

Nancy Solomon: Today is July 24th, 1997. This is tape 2, Nancy Solomon talking with Doug Rogers. You said that you knew a lot of other baymen who were no longer around.

Doug Rogers: No longer here. (Frank DeGora?) was a bayman from East Marion all his life. He died a couple of years ago. He was 87 years old. I don't know if I told you on the first session whether my Uncle Jim was a bayman from Orient.

NS: I do not think so.

DR: Now, he lived down in Pete Neck in Hallock's Bay, and he worked the bay all his life. He was one of the first men hired to build the Orient State Park. He was about two miles away by water. He rode over every morning to go to work and rode home at night. He didn't have a car. He lived in the woods in a little shanty. He'd get up early, go out clamming, go to work, come home, go clamming some more, and go to bed and go out the next morning and do the same thing day after day. Scalloping in the wintertime, oystering in the wintertime. He worked there for twenty-seven years until he retired.

NS: Do you know what his favorite hunts were in terms of clamming and oystering and scalloping?

DR: Well, he was a great hunter. He hunted black ducks, all the sea ducks, the old swans, and shelldrake, coots, surf scoters, something they're called.

NS: What I was trying to find out is what were his favorite places to go clamming?

DR: In Hallock's Bay.

NS: Any particular part?

DR: He had a bed where he'd plant his small clams. In the summertime, clams weren't worth much. So, he'd plant all the small clams in an area where he could look out his window. A mile away, he had a pipe in the water underneath the low tide. You could only see it when you went over by a boat. You knew just about where it was. He'd plant all his clams around that German pipe. Then in the wintertime, when the clams got high, he went out there and harvested them.

NS: You are talking about the price would get him.

DR: Yes, yes.

NS: What was a good price?

DR: Today, a good price for a little neck clam, I think, is around 20 cents. Each clam. Then they'd take it to the restaurants. A dollar a piece. In those days, it would probably be around a penny or two. There was a lot more clams then.

NS: About what time are we talking about?

DR: Oh, this is the [19]30s and the [19]40s.

NS: Did you get a lot of part-timers coming in in the summer to go clamming?

DR: Not too much, no. If they went clamming, we had a big summer population. Had a summer home, a cottage near the water or on the water. Of course, they went out and got their old clams to eat for themselves. They didn't sell them. Nobody came out to work.

NS: What about students? Was it considered a good summer job to work to the bay?

DR: No, not in those days. Nobody came out to work in the summertime. They came out for vacation. They stayed usually. Not too much. They went home, closed up the cottage. They might come out a weekend. It was nice once in a while. That's it.

NS: Tell me more about your Uncle Jim. What was his last name?

DR: Douglas. My first name. My mother's maiden name was Douglas. The Douglas family. At one time, my great-grandfather owned all the property from Hallock's dock all the way to Hallock's farm. That included Pete Neck and all the farmland in between. That was maybe a thousand acres. But he lost it all during the Depression. The stocks was bad, and bonds was bad. I'd sell it and sell that. He died around that period of time. My grandfather, Douglas, never worked a day in his life until the Depression. He lost everything. He had to get a job and go to work. He lost his family. He had all grown up by then. He owned a city block in New York, a farm in Port Jefferson, a summer home in Orient. He sold everything and went to Orient Bay, made a home out of it. That's where he stayed the rest of his life.

NS: Did he work with anybody?

DR: He worked as a painter during the Depression. My father got him a job in the Depression working. That's the only job, as far as I know, he ever had.

NS: When he was working on the bay, he was pretty much alone?

DR: This is his father.

NS: I am asking about your Uncle Jim.

DR: My Uncle James and his father was James. They're both Douglas's. My grandfather was the older one. He was the one that had all this stuff.

NS: All the farmland. So, your Uncle Jim, when he would work on the bay, what do you remember about some of the things that he did?

DR: When I was in the building business after World War II, I'd go down there to get a mess of scallops for dinner. Of course, if he didn't have any there, he'd say, "Well, get in the shop." He

will go out and get a mess. We'd go out and know just where they were. It's over a bench and one little toe was 15 feet, 20 feet. I would have a good source of scallops right there. Turn around and come right back in again. He didn't have to look for anything. He knew just where they were. He knew every piece of the bottom of that bay. What holes were here, what channels were there, what flats were. He just photographed it in mind of what the bottom was like. He knew where to go clamming, where to go scalloping, where to go eeling. He just got anything down there. Of course, him, there was one other man who was on Brown's Point. That was the next point past east of Pete Neck Point. That man was called August. He was a farm helper in World War I in the Hallock's Farm. After he'd been here a while, he didn't like farming anymore, so he went on the bay. He had permission to build a little shanty down on Brown's Point, and he stayed there the rest of his life.

NS: What kinds of things did he do on the bay?

DR: Same as my Uncle Jim. He'd clam and scallop and eel. They just lived in. No cars and just to walk. If they had to go to walk, they'd walk two or three miles to get to the main road and then hitchhike to Greenport, so that they had some good stuff. They'd walk into Orient and call up, and the man would come down and get clams and scallops, stuff like that.

NS: Were a lot of their houses pretty close to the creeks or to the water?

DR: There was hardly any house on the water in the old days.

NS: Where did your Uncle Jim live?

DR: He lived in a little shanty in the woods down on Pete Neck Point, which was almost on the water, but there was no housing for miles around.

NS: About how far did he have to walk to get to his boat and to his gear?

DR: About 25, 30 feet, that's all.

NS: That is what I was wondering.

DR: He's down on the edge of the creek. He had his boat on little canal there and tied up so high, tide, low tide, it was safe from any winds that would damage it. He lived there, I guess, for about thirty years.

NS: Now when you were working at bay, you were living in this house?

DR: Yes.

NS: Where did you keep your boat?

DR: In a little creek just north of the Yacht Club dock in Orient, which we just called The Creek. It's between Children's Beach and the Bay. It's about, I'd say, probably a mile, a mile and

a half long. The widest spot might be 500 feet to 800 feet wide. It's sheltered by a little inlet. It's only about 12 feet wide and about three feet deep. At low tide, it's only around 6 inches deep. So, you've got to be careful. If the tide's going out, you can drift right out with the tide. If a common inland tide's going out, you can't get in until the tide changes. I haven't had my boat there in twenty-five, thirty years.

NS: I am trying to think. How much water did your boat draw?

DR: Not too much. It's only a small boat, 20-foot long and probably drew 6 to 8 inches or so.

NS: Okay. So, you could get in during low tide.

DR: Yes. If the tide was coming in, it'd bring you right in. If the tide was still going out and it was almost dead low, you couldn't get back in again until another half hour, forty-five minutes, and the tide changed, and it would come in. It comes in fast in the creeks and stuff.

NS: Did you ever get really stuck?

DR: Not really. Sometimes we'd hit the sandbar and have to get out and push it away into the channel further.

NS: Have the sandbars shifted over time?

DR: They'd shift every year. One spot one year and next spot the next year. It depends on your local storms. If you get a southeaster, the sandbars would be to the east. If you got a northeaster, the sandbars would be to the west. It builds up. Sometimes it'd be straight in and out. Throughout the years, I can remember when I was a kid going down, running down there with my friends in the Orient. Sandbars were way, way to the east. Now it's all five or six feet above high tide. Big sandbars going up in there.

NS: Do you know how it got to be so big?

DR: No, as far as all the history I've read and the maps I've seen, the creek has always been there. They used to have a windmill on the east side of the creek to ride their grain with. I have pictures of it. It was brought by somebody down in the north shore of Syosset or someplace down that way. It burned down a few years later. We put on a bar, taking up the sand all the way down there. I'd say they didn't use it anymore in Orient.

NS: Do the sandbars have names?

DR: No, never a bar unless it's like Pete Neck. You've got a bar in front of them. You have to know which way to go. In the channel north, the entrance to Pete Neck is I'd say maybe 50, 60 feet wide. But you only can get in there with about 10 or 12 feet of it. You've got to know just where to go.

NS: One of the things I do not know and maybe you can help me, do shellfish like sandbars?

DR: No. They don't like sandbars. The reason a shellfish doesn't like sandbars is because in a lot of times, the real low tides, you get a northwest wind, strong, drives the tide out, especially on a full moon. You'll be two foot below normal. Anything exposed on a sandbar will be killed by the forest – clams, scallops, oysters, everything. Sandbars are usually barren unless you've got three or four feet of water on top.

NS: But they do like marshlands.

DR: Marshland, yes. Shellfish grows very fast in good tides, strong tides. You take the channel going in and out of Pete Neck, which is probably the best place to dig for clams and, of course, scallops. You can watch all around. They grow very fast and get very big. When we go someplace else in the whole bay down there, we have the size.

NS: So, does the same principle hold true for clams and oysters? So, they like strong tides?

DR: Yes, I think so. All your big oyster beds years ago was out on points of land where the tide ran pretty good. Why? I have no idea. But they grow better. The food was better. They grew quite as fast.

NS: Uncle Jim, what were some of the stories he told you about things that you needed to learn from?

DR: Well, Uncle Jim was quite a character. He used to have a raccoon, a pet raccoon. He had it for about two years. He had it in a pen when he'd go to work over the state park. He'd put it in a pen and lock it up until he came home at night, and he'd feed it. He had that, like I said, about two years. He could talk to that thing. He'd put it up on his hind legs and he'd feed it right out of his hand. He also was very good with rabbits. He had rabbits come up to his porch, and he'd feed them. He had birds fly right into his house laying on the table. He could feed the birds. Of course, he spent a good many hours coaching these things in and out. He was a very good man, a great nature lover.

NS: Did you go out on the bay with him?

DR: Oh, yeah, I went out on the bay with him. He went out when I started fishing. He'd come out and help me fish. I used to have a bay slew. He'd start scalloping with me. Quite a man. He had been married, but his wife divorced him. She went back to New York. That's when he went to Pete Neck out in shanty [inaudible] New York anymore. He lived the rest of his life in the back.

NS: Did he ever talk about things that were important to know about his work in the bay?

DR: I don't recall if he ever told me. I've been brought up around here all my life. I probably knew about most of the things myself. He was a great Indian artifact collector. He'd walk the fields, get arrowheads, things of that nature, and boxers and boxes of them.

NS: Do you have them?

DR: No. One of my relatives', cousin, has them. Probably around a couple thousand points.

NS: Wow.

DR: Of course, now you don't find that. When the tractors came into being, we used to find a lot of them and had horses. Horses only had small hooves when you compare them to tractor wheels. When the tractor wheels came along, they broke everything up.

NS: It broke everything.

DR: But this was a great Indian area, especially Orient Oyster Pond.

NS: Were there any Native Americans that worked on the bay in your time?

DR: I don't recall any, no. Of course, there was old man around here when I was a child. Mr. Rackett has three. He'd clam every day in Dam Pond. I never remember doing anything else.

NS: Did he do it for his family or did he do it for himself?

DR: He did it to make a living. He was an old man then. I was probably about ten or twelve, and he was probably in his sixties. Every day he would...

NS: Did he do it the same way as everybody else?

DR: He did it all by hand, clam-raking. He'd be in the same spot year after year and never moved out.

NS: Where was his spot?

DR: In Dam Pond on the Gillespie's Point. The thing about clamming, if you clam there all the time, you cultivate the ground. Therefore, the seed clams grow faster and keep multiplying. If it's not raked at all, just what's there is...

[talking simultaneously]

DR: That's it.

NS: Is it like a suffocation process? That is what I know.

DR: I don't know why they don't keep growing there, but if the ground is disturbed and cultivated, you get new sets going in there all the time. You take digging out of channel for the past week in and out of the creeks, and the next couple of years, just by moving all that ground out of there, the set grows right in there the next two years loaded with clams.

NS: Did they used to dig it by hand or they always dredged it?

DR: They always dredged it by cranes. Of course, they'd use backhoes, sand suckers, things like that. Many places ever dug out. My memory is, a couple of years later, it was always loaded with clams. That's where the tide runs fast, in the mouth. That's why you dig it out.

NS: When did they start dredging the channels?

DR: I really don't know. The county had a dredge. Maybe a couple of them at one time. Of course, all the towns in Suffolk County were dredged this year, one town, and the next year, another town, so they had to have a list to take care of everybody. They had a pretty good crew. They had to have a spot they're dredging. They pumped it and made big hills of sand and stuff like that.

NS: Did they dredge to make Orient State Park?

DR: No. They did dredge to make part of the roadway going to Orient Park. The land was always there. It was so low that during high tide, you go over the top of it.

NS: You have to build up the road a bit.

DR: So, when you dug that all up, and a concrete road from Orient Point out to the park, which is probably two miles long, and the [19]38 hurricane took all that concrete road and pushed it right into the bay.

NS: So, it had to start over again?

DR: It's still there. You can see it out in the bay. So, they started over again, and then they got a blacktop.

NS: Did that affect the clamming at all?

DR: I don't think so. Not to my knowledge.

NS: When did they do this? This is like in the [19]30s?

DR: Well, the state park, I believe, started around 1932, [19]34, somewhere.

NS: How many baymen have you known in your lifetime?

DR: Oh, a lot of them I never know really well, except for their first name. Probably around forty to fifty people. At different times, they went on the bay and made a living for a while, and something else would come up, a better job, and they'd leave and go do something else.

NS: Were there many who did it their whole life?

DR: Not too many, no. It was quite a hard existence. In those days, you didn't have trucks and cars, and nobody had a pickup. So, everything had to be done by horse and wagon. It was quite a trip. They'd take advantage of Greenport, which had a boat and a wind there. It was all sails in those days. The wind was wrong, you couldn't get up there until four or five hours to go six or seven miles.

NS: What about in the last fifty years?

DR: Everything was outboard in the last fifty years, everything else.

NS: Have there been more baymen because it has been easier?

DR: There's probably more scallopers in the wintertime, like I told you before. People with jobs just take their vacations.

NS: Yes. It was more Christmas money.

DR: They all went scalloping and they make fast money. But after the scallops got scarce, they wouldn't go anymore.

NS: Well, during the last fifty years, except for the last ten, how many full-time, long-term baymen do you think there have been, those who have really spent the better part of their lives on.

DR: There'll be a couple hundred out in this area suffered. I didn't know all of them, but I knew they left. Down the bay, look out and you see thirty, forty boats in one area scalloping. Down the other road, you see another thirty, forty boats.

NS: They were on the bay their whole lives?

DR: No, just part-time.

NS: I am talking about the ones who were on the bay their whole lives, though. How many?

DR: Well, I don't think there was too many. Probably half a dozen each town, like the one he has, a half a dozen, Beach Bay, half a dozen, Greenport, half a dozen, and so on. Nobody really wanted to work that hard. After the war, nobody wanted to work at all. No one yet. The reason, you see, when World War II started, everybody got defense jobs and went into the service. That's where your coffee break started. Before that, you had no coffee break. You worked for eight hours, had lunch for half hour in the afternoon. So, it made up your eight hours, and you [inaudible] go home. But then they had coffee break. The unions got into it.

NS: Well, we have certainly talked a little bit about oystering and the oyster houses.

DR: Oystering, like I said before, was a big industry. We had oyster companies and had big houses, and they were all free of boats, hired hundreds of people. Very seldom did you ever see

a bayman make a living with oysters. He didn't have the grounds. He didn't have the equipment. It took a lot of money to commercialize.

NS: Were there some baymen that worked for the oyster companies full-time?

DR: Probably. At different times, they went on the boats.

NS: Or it would just be like for a period.

DR: Well, you'd see the oystering actually went from September to March or something like that. During that time, it's cold and windy and miserable, and the baymen probably didn't want to go out there themselves, so they worked on a boat or ran shop that have opened up. Got a job like that.

NS: Did the oyster shells ever get dumped back into the bay?

DR: Every oyster shell was harvested, opened up, conveyed, back onto the boats, took out and dumped.

NS: Where would they dump it?

DR: In oyster grounds, and buoys, and grants from New York State, at least acres and acres of grounds.

NS: Do you remember where some of those places were?

DR: It was all over. Some of the companies had them over in Connecticut.

NS: What about around here?

DR: Well, Orient Harbor was big, and Peconic Bay was big, and Noyack Bay. You could name any bay in the Southern County, there was always a plant of oyster somewhere. Mostly on your sand bottoms, hard bottoms, but not shallow.

NS: So, it was the deep water.

DR: Right.

NS: Did that help produce more oyster?

DR: Yes. They're set from spawning oysters, would set on shells.

NS: Did clams ever get mixed up with it? Did clams ever spawn in the same place?

DR: Oh, yeah, I think they have spawned. But the clams were most more in the shallower water, not in the deep water. You'd get clams in twenty-four foot of water where very seldom

you'd get an oyster in there. It had to be in twenty-four foot of water. Why? I have no idea, but that's the nature [inaudible].

NS: Did you see much changes in the width of the channels or the creeks over the years?

DR: Well, of course, everything changed after. I don't know if I told you before, but out at the end of Long Beach, which runs from the Orient Point to the west, I'd say about five or six, maybe even seven miles long, and at the end of that is a lighthouse, which is called Bug Light. When I was a youngster, I might have told you that we used to go gunning out there. We'd have three boats at least between the lighthouse and the Point. Today, there's not room for one boat. How much it's grown, the Point is going up, goes right up. In the low tide, you can walk right to the lighthouse. Ten years ago, you could take a big boat right through there. Now, it's all sand. It's right up.

NS: Do you know why?

DR: Because there's a natural flow of the sand that comes from the east to the west and blowing up a little gradually. There's no big storms that break it through and make a channel again. The big channel is the east of the – west to the lighthouse. East to the lighthouse is all the sandbar.

NS: Was that also a good area for shell fishing?

DR: Yes, right off the Point into the northern part of the Point was a big oyster ground there. That was a big, big oyster ground. The oyster plant was down on Shipyard Lane, and they could have spotters in their towel looking out and watching to make sure nobody was stealing the oysters. If you saw somebody working, you'd have a boat and run out there to chase them off. Most of the time, they tell me a lot of the old-timers used to get a job watching oyster ground at night, anchor and just stay there.

NS: Just being watchmen?

DR: Yes, watchmen. Then the boats would come by and chase them off, because they had a lease on that land.

NS: Yes.

DR: Nobody else was supposed to touch it.

NS: Did the baymen do the same thing if they were working in a particular area? Did they ever stand and watch over it or anything?

DR: I imagine some of them got jobs in the wintertime when it wasn't busy or something like that.

NS: No. I was just thinking, if you were a bayman and you had a particular area, like for clamming or scalloping, would you ever stay out there to make sure nobody came around it?

DR: No. Anybody is entitled to any land there is.

NS: Yes, I know. I know. But still, they may get a little protective.

DR: Usually, when the scallop season starts, you ride around, and you see where all the boats are. Then you go to scalloping because they finally [inaudible]. Now, scallops, sometimes it was good, and sometimes it wasn't. So, you went and find your own spot sometimes. But sometimes it was good. They wouldn't see you. So, you dump dredges that you caught on board. You get a bushel at a time and all these small boats are riding right around. You clean up that spot, you get to another spot. It's a hit-and-miss proposition. You couldn't always find them. If you found a good spot, you weren't satisfied. So, you'll try to find a better spot and didn't find anything. So, you wasted the rest of the day. The next day, you went back to the first spot, and we could get something and worked all day long.

NS: Tape two with Doug Rogers. What do you think has been the biggest catalyst for some of the decline of scalloping and shell fishing?

DR: Oh, probably the outboard motor has a lot to do with it. You have more people out here. There's hardly any room on the waterfront that isn't built up now. There are houses and cottages and marinas. Everything on the water is developed.

NS: When did the marinas start popping up?

DR: Right after World War II.

NS: Was that also when a lot of the summer cottages were built?

DR: They had a few before then, but not too many. But most of them after that period of time. Also, people, probably in the [19]40s and [19]50s, even in the [19]60s. Taxes got very expensive down in Nassau County and Western Suffolk. Thousands of dollars over the years, and people are like, "I can't afford this anymore. I'll sell my place and move out East." A lot of people did that. A lot of people. Also, people that retired. "I'm selling my place to move out and stay out in the country." So, now, we don't have a country anymore. It's all built up out here.

NS: Like the [19]70s, is that about the time period that started it?

DR: I think so.

NS: Or more the [19]80s?

DR: I had a lot of people I built houses for when I was in construction and sold their houses and got big money to come out here and take half the money and have a better house than they had before and still have a nice environment around it. Country life. But they got more and more and more. Farmland got sold, and developers came out, and it was just like, I suppose, the

colonists, the early settlers, more and more people came from Europe, (south of the county?). The same happened in the United States. So, it is a vicious cycle.

NS: Were there things that you saw happen on the water that also really changed things, besides the storms and the hurricanes?

DR: Not really, no. They just stayed about the same every year, except for terrific storms and the bed of scallops would be washed away, washed ashore. Maybe I told you a good northwest wind in the wintertime. If you have a lot of scallops along Orient Harbor, they will wash ashore and be three or four feet deep on the beach. So, you go to eat them. People would be down, get a net. I used to get down with a pickup truck, four-wheel drive, shovel them onto the truck, whole truckload at one time.

NS: You would shovel them?

DR: Shovel them, yes. Sure.

NS: Just go in the water and shovel them?

DR: Not out of the water, right on the beach dry.

NS: Wow.

DR: The night before, they were all washed in with the wind storm. It was in shallow water and they...

NS: Which beach was this?

DR: This is Orient Harbor. Well, he had enough openers. You could keep running back and forth and pick up loads of scallops all day long. But you only had your family doing this so you only could handle so many. You go back the next day and get some more if you could find any. Tremendous amount of scallops.

NS: It is sad what has happened.

DR: I can remember when they used to be twenty-five cents a quarter, open. Twenty-five cents today, you probably get it from ten to \$12 for the same thing.

NS: For shucked scallops?

DR: Yes, if you can find them.

NS: Yes. I was just thinking about that. Have you ever clammed for butter clams?

DR: I don't know what a buttered clam is. I think you're talking about a duck clam. It's a little tiny clam.

NS: It almost looks like a little neck, but it is rounder.

DR: You're right, and yellow inside.

NS: Yes. It has got a little stripe or two on the outside.

DR: That's a duck clam.

NS: A duck clam.

DR: That's what we natives call a duck clam. Most of that is eaten by wild ducks. Broadbill feed on duck lands. I remember in Hallock's Bay, and you get a (niche?) storm and the east side of Brown's Point, the whole beach would become yellow and white with these duck clams because of the broadbill feeding in the water, eating them. The shells would be white just by the shore.

NS: Did you ever harvest them, or do you know anybody who did?

DR: No. As far as I know, nobody ate them except the ducks. They're very tiny, the size of your fingernail.

NS: Yes. Were there any other things that somebody tried once to harvest, like shellfish, that didn't quite work?

DR: Of course, years ago, they didn't use conchs like they do today.

NS: Really?

DR: No conch years ago.

NS: When did that start?

DR: Well, probably after World War II, when we had a big population of Italians and Greeks in the country, and they fed on them in the native land, the Mediterranean place like that. Delicious food. The buyer said, "Get some plants. We got a market for them. Get some conchs." So, I started conching.

NS: What would they use? Would they use winkel pots?

DR: That's what the conch pot is, the winkel pots?

NS: Yes. The square and the stake are in the middle.

DR: Right. They used horseshoe crab as a bait. They used to get, if I remember, right around six or \$8 a bushel, which is decent money. Today they get around \$25 a bushel. There aren't as

many conchs now. Some people who have two or 300 pots every day, they bait them every day. That's a lot of bait. A lot of work. They make good money, just three or four months and it's all over.

NS: Where would be the best places for conch?

DR: Well, I don't really know because I never fished for conch. I tried it one...

NS: Was it deep water or shallow water?

DR: I tried it once in the sand, and somebody gave me a couple conch pots. I had some lobster pots out there, so I went and tried the conch pots. So, the next day, after I set them, I went by. I said, "Well, I must see what's in the conch pot." I was going to get my lobster pots. I lifted the first pot up and a solid full, right to the top, and some crawling on the outside, trying to get in.

NS: [laughter] They did not get the idea that the others were dead.

DR: This is going to be a big boom. But then I went and took my lobster pots and came back, and that was the only pot that I had a lot of conchs in it. All the rest didn't have much.

NS: Did they set the conch pots in the estuary at all in the bay?

DR: They sent them in trawls, like taking a straight line from one point to another a mile long and putting a pot every twenty, thirty feet.

NS: This is in the bay?

DR: In the bay. The bay had the biggest conch, and some is small conchs. I have no idea.

NS: Is it generally in deep water or shallow water?

DR: Sometimes, it's anywhere from six feet of water to twenty feet of water. They migrate. Conch migrates across the bottom. They eat one day, and the next couple of days, they get scarcer and scarcer. They go to the west a mile or two and put some conch pots. You start catching them again. They go on up there to spawn. Why? I don't know, but they lay their eggs in the sand.

NS: What was the season for the conch?

DR: In the fall, usually cold weather are now the conch season. Usually in July and August, they kind of disappear. They don't caught anymore until fall. Then they're going out in fall to every ocean, Block Island sand or wherever.

NS: Okay. So, they go into larger bodies of water.

DR: They migrate back and forth, same as the lobster does. Same as the blue crab does. Some

of them will go into the mud. (They go scalloping in some area with mud?). They got blue crabs sometimes. They're just dormant, don't move until they get up on the cold end and then move then. The blue crab only lives a couple of years, and it dies too.

NS: Is that the lifespan of conch?

DR: Conch will live a good many years, but they only get so big, and they'll stay that size.

NS: What size did they get?

DR: Oh, about like that. A good size.

NS: About a foot?

DR: Oh, no, eight or ten inches. Actually, if you go scalloping in Hallock's Bay with a scoop net and you drift with the tide and you see the scallop, you pick them up in scoop net. You also see conchs and you pick them up, too, because the conch eats the scallop or the clam. That's why you take care of them guys trolling boats. Sometimes you didn't even want to sell them. Just throw them on a beach someplace because they'd kill the scallops that you were after. Horseshoe crab does the same thing.

NS: Would they be crawling out of their shell, or do they always stay in their shell?

DR: No, they crawl out of their shell.

NS: Okay. I have never seen it. I have heard. I assumed that.

DR: Of course, the buyers, they buy conchs. They steam them, take the meat out, and they take the meat and packages in. Five pounds, ten pounds, whatever size they have amounted for, and they ship them to Italy, Greece, and Mediterranean countries and get big money.

NS: Was there a particular middleman around here who...

DR: Yes, there was a man in (Southhold that fish a lot of types of conchs?).

NS: What was his name? Do you know?

DR: (Jamie Calls?). He might be gone now.

NS: Did he also work with the clamming and the oyster?

DR: Scalloping and conches, mainly. I don't know if his son does it now or not. He was in the business for many years, maybe thirty years, forty years.

NS: He was in Greenport?

DR: In Southold.

NS: Oh, in Southold. Okay.

DR: People would take this stuff up to him. He'd pay him the cash, and everybody was happy until it got debated. Somebody said, "Well, that guy's making all the money, so I'll stop buying them." He paid a little more money, so they won't go to him. Back and forth that way.

NS: What was the other guy's name?

DR: I don't know.

NS: Is he also from Southold?

DR: They didn't last very long, (Calls have stated?).

NS: Oh, okay.

DR: You could also ship them to New York in bags, the whole fish market.

NS: How would you do that?

DR: Just put them in a bag and put a tag on them. The buyer is going to buy them in New York and fish house.

NS: Well, how would you get it to New York?

DR: You take it to Greenport to a relay station like Pell's Dock, which has fish, scallops, oysters, clams, everything. They pick it up in a refrigerated truck and take it to the market the day you caught it and get very, very fresh.

NS: Where was Pell's Dock? I have heard about it.

DR: That's the head of Mill Creek. Not Mill Creek, [inaudible]. That's where the hospital is in Greenport.

NS: Yes.

DR: Right near there. About a block away.

NS: Okay. Is that where a lot of fish that was heading to New York would go?

DR: All the fish from this area (goes back?) into New York. He was the only buyer, I would say, maybe fifty years or more. One time he had his own truck, and he managed the truck with shellfish and drive it. I worked in the truck and then I pushed out and I caught oysters to New York between [inaudible]. You leave here around 5:00 p.m. Pick up all the way up to the

Riverhead almost, driving the truck. Different places and houses. Get in New York around 10:00 or 11:00. You'd have to leave up so many barrels of fish for buyers and leave barrels for the next day. You got really a whole truckload and tractor trailer. Then you'd have to go to a warehouse that had produce, furniture, nails, hardware, plumbing, supplies, whatever had to come from the warehouse out to Long Island to different places being shipped. So, you load your truck up and then you're making deliveries out. So, you got home around, I'd say probably 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. A good twelve hours on the road. Of course, it paid pretty good money.

NS: Were you working on the bay at that time?

DR: No.

NS: Okay. So, you did one or the other.

DR: I just gotten there and it was the only job available. I did it for one season. I was never home. Sleep in the daytime. You get home at 9:00, have something to eat, go to bed, get up at 4:00 and get ready to go back to work. Then I went working as a carpenter after that for a builder in Orient. I worked for him, I think two or three years. It wasn't crazy about that at that time. So, I run a gas station. I had a gas station for three years. That's when I got my first house down here. (It's my best place?). I was up there 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 at night, and sold a lot of gas. But I never saw my family. I said, "I got to get out of this place." The kids were growing up. Jean, my wife, would pushed a baby carriage all the way up there, three miles to come see me at lunchtime. So, I left, and I went in the construction business until the health department and the zoning board, and all that other politics got into the business. I gave that up and went on the bay. I was at bay for thirty-five years.

NS: How old were you at the time?

DR: Well, I was twenty-five when I got married. Probably around, I'd say, forty-five years old when I was [inaudible].

NS: When did you stop?

DR: When my heart gave out. I had a couple of heart attacks. I had to give it up. I still could go now, but I'd be inefficient. I get tired fast, and I'd be in the way.

NS: So, how old were you when you decided that you couldn't...

DR: Just two years ago.

NS: Wow.

DR: I was still going strong even after a couple of heart attacks. I felt good. After my last one, which was around three years ago, I had a stroke, and my balance wasn't great. So, it didn't take a lot of the (waterfall overboard?).

NS: How old are you now?

DR: Seventy-five. That's how old I am. [laughter] Born in 1921. Yes, I can remember Charles Lindbergh coming back from flying to Paris and coming up Broadway and limousine, open car. I remember sitting on the sidewalk, waiving to him. When I was overseas, I [inaudible]. Lindbergh come over there and showed the pilots how to drop five-hundred-pound bomb, take off, and they never did that before. They came over and showed them how to do it. So, I saw him twice in my life.

NS: I know your son, Doug. Does he go shell fishing at all? Do you mostly use the conch trap?

DR: He's mostly go fishing. He's bigger than I ever was.

NS: How come he did not do the shell fishing? Any idea?

DR: You can't do everything. You have to do one or the other. If you do a full-time job or fishing, you're busy year-round. He had some traps in the spring, but now he's only fishing five because areas where the other two were fished out and there's no more fish there. He's planning on putting another one up in the sand pit full of fish. If you take care of them, you have to do a lot of work. Every stake has to be painted with copper, same as the bottom of a boat or the [inaudible] would just take off. All your nets have to be dipped every year...

NS: In tar?

DR: Not tar, but a classic preservative until the (grass?) will grow on. If the grass goes on, it gets heavy. You have to dry them. So, with this new classic stuff, you want to dry maybe two times a year. The old tar, you have to dry them about six times a year. You have to pull them all up and put them on top of the stake, let the air and the sun get to them, kill any growth, and he can set them down again. Sometimes it takes two or three days. Well, I work hard in the fall when you get your fishing net. Pull all the stakes out, take them ashore, put them up on racks, take the ropes off. Next year, you start over again, painting them and drying them every year. A lot of work that you don't make any about for, I'd say, probably December, January, February, or March. Four months you're working, mending your nets, fixing your stakes, and you don't get a penny. So, if you don't make it to summertime, you're out of business. That's the way it is. If you want to work hard, you can make a good living.

NS: Are there any places that you also work the bay, not necessarily around here? Did you ever jump in your pickup truck with your boat and go someplace else?

DR: No. I never went any place.

NS: Did any people come here to shellfish, full-time baymen from other places?

DR: We used to go sometimes in the fall over to Sag Harbor for scalloping.

NS: Yes. But that's still a thing?

DR: Well, it's the same area.

NS: How would you get there? Would you take your boat over?

DR: I took the boat and crossed the bay, and me and my son would get twenty bushels and come back, and we'd blow them hard. We'd get wet and sloppy and had to bail out the boat every five minutes. It was rough going sometimes.

NS: How long would it take you on a good day?

DR: Probably an hour to get over there. When we get back, we had to load. It took longer. Depends on the weather. You see the tide was coming in, you'd go with the tide. The tide was going out. You had to buck the tide and it take longer.

NS: Before there were motorboats, did anybody make that trip?

DR: Oh, sure. They sailed over there.

NS: Would they stay overnight, or would they be able to...

DR: They would come back every day. You had to have your scallops open. So, you could never sell scallops any quantity in the shell. You could sell a few bushels to different people.

NS: Where would you take them to get them opened?

DR: Usually, you open them yourself.

NS: Oh, okay.

DR: Yes. Mostly...

NS: Yes. I remember you telling me about you and your family.

DR: Yes. Then after the war, they had some buyers who'd buy them in the shell and open them up and charge you so much a bushel opened them up, but they had openers come in and different people in town, and they might be part time, like two hours in the afternoon, four hours in the evening, and they'd open somebody at your bench without owning, somebody's scallops with a tag and his credit went whatever you would open. Most of the people open their own, and some of them don't. Then you got a lot of property. You didn't have to pay the middleman and opener and the shop had to pay something to eat.

NS: If you did have to pay somebody, how much would you pay them?

DR: It all depends on...

NS: Did you pay them by the hour or by the number of clams?

DR: No, by the amount of scallops they open by the gallons. One man can open two gallons an hour. You're not going to pay him the same as the man who can open one gallon an hour.

NS: Right.

DR: That's why you pay them by the gallon. Now, the one who worked the hardest, he got the most money. Because if you got to pay everybody by the hour, I'm not going to rush myself. I mean, I'm the best guy. I'm going to work slowly, and I don't have to make – I'm not going to make any more money than he does, and he's taking his time. That's not done today in all kinds of businesses, especially in this industry today.

NS: So, how much would you pay someone for [inaudible]?

DR: In most days, I know it's hard to feel the...

NS: How about a guess?

DR: Oh, probably a couple of dollars a gallon.

NS: Okay. This would have been thirty years ago?

DR: Thirty, forty years ago yes. Today they probably get [inaudible].

NS: They still pay them like that?

NS: Yes.

DR: I mean, you pay by how much you want to use, which is the only fair way to do it, really.

NS: Were there people who made a living just opening scallops and oysters and clams?

DR: Well, they didn't really make a living at it, but they made their part time wages. Some days will be bad. The man couldn't allow get scallops, so the openers couldn't go to work.

NS: Could not work, right.

DR: That depends on the weather. Sometimes during cold weathers, you had ice on the base, like I said.

NS: Right.

DR: So, most boats couldn't get out, so the openers doesn't have nothing to do.

NS: Now, would they also dump the scallop shells back in the bay?

DR: Sometimes, but not for the same purpose as shells and oysters. Scallop shells are just used for driveways and farm roads. They would dump them in the bay and crabs and feed on their guts and fields and feed on the leftovers, but they didn't do any good for the scallops.

NS: What about clam shells?

DR: Clam shells are the same way. It wasn't any for clams.

NS: Used for roads.

DR: Well, oyster is the only thing that clam shells would be good on an oyster bed. The oyster would settle on something white.

NS: So, did they do that? Did they dump the clam shells on...

DR: Well, it was no big, big bunch of clam shells like there were in oyster shells.

NS: Yes.

DR: Oyster shells are mountains.

NS: Yes. Those are huge.

DR: Yes, as big as houses.

NS: Yes.

DR: They were all taken aboard in a boat in the springtime and scattered on the oyster grounds. I usually wash them overboard because there's a whole heap of them. Boy, that could take a power hose and pump them overboard and just wash them across the deck onto these open bags and [inaudible] around us. They wouldn't have to shovel them because [inaudible] are easier.

NS: That is some [inaudible].

DR: A couple of years later, you go back and get some more.

NS: What I would like to do...

[end of transcript]