scallops.

DR: Yes. The dredges always had a blade as they lay on top of your screen and walk. Because the way if you have a mud dredge with a chain and scallop would be invented in the mud. So, you have to dig them out of the chain a little bit.

NS: Were there limits on how many oysters you could harvest?

DR: I have no idea because I never went and took all to the only bay.

NS: Who did? Who were the oyster company?

DR: Oyster companies, most of them.

NS: Did they work with the independent baymen or you did one or the other?

DR: Well, most payment didn't go away. It was too much competition. Not a big waste of houses.

NS: So, who works for the oyster houses then?

DR: Not people around town. They had openers and people worked on their boats, I know.

NS: Did you know anybody who worked on their boats?

DR: Oh, sure. I met (Adams Morrison?) used to run an oyster cabinet. My deceased friend Kurt Taylor, he worked on the oyster boat. Most everybody want a job. In the wintertime, we'd get a job at oyster plant or an oyster boat, we work.

NS: So, you would work for the oyster company for a few months, and then you would go back to your own thing. You could do that.

DR: Work year round for your company if you wanted to. But most of the oyster industry was in the wintertime. They had signs. Oysters are in season only in the fall. During the summer, it was believed that oysters in hot weather could get sick, which isn't true. You found that out after a hundred years. [laughter]

NS: So, how many of the men would work on the boats for the oyster company? You had to take a guess.

DR: Probably hundreds. Hundreds of hands work on the boats, and another hundred or so or maybe two-hundred or so working race jobs.

DR: Some guy whipping and shoving oysters on to the benches for the owners opened up all of the wood before they had conveyor belts. I have to take some shells out and planks and dump them in the heat.

NS: Did any women work for the oyster company?

DR: Women were good optimists.

NS: A shuckers, what were some of the other things that women did? Did you have any friends who worked for the oyster company?

JR: No, no. I only opened scallops.

DR: But we know people who opened oysters after the bar opened. Okay, this is (Savage?). (Scotty Savage?). The wife is like beyond but free. Two of them. But they were a rugged woman.

NS: I would think so.

DR: Tough and rugged.



NS: Were all the oyster companies in Greenport or were there in other places?

DR: Mostly in Greenport, but you had some in Southold. You had some in Malakoff, I believe. But small quantities compared with Greenpoint, Greenpoint was a big entity in...

NS: Are many of the buildings left?

DR: Well, I don't think so. There might be some buildings converted into something else. I can't think of any.

JR: I can't either.

NS: Wow. That is scary. Were there ever any scallop houses?

DR: Yes, but they were called scallop shanties. They were small kind of openers. Mostly ladies will come down in the afternoon if you've got in early. Got scallops right through the evening.

NS: Where were the shanties?

DR: Sorry.

NS: Where were the shanties?

DR: Any of those waters. Right near the water.

JR: Near the water.

NS: Is there any left of those?

DR: Yes, there's some up in New Suffolk. They don't use them anymore. The summer you go down with a marine reef down there, and you go on the west side of the Marina, there's a little dirt road and you see them on the edge. They use them to store stuff in their factory. Right along the edge of the creek there. The property on the other side is private homes. Maybe the private homes own home, but they're still there.

NS: Yes. Who were the best known baymen in your lifetime?

DR: My uncle.

NS: What was his name?

DR: (James Douglas?). Call him Jim Douglas. He lives in Pete Neck in Hallock's Bay.

NS: Hallock's Bay, right.

DR: Little shanty in the woods down there. He worked most all of...

[end of transcript]