

John Kochiss: Is today August 3rd, is it not?

John Tucker: Yes.

JK: Yes, 1977.

JT: I got a birthday coming Friday.

JK: So, happy...

JT: I'll be 79.

JK: 79. Oh my heavens. Happy birthday.

JT: Thank you.

JK: These pictures, these are oyster boats.

JT: He used to keep them down here in the creek. That was long before we had any (clear suit stable?). That used to be all mudbank. He used to lie his boats in there. He had; I don't know how many demands for boats from rich people. But he was an independent fellow. He just built a boat when he felt like it. Sometimes he'd build one a year, two a year. They wanted him to go in the big way and he was independent and he just wanted to build one now and then as he wanted it.

JK: What was his name?

JT: Edward Rudolph.

JK: Oh, Edward Rudolph.

JT: I think that was the uncle of these Rudolph boys. He lived this next house. Not this one, but the next one. That was old man Rudolph's house. That was the oyster guy. The next one up that was Edward.

JK: I thought it was best.

JT: He was the one that built the boats. I don't know whether they were brothers. They must have been brothers.

JK: I can see the date on here, 1905.

JT: Yes. That's quite a while back.

JK: Did you say he made clamming tongs?

JT: Clam tongs and rowboats. He built beautiful rowboats.

JK: Really?

JT: Yes. Here's one of his boats here. This one here, that's one of his boats.

JK: Oh, yes. Right at the bow of your boat where you are sitting on deck. That does not even look as though it is painted. Is that varnish or is it painted? No, that is painted.

JT: That's painted white.

JK: You call that a rowboat.

JT: Yes.

JK: Now, I have heard people call them sharpies.

JT: Yes. You can call them sharpies too? There are all different names for them.

JK: Yes. I would call them...

JT: We call them skiffs too. They call them skiff.

JK: Skiffs.

JT: Yes. There are all different names, but I always call them rowboats.

JK: What about the old-timers, did they also call them rowboats?

JT: Well, anyone where they used an oar as wood, they'd call them a rowboat. But you see there was no outboards at that time. We did everything on our own or on the horse.

JK: Now, would this rowboat type ever have sails?

JT: No. No. No, they didn't have any sail. They never made any good sailing boats because they never had no centerboards. We used to try to put sails in them. We used to put the mast in the front seat and they blew right off. There was no way of giving them a chance to...

JK: Let me check this. The terms people are using, they say sharpies. Now, back home in Connecticut, a sharpie to me is maybe a 29-foot flatbottom sailing boat used for tonging or whatever.

JT: No, they wouldn't call them that here.

JK: That would be a skiff or a rowboat.

JT: Oh, yes. As I said, they called them skiffs or rowboats. They used to just...

JK: In a common language though, if somebody said sharpie, would you think of that?

JT: Yes. They are more a Clicker. They do it...

JK: Oh, you would know a Clicker by the word sharpie.

JT: Oh, yes, sure. That was just my habit of calling a rowboat. But it was a rule.

JK: It was a rule.

JT: My father always called them sharpies.

JK: Who did?

JT: My father when he was alive.

JK: Where would a skiff go? Would a skiff be bigger, smaller?

JT: It might be a little bigger, yes. That would be a little bigger.

JK: We were...

JT: But I never called them skiffs, either a rowboat or a sharpie.

JK: You were saying about the conchs. I made a drawing here. So, you said that it was best in 4 to 5 feet of water, but you also caught them in 16 feet of water and the Italians ate them. Did you sell them locally?

JT: No, I shipped them into the full market.

JK: I think you mentioned that once. You also shipped in eels too for the Italians?

JT: Oh, yes. We used to ship them in barrels.

JK: What did you ship the conchs in?

JT: In [inaudible] bags. Mostly in some baskets if you could get the baskets.

JK: Did you...

JT: Then we'd have to put a bushel in the basket and then we'd face them all up so they'd make a nice display when they came in the market.

JK: You would put a bushel in a basket?

JT: Yes. At the best time, they'd bring from about eight to \$10 a bushel. When they got down to four, that was late in the spring, it got warm. I'd quit. I wouldn't bother. Then I would do it again in the fall.

JK: What other activities did the baymen do?

JT: Well, they used to set eel pots. Some made just a living at that.

JK: They made a living at that?

JT: Scant living [laughter] because they weren't worth anything, the eels, at that time.

JK: Pots would be similar to this?

JT: Yes, square wire about that long.

JK: About 4 feet?

JT: It would be about 6 inches square. About 2.5 foot long. About 6 inches square. They have one funnel in it, so they used to put two funnels in because the eels wouldn't go out.

JK: Now, was that the kind of trap they used when you were a boy?

JT: Yes, same kind of type of trap.

JK: Was that made out of [inaudible] too?

JT: Galvanized wire.

JK: Oh, it is galvanized wire. Did he ever make it out of lats?

JT: They used to make little wooden pots that they were all moving together just so the water would come out of them when you pulled them up. But you had to get around early in the morning because just as soon as there was any light that's shown in there, well the eels would go for it and they'd get out. See, the wire trap would just soon as it made daylight, everything was light. Then they couldn't see so they would go down on the wooden traps as they would with the wire ones. They used to have to get up extra early in the morning to raise these little wooden caps.

JK: Well, with the wire they can see light anyway.

JT: Yes, they're stronger than...

JK: But they could not go through the wire.

JT: No, they can't go through it.

JK: Oh, so even way back they had wire?

JT: Mostly wood ones though.

JK: I am sorry, the wooden ones, yes.

JT: Yes, mostly those little wooden ones. They were about that long.

JK: 3 feet.

JT: I used to use them. I never cared.

JK: Were they squarer on the end too?

JT: No, they were round. They were flat on one end where you could stand them up, see?

JK: Oh, almost...

JT: Then they had a round cap on the top that you rope and then you pick them up, dump the whole eel.

JK: Oh, it was almost like the old lobster pots.

JT: Yes, somewhat.

JK: Flat on the bottom and curved on top.

JT: Yes. They were perfectly round. They had a great tendency to wash when there was a storm if you didn't put weight into them.

JK: Well, wait a minute, they were perfectly round, you say?

JT: Yes, they were. They were just flat on the bottom where they stood up so you could put the bait in.

JK: What about the other end, also?

JT: No, it was flat on the bottom.

JK: What about this end?

JT: Round on the top.

JK: It came with...

JT: It was a round cap. Then they used to stand the pot up on the bottom and put whatever kind of bait they wanted into it. Then if they got the eels, took the cap off the top and then just tip it up and the eels would come out.

JK: Now, where would the funnel be? Would there be a funnel in there?

JT: There would be a funnel. This is supposed to be the inside, but you go on the outside. The funnel would be like that.

JK: I see. They would enter this way.

JT: With a hole in the end where they used to go in.

JK: They would enter this way.

JT: Yes. Go in the back part or the bottom part there.

JK: You said that they had a tendency to roll along the bottom.

JT: Yes, they did.

JK: Where did you have your line attached?

JT: Well, mostly on this end, because sometimes you used to pull the pot up and the eels would be in the bottom of this funnel. If they happened to pull it up –

JK: Yes, the eels.

JT: – the bait would fall down through the end. See, they'd go inside. Otherwise, if you had it on this end, they'd fall out of the funnel and then you'd lose them.

JK: Now, did you have a yoke-type thing here or you just attached it here?

JT: Well, at least a rope they had tied.

JK: Tied on?

JT: Yes.

JK: Then up to a float?

JT: Yes.

JK: Was it the same kind of a float as the...

JT: Same as what I was telling you about.

JK: The 3-inch?

JT: 3-inch core.

JK: It went right through the center of the cork?

JT: Yes, with a hole in it. They put a knot in one on the end.

JK: You might have two or three here? Three.

JT: Yes, three.

JK: Three.

JT: That's what we generally used to use.

JK: Now, in the old days, they would use the corks from [inaudible]?

JT: They had little wooden cedar floats too. They used to paint them white. I know my father used to when he was younger, they had little cedar floats. But I never cared for those because they'd get water soaked and they wouldn't be as good as the cork.

JK: They would be about like this, a 7?

JT: Yes, 6-inches long with a hole in the end.

JK: Right straight through it.

JT: They'd be tapered down, see? So, if it was a heavy tide, they'd weather it better than if it was blunt? It would be tapered on the end where the rope goes through.

JK: Oh, in the bottom part in other words.

JT: Yes.

JK: So, it looked like a fid or something like this?

JT: Yes, that's right.

JK: Not to a point though.

JT: No. No. They'd be tapered, but there'd be a hole there right at the bottom.

JK: There would be a hole right through and then you'd have a knot on there. You would have

one of those floats?

JT: One, yes.

JK: One. The line?

JT: They weren't as good as really the core?

JK: No. Would your line also be about 9-thread?

JT: Yes.

JK: So, you eeled, you clammed, you oystered, you went for conchs.

JT: I'll tell you another thing they did too. They used to have seine nets that if they saw fish, they used to go out with these old-fashioned sloops and have about four to six men on. They used to sail around all day long in the bay. They'd spot bunches of weak or bluefish and sometimes didn't do good.

JK: When was that?

JT: Well, if the market happened to be right. So, otherwise, we wouldn't. This fellow that used to do that, he did it for years. Sailing around all day long, sitting and lying around on his boat looking for these bunches of fish. Sometimes they were lucky, sometimes they weren't. Anyhow, he was telling my father, he said, "If you started with \$900 in the spring," and he said, "Hide your boat." He was telling whatever – he said, "You sail around all summer looking for fish." He said, "In the fall," he said, "You wouldn't have no boat." He said, "Your \$900 would be gone." I said, "I was happy he was fooling." There was nothing in it. So, he used it all up, what money he had. [laughter]

JK: When he sailed, how did he set the seine?

JT: Well, they'd go around the school with this net. It was a gillnet. Then they'd drum them. They'd take a skiff and go the net on the boat on a certain side where the fish were supposed to go in and they'd scare them. Of course, they'd go in this net and gill. That's when they'd pull the net up, they'd be all gilled in there.

JK: Now, would that be like just a rectangular net like this? Well, long?

JT: Yes, I imagine it would be stretched.

JK: How deep would it be?

JT: Oh, I guess about 6 feet deep.

JK: Would there be corks on top?

JT: Yes, to let it out on the bottom.

JK: How long?

JT: Any length you want, you'd go quite a long, long thing.

JK: A couple hundred feet?

JT: Oh, more than that.

JK: Really?

JT: Yes. Again, they've had them almost a quarter of a mile long.

JK: They just set them in a straight line?

JT: Well, they set them kind of in a straight line. Then they'd find out where the fish was going to go. Then they'd scare them and they'd all gill.

JK: What kind of fish are these?

JT: Bluefish and weakfish.

JK: Where would you sell these fishes?

JT: They'd ship them in the market.

JK: Oh, they would ship them?

JT: Yes.

JK: But there was no money in that.

JK: Were there just a few people doing that?

JT: Well, there was maybe about three or four different boats.

JK: Oh, and it would be the same kind as your boat.

JT: Yes. Same kind of type sloop.

JK: How did they haul in the net?

JT: Well, they have these skiffs, like I said, round bottom. These were round-bottomed skiffs, but they were bigger than a sharpie. Then it was quite a big net. They'd go around those with

these two skiffs and then draw the net, tie it together, and scare them. They slapped a board on the deck of the boat and scared the fish. That's the way they did. They pulled the net in, in these skiffs and take the fish out. Sometimes they'd do good, but most of the time they laid around all summer long and wouldn't have any luck, wouldn't see any fish. Like he said, it's just you wouldn't have any boat, you wouldn't have your \$900 at the fall. So, it showed how they made out.

JK: Did they put the fish right in the hole?

JT: Yes, they put them in the hole of the boat because they kept them out of the sun and they had hatch covers on them.

JK: They would just...

JT: Then they'd go in and clean them all up and ice them up and ship them in, in boxes, 100 pound a box. That's the way they'd do it and they're still doing that today the same.

JK: Really?

JT: Yes.

JK: Out here?

JT: Well, not out here, but there's a big firm in Islip and there's white cap. There's only one now. This guy has outside fish pounds. They all went out of business. This is the only one at sunrise he's still setting his own nets out in the ocean.

JK: Out in the ocean at sunrise. From Islip?

JT: Yes.

JK: Are there any gillnetters today?

JT: No, not anymore.

JK: You said one fellow, what was his name that did this?

JT: Weeks, W-E-E-K-S. Then there used to be a fellow by the name of Collins.

JK: Collins.

JT: They did. They're all dead now, all of them.

JK: Do you remember their...

JT: The *Ella C.* was the Collin's boat.

JK: *Ella C.*?

JT: Yes. There was another one too. What's his name?

JK: C stand...

JT: The fellow by the name of Bran, he had a big, white sloop. I can't seem to remember the name of the Bran brothers. They were in that too. I can't remember the name of the sloop.
[laughter]

JK: The *Ella C.*, probably the C stood for Collins?

JT: Yes. She used to be at a yacht over here that worked over in this place across the creek. He was a rich man and he had this yacht. He was captain of it, this Collins, but he was always in the bar room. When the rich men wanted to go out sailing, he'd have to go to the bar room and get him. So, I guess he got disgusted. He discharged him and he gave him the boat to get rid of him. It was a lovely boat and he used to use it on the bay for scalloping in the winter or gillnetting or clamming. That was a lovely boat.

JK: Was this a yacht at first, you mean?

JT: Yes, she was yacht.

JK: Oh, she was a yacht.

JT: Didn't have to do anything with her. He just took the boat and went out on the bay with her. She was a lovely boat. He put a cabin on the back end and she must have been about 50-feet long. She was a lovely boat. The *Ella C.*, that's her name.

JK: *Ella C.*?

JT: Of course, he named her after his wife Ella Collins.

JK: Was that built locally or?

JT: Yes. I don't know where it was built, but I loved the boat. When I saw her, she was all beautiful, white sails, and white paint and she really did look lovely.

JK: But the other folks like the Weeks had one of an old-fashioned type of boats.

JT: Yes, he did. Then he went and built one afterwards of his own. But there was no more fish. Fish played out. The boat was too big really for the bay, but he managed to use it. Then he died and he sold it.

JK: Was he related to the boat builder, the Weeks?

JT: No, this is a different Weeks.

JK: It was a big boat then?

JT: Yes, he was quite big too. I would like to know the name of that one. I was trying to remember, but I can't seem to think of the name.

JK: [laughter]

JT: She was around the bay for years. Oh, the *Gilbert Hirsch*, that's what was her name.

JK: [laughter]

JT: [laughter] He used to be a Jew fellow working up here at Gerber's store. Used to be a big grocery and haberdashery store. He was a wonderful Jew. He was one of the finest. He had this manager and that was his name, Gilbert Hirsch. This fellow had this boat built and he named it after him, *Gilbert Hirsch*.

JK: Oh. how would you spell that last name?

JT: H-I-R-S-C-H, I think.

JK: Oh, that is it.

JT: Hirsch.

JK: She was like your boat, what it used to be when you would sail?

JT: Yes. She was a little bigger than my boat.

JK: Do you know where she was built?

JT: I wouldn't know. Might be Patchogue. It was generally all built there in the early stages.

JK: I got to ask you a question has been bothering me about summer cabin and so forth. When this was a sloop, would you be able to take this cabin off in the summer and put a cabin up this fall?

JT: That's what they used to do.

JK: See, there is a little deck in between the hold and here. You see that?

JT: They were all put in those middle decks, we called them.

JK: Oh, the middle.

JT: It strengthened the boat. Especially if you had oysters on and you could throw them right up against the cabin and then you could shovel the oysters right with a shovel. So, good, many times they made such a narrow deck that you couldn't get the shovel in there. But we made it about 3 foot wide. Like you said, they used to take this cabin off and have a summer cabin halfway to this hatch. They used to like to go out on the bay and take a little party if they wanted to or take their friends out. Then in the wintertime, they'd take this cabin off and put this one on. But we had them made stationary because more or less they leaked when you had to take them on and off. So, we never bothered with the summer cabin anymore because we used to put oysters and clams in. This one, why we made it stationary. See, this is stationary.

JK: How could you tell it was stationary? Can anybody tell by looking at it whether it was stationary?

JT: Oh, yes. You can tell because they were more or less bolted when they were just put on during the summer months. But you see when they used to have sail when they used to use these borrowed cabins. But then when we got these stationary cabins and they made this – we call them coup shaped.

JK: Coup?

JT: A little part of the house. We called them coups, but there's really a little part of the house. See it on this thing on top here?

JK: Yes.

JT: Now, we used to use that when we had power. Never bothered with the sail anymore.

JK: Now, when this type was converted in the summertime, the summer cabin had the canvas on it –

JT: Canvas on it.

JK: – and had stanchions. Now would that cover the complete...

JT: Yes, cover the complete Coleman there. We called them Coleman.

JK: It would go from the forward part to the end.

JT: It would go right over the Coleman and sit on the deck some way. The stanchions of the cabin would fit over this Coleman here. See how that's about 4 or 5 inches from the deck. That would fit on there so it wouldn't sit on the deck. But it was built solid and stationary.

JK: Why did you have the summer cabin in? Just to sit in?

JT: We never did. We never had one.

JK: But I mean the people, just to take passengers out.

JT: I suppose it was cooler. I never liked the cabin in the front part of the boat.

JK: Now, when the after cabin was taken off for the summer, did it not expose the bunks and everything else?

JT: No, they didn't have any in there. What bunks they had, they put into the front cabin. It used to be like an open cockpit, I called it.

JK: Oh, it was like an open cockpit?

JT: Yes. They had all that paraphernalia in that front cabin if they had a bunk or a bed.

JK: Well, in the winter did they put the bunks back in there?

JT: Then they'd put this cabin back in here.

JK: Then they'd put the bunks back in.

JT: Back in here too, they put all the paraphernalia back. Like I said, they had these hatches. Well, I call them hatches, these covers. They'd put them down and they'll keep all the rain and snow and ice and everything out.

JK: The tiller now?

JT: They used to have a wheel with spokes, old-fashioned wheel on gears. That used to turn the runner. I did away with it. I put a tiller in because it was quicker and it was handy. I used to stand in that cabin on the back end there and steer with that. Otherwise, I'd have to go on deck.

JK: Now, some of the boats though, the pictures I've seen, have tillers. Some tillers were...

JT: All different shapes. There used to be straight ones.

JK: Curved.

JT: Curved ones. Just all according to what kind you wanted.

JK: Here is the profile of her in the wintertime. Now, I've seen it with tillers that come up like this. It's almost like on the boats now.

JT: Yes, that's right.

JK: So, you could sit in the cabin there.

JT: You would just reach your hand out and steer it.

JK: But when you went in the summertime, you took this cabin off. Now, this seemed to be kind of high. Did they replace it with another tiller?

JT: No, they used to leave the same tiller on. But there used to be a wheel here with spokes, like I said. They were more or less slow maneuver with them because they turned slow and they'd take those off and they put – that's what we did too – we put it with tiller on because it was quicker. The boat would handle quicker.

JK: Would a workboat have a wheel also?

JT: Yes. A lot of the old boats had to be converted afterwards with a tiller on.

JK: Oh, you mean they first had the wheel?

JT: Some of them still had the wheel. They all had wheels really.

JK: Would they ever have a wheel and, in the summer, they'd take it off and put a tiller on?

JT: No.

JK: You did not do that.

JT: If they had the wheel on, they would keep it. But eventually, after a while, they did away with the wheels, like I said. I suppose they got old-fashioned and the tiller worked quicker.

JK: Yes. Now, you're talking about the sailboats with the wheels.

JT: Yes.

JK: Sailboats had wheel.

JT: Yes, they had wheels.

JK: Now, I remember I have seen a picture of a boat they had in the house. I do not know whether you remember.

JT: Yes, I remember.

JK: It had an arrangement like this. There was a big hole like this and there was no middle – what did you call it, the middle deck?

JT: Middle deck.

JK: There was no middle deck.

JT: No, they didn't have them –

JK: They had the summer...

JT: – in the early stages. They were just put in after the sails left, they had converted to power. Well, then they used to make those middle decks and use them and put oysters up against the – if you had the other rig, they couldn't put no oysters on the deck like that. You used to put them right up against the cabin and then shovel them right off.

JK: Now, you say which one is the older type, did you say?

JT: The ones that didn't have the middle deck, that was the older type boat. But they all reconverted them all over.

JK: They reconverted them to middle decks?

JT: Yes.

JK: When this fellow oystered, could I show you a picture of his boat? Would you like to see a picture of the old one?

JT: Yes.

JK: Let me pause.

JT: She was an old-type boat like the old sloops?

JK: Yes.

JT: That's an old-type boat, power spray?

JK: Yes.

JT: She looks like she's got a summer cabin on.

JK: Yes. She does not have any middle deck.

JT: No, I say that came later when they took away the mast and converted them to power.

JK: But I have seen pictures of...

JT: Where did you get this picture from?

JK: That was from Mrs. Lucille Wicks.

JT: Oh, because I see there's a schooner in the background.

JK: That was taken in 1909.

JT: That was just an old...

JK: Well, now if...

JT: Like I said, they had these summer cabins on. Then they had this open in the back where the other cabin would be in the winter.

JK: Now, where would the oysters go in the wintertime now?

JT: Well, they wouldn't have any oysters.

JK: That is not a workboat?

JT: Yes, it's a workboat. But they take this cabin off and put this stationary one in the back. I don't know whether they put the oysters down in here where this summer cabin is, but they used to keep them in nice condition like walls and painted up nice. Now, whether they put the oysters down in there or not, I don't know. It would be before my time.

JK: At least they put hatches over it.

JT: Yes, they'd have hatches over them.

JK: Maybe they would put it on top of the hatches.

JT: I could see that at – I don't seem to remember that boat, but I've heard of the name. It used to be the head of the house. When I used to go down oyster off Patchogue, there used to be a boat with that name down there. Maybe that's the same one. They used to have these guiding lights, these boards. They used to have pinnacles like the oil lamps with oil and kerosene. Then they used to have these strap with a tin on and they used to hang these lights on there, take them down every time they got through with a boat and have them hanging on there, red or green, see on the other side.

JK: So, you say that was an old style?

JT: Yes, that's an old style. That's one of the old-style sloops. You can look at the costumes of the fellows on there.

JK: They were taking out parties from the Mascot Dock?

JT: Yes, well that's what I said. They used to have these summer cabins on and in between when things were slow, they'd take a party out.

JK: Those stanchions were wood. They were not metal.

JT: Yes. So, you can see in here how that fitted on the Coleman here. They used to undo the screws or bolts, whatever they had them fastened with, and lift them right off and set them on the shore. Then they'd put the winter cabin on. Sometimes I've seen them they would have both cabins on, leave them both on, and use them.

JK: Really?

JT: Yes. They would in the summer.

JK: The winter. Did the winter cabin look more or less like yours here?

JT: Yes, would be on the same type. Then they'd have the stove in there in the winter and keep warm.

JK: Now, here is a picture of that man's, Orien Hulse's other boat. Now, that is a catboat. You could see his summer cabin there. He has got the canvas on there.

JT: Mostly all the boats, in the early stages they were all catboats and they converted them to sloops. This boat I had was a catboat and he was converted. Because I used to crawl up in the bow and then I could see the hole into the keel where they had the hole where the mast came down. It was way in the bow. I still can't understand how they could have those boats with no stays.

JK: I know, there are no stays on there.

JT: All these boats here have got rigging. Stay this way and then stay under the horn. I always said to my father, "How is that that when they're converted to sloops, they have to have rigging?" I said, "With a catboat," I said, "They just stick the mast through the deck and it fits in the keel and that's that." I still can't understand that. [laughter]

JK: What did he say?

JT: He didn't seem to say much. He said, "Well, that's the way things are." He said, "With a catboat." That's all he said. Because I know our boat was a catboat and mostly all catboats, we had a great, big sloop with the name of *Nellie Hayes* before we had the other one. She was converted too from a catboat.

JK: She had a middle deck?

JT: No, she didn't have no middle deck at that time.

JK: Oh, she was like this one then.

JT: Yes.

JK: Again, what did your father do with his oysters on that boat?

JT: Well, he used to catch them. He used to go out and find little bunches of oysters out here where the Blue Points is. They bought that all now. They own that all. The town owned it years back. He used to find these little bunches of oysters. Then he'd dropped a buoy where he used to let the boat drift slowly and have his tong. When he found them, he'd throw this buoy overboard. Then he'd catch a few bushels. I don't know how many bushels he'd catch a day, but he used to sell them down here to the shippers. They'd buy them.

JK: What did he do with the oysters on the boat? Where did he put them if it was all open up in the front?

JT: Well, I guess he had his winter cabin on at that time because you can't catch oysters really in the summer.

JK: Did he have the hatches over that forward hole?

JT: The covers, yes. Hatches.

JK: Covers, yes. That is covers.

JT: We call them hatches. They close up tight and it keeps the rain out and the cold and wind.

JK: So, the hatches would go right up to the cabin front and no middle deck.

JT: Yes, it would be around Coleman here. See where the mast be, just after the mast. That would be round. Then the hatches would be round on the front and then they'd go to the back end. That would be square.

JK: It would hit right against the cabin.

JT: Yes. It'd be closed up pretty tight. That's an old picture because he even got – rowboat behind. See? [laughter] That's a nice picture. I get one of those Yankee fishermen. You know those fish boats?

JK: Yes.

JT: Or boats that comes out?

JK: Yes.

JT: There's a firm in there that makes mast hoops. I was surprised, I said, "They may call and get all that kind of stuff, the sailboats."

JK: Did you ever catch crabs?

JT: Only for fun. I know I never did. They used to have dredges in the wintertime with long teeth. I used to dig them out of the mud with these dredges.

JK: Oh, really?

JT: Yes, and ship them in the market. Used to get pretty good price for them. But I never did it. I only caught crabs just for fun when I wanted to eat.

JK: With the net?

JT: Yes. There was a creek up around East Islip there and it was shallow. It was a typical, wonderful breeding ground for crabs. They used to thrive in there by the hundreds. You could go in there and catch any amount. Beautiful, beautiful, blue crabs. But we used to just catch them for fun and eat what we wanted. But in the wintertime when things got slack, well then they used to take these crab dredges and go dredging.

JK: Someone told me that they used to have a little, like a sharpie, but with a sail on it. They would go out and get crabs by means of a trap or something like I guess an eel trap. Did you ever hear of that?

JT: No, I never did. The ones I heard of was in the winter with these crab dredges. That's the only way you could catch them, because they'd be bedded down in the mud. When you catch them in the winter, these crabs are just dormant. They'd lie there and they'd stay that way all day long. But if you took them and put them in the cabin where you have a fire, they'd all come to life just like in the summer. [laughter]

JK: Weird. Were the dredges like the oyster dredges, but with bigger teeth?

JT: No. They were smaller there and they were light so you could throw them and handle them. Long teeth, about that long.

JK: Well, about 8 inches.

JT: Then just a little webbing of the net just enough to hold about a dozen or fifteen crabs. They pulled them up quite often to empty them out.

JK: Well, they would have to be pretty heavy in order to sink that?

JT: Oh, yes. It's all made of half-inch iron.

JK: How wide was the dredge about?

JT: I imagine 2-foot wide.

JK: Was this big?

JT: Did pretty good at it in the winter. The crabs were worth more money then. Same way with scallops. We have a scallop dredge there, light pad and (threw them with hands?).

JK: What is the difference between a scallop dredge and an oyster dredge?

JT: Well, a scallop dredge is lighter and they have a little bag on it like an oyster dredge, scraper blade.

JK: Oh, no teeth.

JT: They're good and lighter than an oyster dredge because the scallops are light and they catch easy. Then the crab dredge, they have teeth on them because you have to have these teeth go through the mud to hook these crabs out because they're bedded, crabs. We were talking with a fellow I used to go scalloping. He says, "I can't understand when you go scalloping that you don't catch every scallop you see or that's down there." But he says, "We were watching it as the crabs went along, water must have been clear." He says, "Wherever the scarlet laid, there was a little indentation underneath it like a little hollow. He'd be in that hollow. When the dredge came along, the dredge would go right over it. If you just got deep enough in the sand that the dredge would go over it." I said, "Well, that's the first time I've ever heard of that." This is thrilling, I don't know. I used to raise oysters and plant shells and plant young small oysters. It's a thrilling thing to watch them grow and everything, thrilling thing. But I don't know about the bay. It's getting pretty bad with pollution according to the paper down here.

JK: What is your opinion? Does it seem polluted?

JT: It might just. They had to close a lot of the areas off.

JK: What is that, from drain offs or what?

JT: It's all different pollution from all the people. It's more and more all coming all the time, more boats. They want to close a lot of it out, but they've been fighting it so bad that I don't know how they're going to do it.

JK: By the way, what was another way of catching eels? By spear eeling?

JT: Yes, in the wintertime.

JK: That would only be wintertime.

JT: Then you'd go on the ice and cut holes in the ice, wherever the muddy bottom is. You couldn't catch them on sandy bottom because they're down on the mud. They'd go in the mud and they just have their mouth even with the mud so they can breathe to the bottom. Then you take these hand eel spears, I call them. They have four long hooks on them about that wide. You put that on eel –

JK: 8 inches, yes.

JT: – from 12- to 14-feet long. Then you jab these down. You can feel every time when you got an eel on it. I did a lot of that in the winter.

JK: They are hibernating too.

JT: Yes.

JK: When they come up, are they half dead?

JT: Oh, it's pretty lively.

JK: Oh, yes? [laughter]

JT: Oh, yes, sure. Just as soon as the weather gets to a certain temperature, well then they come out of the mud. You can't catch them anymore with the spear. Then you wait a few weeks and then you catch them with an eel pot.

JK: What months would they be under the mud?

JT: Well, latter part of April that's when you start to get ready to catch them with a pot. Then in November, that's when you – from that until about 1st of March. So, you start recording what weather you have. If the weather gets warm, well they come out of the mud earlier.

JK: How did you send these to market?

JT: Well, we used to send them in little barrels at that time, half a barrel. Sometimes we used to get a barrel and sort it in half, we didn't have a full barrel. Put a chunk of ice in it and empty the eels in it and ship them off to market. You never got too much for eels at that time.

JK: Did your father ever eel?

JT: Yes, he used to do a lot of that.

JK: Same way?

JT: He used to smoke eels and they used to have my daughters go around and deliver them all around the town. Smoked eel, 10 cents a pound, that's all he got for them at that time. Isn't that awful?

JK: Would he cut them up into little chunks and smoke it or the whole eel?

JT: No, he'd just smoke the whole eel. They'd go on a rod and he'd have a smoke box and hickory wood or cherry wood, oakwood too they used. Then they'd take three hours about to cook on an eel. My brother used to do it. He used to cook them lovely. Boy, I loved them,

especially when they were fresh cooked and they'd be warm. They really were delicious.

JK: They must have caught bluefish, for example, by line.

JT: Oh, yes. They used to go out in the ocean and catch those, big ones too.

JK: Now, was this pleasure fishing or commercial?

JT: I remember only a couple of years where the fish were down in the channel. There was a lot of them that summer. They were catching them with chum and hook and line, any amount you could have got. That was the only really two years that I noticed that you could catch bluefish. As a rule, you're going to have to go out in the ocean and troll them there and you catch the great, big ones.

JK: What other kind of fish do they have here in the bay that you caught?

JT: Well, we caught flounders.

JK: How did you catch stuff?

JT: Used to catch them with fykes. Used to have a half-inch iron and have them knitted with net with a funnel and have a liter on it. They'd hit this liter and go on into the net. That's how you'd catch them mostly in the winter. Then the fluke, they used to let the fellows have their draggers. They did away with it. They wouldn't let them do it anymore. But they used to drag the fluke in the bag. They used to do pretty good in bluefish and weakfish and blackfish. Blackfish never went too much, but we used to catch a lot of them with traps. We used to have a wire box about that long, about 2.5-feet high. We used to catch some beautiful blackfish. I caught them as high as 9 pounds.

JK: Are you getting menhaden here too?

JT: Yes, not too many. They tend to get those outside mostly.

JK: Out in the ocean?

JT: Yes. Years ago, when I was a kid, when I was quite small, I used to have a lot of bunkers come in the bay. But I suppose there's so many boats now and people that they don't come in much anymore.

JK: Let us see.

JT: Well, it was nice of you showing me that.

JK: Did you like that picture?

JT: I wouldn't mind having one like it, if you could get one sometimes.

JK: No, you can take that if you wish. I will put down who it came from though.

JK: Did you say that the oldest boats on the bay were catboats? Or do you think the first boats were worked out here were catboats or sloops or what?

JT: Yes, I remember my father had a catboat, I don't think I was born yet. He used to tell me how he used to take the *Madonna* that's in Patchogue now, she's 84, and she used to go out in the bay with him. She was a catboat. Her name was the *Effie Mae*. That's her name now. That's her first name.

JK: *Effie Mae*?

JT: *Effie Mae*, yes. She was a catboat and she used to go out in the bay with him and help him.

JK: What did he do with the boat?

JT: Well, he caught clams and different things, followed the bay with it.

JK: Oh, he followed the bay?

JT: Yes.

JK: Oh, and she is still living?

JT: Yes. I think she's 84 now.

JK: Oh, that was built in Patchogue?

JT: I think so, yes.

JK: The *Effie Mae*, I'll look that up. I think I remember reading a scene in the name of that.

JT: A few years ago. I think it was before I was born. So, I'll be 79 on Friday, so you can see how old it is. It's 100 years old.

JK: She was a catboat, you said?

JT: Yes.

JK: Will it open like...

JT: Yes, just like this one in the picture here.

JK: You mean just like one?

JT: Yes. Summer cabin, I guess she had on. I don't think he used her in the winter.

JK: Now, the bigger boats though, those that that would go to New York with the oysters and stuff, they had a middle deck though, did they not? Even the old ones.

JT: I don't think they did.

JK: Really?

JT: No, I don't think so. Maybe they did. I guess they did have a middle deck because I used to help unload a lot of oysters that used to come in on these big freighters. Used to have to shovel them all. They had all middle decks, big, wide ones too.

JK: Did they carry much load down below?

JT: No, they didn't put too many in the hole because we used to have to shovel them all out. That was quite high. It was 6-feet deep, I guess, the holes.

JK: So, mostly it was on deck?

JT: You'd have to look up. They'd be mostly all on deck.

JK: Even taking it to New York?

JT: Yes.

JK: How many bushels could you carry on a deck a big freighter?

JT: If they'd go to New York, they'd have them in the hole of the boat, the clams and oysters. Then when they came back, they'd have barrels of flour or bags of feed or they'd have a whole load of coal they'd bring out. They'd distribute that all around to whoever wanted coal.

JK: Oh, boy, they would have to clean out that bottom though after.

JT: Boy, they were black like coal themselves. They had to clean it all up after they got through, you perspire.

JK: But I mean they had to clean out the boat.

JT: Yes, to clean the boat and everything.

JK: They had a sealing in the inside that did not –

JT: Yes. Of course, it wasn't so strict. Now, it was more board of health. You have to keep everything spotless and clean. But they were good doing things. He used to sit and tell me stories about how we went to New York and how bad the inlet was going out of Fire Island. He

said, "You know we never had no power and we had to just go out on tides. The tide went out, well, we could go. But if it was coming in, he said, the sailboat, you couldn't bucket." I said, "Now they got high power in, they go right out whether tide's coming in or not."

JK: Tell me what the activities of, say, that boat? What would it be beginning in, well, the spring of the year? What would that freighter do?

JT: Well, they used to mostly freight oysters in at that time. During the summer months...

JK: Where were they freighting oysters? From Connecticut?

JT: Yes. They'd bring them from Connecticut, Greenport, and I guess Rhode Island too, I guess some.

JK: When it went to Connecticut, did it go through the East River?

JT: Yes, East River, yes.

JK: If it came from Greenport, it would come around naturally around Montauk.

JT: Yes. But I know most of the boats came from the East Riverway. Because in the latter years they used to call up when they had a load coming in the night before telling us, "Well, we'll be here at such and such a time." Well, they would. We used to work on the bay on the boats there. We used to watch near the inlet and you could see their sails coming out of the mast. They had quite a tall mast and you could see them coming along and we'd wait for them.

JK: How far away was the inlet from here?

JT: 10 miles, I guess, or more.

JK: You would be able to see them coming through?

JT: Yes. The inlets were quite a ways west. But after they got inside the bay, you could see them coming along the beach inside. It was [inaudible].

JK: Now, the [inaudible] with freight oysters in the springtime.

JT: Yes.

JK: Now, as the summer came along, what would it be doing?

JT: Well, they'd mostly lie out during the hot months, not unless they were converted to bunker fishing and then they'd do that.

JK: That would be done out in the ocean?

JT: Yes.

JK: Those were good ocean boats?

JT: Oh, yes.

JK: Like the *Still*?

JT: Yes.

JK: Then that would go sail out of Fire Island Inlet?

JT: No. I think they'd be birthed in Jersey or somewhere.

JK: Oh, they would go from here down there?

JT: Yes, they'd go down there and get rigged up. Rigged mostly here, but they'd go down there and then go out in the ocean. I guess the fish canneries were around Jersey somewhere. Then they'd go birth there and put out their fish there and then go out and get another load. They'd then get quick in the fall and come back here and either lie the boat up or do freighting or something.

JK: Why would it lie up? Would it not want to go to New York for oyster?

JT: There wasn't anything really much to do during the summer months. It's too hot for oysters. It's out season. They only do that mostly in the fall and the spring.

JK: But I mean in the fall then it would resume?

JT: Well, some would lie up until the next spring. They'd lie up.

JK: Really?

JT: Yes, some would lie up.

JK: But did they not carry oysters down to New York during the wintertime?

JT: No, they never did that. They shipped mostly on the railroad before the trucks got coming. When the big trucks came, like the trailers, well then they put them in there. Rich brothers from Patchogue used to take them all in to New York to Philadelphia. That's where I used to ship all my oysters.

JK: But in your father's day, he would not use the *Still* during the winter?

JT: No. We shipped them all on the railroad.

JK: I suppose before the railroad though, they did.

JT: Yes, they did.

JK: Going back to bunker fishing. You said they had to rig up for bunker fishing. What would they do to the boat to rig it up?

JT: They have to get their nets ready, at least purse nets. These big, round-bottom skiffs, they have a crew about from eight to ten men.

JK: They would be on the *Still*?

JT: No, they wouldn't be on the *Still*. They'd be on these big coastal schooners like the bishop from Patchogue. There used to be a fellow from here, from West Sayville, the name was (Will Degra?). He used to have the *Dickerson*. He used to have her rigged up for bunker fishing. He used to have about crew of eight to ten men. They'd go all out during the summer months for bunkers. Then he'd lie her up over the winter months, then the next spring again, and they'd go freight oysters.

JK: Now, did you say that the *Still* would bunker fish also?

JT: No, she didn't do that. She freighted oysters in the spring for Rudolph because he owned the boat. Well, her father used to run her. That was before this. He used to go to New York with a load of oysters and clams. They had a different setup there. They used to have, like I said, floats and they used to put all these clams in floats because you were allowed to do that then. But now you can't. It's more of hell.

JK: This is in New York?

JT: Yes.

JK: Oh, right at the docks there?

JT: Yes, right at the docks it's foot market. Used to take all these fish or oysters and clams in, and then you'd come back with a load of either coal or flour. Whatever was freight, you'd bring back.

JK: How did he separate the oysters and clams?

JT: Well, the biggest part, they counted them. There are so many in the count. They used to count them to a basket. I suppose they'd...

JK: That was a bushel basket?

JT: Yes. Then they'd shovel up oysters out with a shovel, the oysters. But the clams, they'd count most of them. It was mostly all chowder clams too. There were no (schmogs and muts?).

JK: Oh, they would shovel them up though.

JT: Yes.

JK: These wide shovels?

JT: Yes, scoop shovels.

JK: Scoop from in the hall?

JT: Yes.

JK: Would they separate them in any way down below in bins or anything? The oysters in the front?

JT: No. They just put them down there. Keep clams on one side or the oysters on the other. Keep them separated. If they'd go to New York and a firm there wanted so many bushels each, whatever, then they'd shovel them up or count them and give them to them, whatever they wanted. It's quite a way to go.

JK: I know, yes.

JT: Really before my time, he used to tell me the stories of what he did.

JK: Were those men in Fulton considered rough men?

JT: Yes.

JK: They were? I heard about that.

JT: He was telling me how they used to gyp you too, if they could. I said, "Yes, don't worry." A lot of that done to me when I first started to ship oysters and clams. They certainly gyped you.

JK: How would they gyp you down there with your father?

JT: Well, if you shipped a lot of stuff in, they tell you, "Well, it was dumped."

JK: It was dumped? What do you mean?

JT: They dumped it in the river. It was nothing but a lot of hearsay because I know used to be firm, by the (Lettingman, Western Toner?) and they used to have a firm in Greenport, a big setup in Greenport. They used to have a place in the Fulton Market. There used to be a fellow from West Sayville. He used to run their oyster steamer. He used to tell his brother and his brother told me because we were friendly. He said, "The oysters and things were dumped." He said,

"You know where they were dumped?" He said, "Not in Fulton Market in the river." But he said they were delivered back out here on Long Island and they were dumped on the oyster beds that they owned. He said, "That's where they put it over you."

JK: I do not get how they get it over. Did you not sell it to them and so what if you...

JT: Sold on commission at that time. They pay you so much commission.

JK: Yes, but once you...

JT: 12.5 percent, I think they charged.

JK: But if you delivered your load of oysters into the Fulton market and you got paid for it, so what do you care where it goes?

JT: Well, they really didn't pay you. They didn't. Sometimes they'd pay you and sometimes they'd not. I know these firms down here that had – he said, "You know I got \$50,000 tied up in Fulton Market." He said, "Of course, they'll pay me. But it's when will I get it? That's the questions." So, I had stuff that I shipped in and they gypped me completely out of it, just completely even my bills.

JK: They just did not pay.

JT: I lost them. Just didn't pay.

JK: I do not get this dumping bit. I do not see how that works.

JT: When things they don't think that it is what they like or something, they throw them in the river, empty it out. They call it dumping.

JK: Where? In the East River?

JT: Yes. I suppose that's where it would go. He said, "You know where they were dumped, don't you?" the captain of the steamer said. He said, "They were brought out here to Greenport and he said they was emptied out on the beds." He said, "That's where they were dumped." They call that dumped and then they don't pay you for it.

JK: Oh, I see what you mean. They say, "Oh, I do not like these oysters." So, they said, we're going to dump them.

JT: Yes, they would dump them.

JK: Oh, I see, they are just claiming.

JT: They wouldn't pay you for it and then you'd be the loser.

JK: So, they'd dump them over there.

JT: Sure, on their own beds and get away with that.

JK: Get away. So, they would have to transfer them to another boat to ship them out here?

JT: Yes. They'd have to bring them out with a truck or whatever the ways of bring them out. Oh, boy. Oh, it was some home bug. They'd certainly put it over us when we first started to ship oysters. Well, I did it from the time that things started, because lots of different ones told me how they gypped you. Even the fellow in Oakdale, he was 93, I think, and he used to be in the greenhouse business. He used to ship a lot of his flowers on commission at that time. He was telling me how they put it over him and gypped him. It's been terrible, flower market.

JK: Well, you have mentioned New Jersey, the boats going down there. Do you remember any oystering or so off Perth Amboy or Keyport, Staten Island? Did you ever hear of any?

JT: No, I never heard anything of that. I've heard a lot and read about Chesapeake Bay but...

JK: Not of Perth Amboy?

JT: No.

JK: Staten Island?

JT: They had a lot of oyster business there in Jersey because I read different things.

JK: Whereabouts in New Jersey?

JT: Well, Port Norris. I used to have a man come out here from Port Norris. He used to sell me oyster seed and all those different names

JK: Did he come up with a steamer?

JT: No, he used to bring them with a truck that time. He was a nice man. But they wouldn't grow here. We couldn't do anything with them. It was more of the southern, the more warmer climate down there. The water was warmer.

JK: They just could not get used to this water.

JT: They just wouldn't grow. Never had any success with them at all.

JK: Even with the Chesapeake or Delaware?

JT: I never tried any oysters below Jersey. I wouldn't buy any because I had such bad luck with them.

JK: Is that generally what they believe here?

JT: Yes. That's why we always used to buy oysters from Connecticut. It was cooler water. They were more acclimated when they brought them here. They used to do wonders here, the Connecticut oysters.

JK: Did you ever hear of anybody oystering in Jamaica Bay or the Rockaways?

JT: Yes. All these fellows were around here. These old hands they used to open that up some way or other. They used to go down there and work and have these old sloops and work right and throw the oysters right in the hole. Then they used to work all week and then come home and plant them on the oyster beds or sell them here to the shippers.

JK: Well, then that must have been public beds then.

JT: Yes.

JK: Do they tong those oysters or do they catch them?

JT: They used to tong them, I guess. That's all I only know.

JK: The same kind of boats, the old-fashioned sloops?

JT: Yes.

JK: Now, where would that be? Right in...

JT: They used to be right in the river there. My father used to tell me they used to have places on the river there where they used to catch them.

JK: The East River?

JT: East River, I think.

JK: You are kidding.

JT: They had beds there.

JK: Well, what about Jamaica Bay, where the airport is now? They catch any?

JT: Well, I guess they worked there too with oysters and stings. Of course, that's all polluted down there.

JK: You know where Florence near the Rockaways?

JT: No, I don't think I do.

JK: Inwood?

JT: No. Maybe my father would.

JK: Well, those are little towns over there.

JT: He used to tell me how they used to have their beds there in the river. They used to work there and catch the oysters and bring them here. They'd work all week.

JK: He would do this too?

JT: Yes, he did it too. All the different baymen used to go there and catch them. I don't know whether you had to buy them or what, but you just caught them. They just opened it up and you could catch them. They used to bring them here and plant them here on the beds here.

JK: Do you know what boats...

JT: East Rivers, they used to call them.

JK: East Rivers?

JT: Yes.

JK: [laughter]

JT: [laughter] I wouldn't know the names of the boats that went because that's quite a while ago.

JK: It was not certainly in the *Still*.

JT: Oh, no. These were regular, small bay boats like the one I was showing you here.

JK: Like the *Hulse*?

JT: Yes, boats like that type.

JK: With that open hole open thing.

JT: Yes. I don't know whether they had cabin. I guess they must have had stationary cabins on then because they used to mostly stay right aboard the boat and sleep there. When the daylight started again, they'd go to work.

JK: Well, why would they want a summer cabin and a winter cabin if, well, an oystermen would not work in the summertime?

JT: No, they wouldn't. But my father used to tell me, he said he used to have sometimes a

summer cabin on. I think it was too warm at that time. They could be very warm those after cabins. They used to take these summer cabins and then they had canvas around the sides, and they used to roll this canvas up so the air would blow all through. Well, you see, that was cool.

JK: Now, I know that a lot of people use those summer cabins for taking passengers out to Fire Island.

JT: Yes, and he did that.

JK: That was one reason too. Now, did your father ever do that?

JT: No, I don't remember him ever saying that he did it.

JK: Now, did they do that around here or more in Patchogue?

JT: Well, they did it mostly in Patchogue more, I think.

JK: There were not the big hotels here, were there?

JT: No. There were bigger hotels there. They used to have a lot of summer people come out back when it was more of a fancy...

JK: Would you say that then the summer cabins were more popular in Patchogue than here?

JT: Yes, I should think so. Although they used them here.

JK: They did.

JT: Well, I can just about remember when I first started to go on the bay, they had summer cabins on.

JK: But that is interesting what you said. I am just going to repeat. "I did not realize that the older boats were open practically from the stern up forward and no middle deck."

JT: Yes, I can just realize as long ago as I can remember about the summer cabins.

JK: When did they get rid of these summer cabins?

JT: Oh, that's quite a while back.

JK: When you were starting to get older.

JT: I guess even before I started going to Baywood.

JK: Oh, yes.

JT: Yes. That was one of the last of them.

JK: Yes, probably before World War I.

JT: Yes.

JK: The railroad affected the baymen here, did it not?

JT: It was wonderful for the railroad. They lost all their business. Everything going on the railroad, these shippers down here, they shipped hundreds and hundreds of barrels a week over to Europe and all over. Now, all went on the railroad, they used to take these up with the teams and never had any cement roads. It was all oyster shell roads. The ruts used to be 8 inches deep. I could see these wagons go up with these loaded barrels. It used to be so cold that the teams just couldn't sit on the wagon because they'd freeze to death. They had to walk with the horses and they'd take from ten to fifteen of double-head barrels up to these freight cars. When they got a freight car full, well, they'd send it all. They used to send it to Europe and all over.

JK: Before that though...

JT: Then the trucks started to come, like the big trailers. Well, then they sent it with those and the railroad lost out, went out of business, really.

JK: Well, your father was working when the railroad was here because the railroad came in in the [19]70s.

JT: I remember he said to me to all load oysters. He used to put them right in the basement and then he used to float them for a week or so and you couldn't store them. Then they used to fork them up, wheel them in the shop, empty them in barrels. I was working on a steamer at that time, and the fellow was worried sick.

JK: What steamer was that?

JT: That was the *Theodore Roosevelt*. That was Rudolph's steamer. So, he said, "I'm worried sick." He said, "I got everything full." He said, "I don't get any orders." He said, "The only thing I can see," he said, "I can't keep these oysters in here much longer. You better take them out and plant them out on the bed." So, I forked for two days and then took all those oysters out of those bins and put them in on the steamer. When we went out, I guess we must have had about six, seven hundred bushels. We planted all handpicked, all cold oysters ready to go in barrels and take them and throw them all on the bed. He came in that night, and said, "Guess what?" He talked that way. He said, "I just got an order for a carload." He said, "I needed every one of those oysters." We had to work nights. The whole crew had to work nights and days to get those oysters back to fill that carload all right. [laughter] "That's the way it goes," he said, "When you got a business like this, you got a headache." I said, "I guess you have." That's the way it would go. After they were all handled up nice, all single, and lovely, then they had to take them out. You had to do that quite a few times.

JK: Before I go, one other thing. Now, speaking in terms of when you were a little boy or your father, the ordinary bayman, the man who just worked on –

JT: The menhaden.

JK: Not like your father who freighted. But the ordinary bayman throughout the years starting in the springtime, what would he do? Sorry, wintertime.

JT: Well, during the winter months, they'd all work in these oyster shops for a steady job. I used to remember my father, they all used to use all these boats during the summer months. When it got towards fall, well, they'd pull all these boats out on the shore. The ones that were first would-be way in land in the open field or so. But the ones that was slow, why the ones that was last to be pulled out, that their boats would be just clear of the water. They said, if you ever had a lot of running ice, why they'd smash the boat all to pieces. But he used to tell me, he said, "Either pull the boats out on the shore." They used to have pigs and chickens. They used to buy a sack full of potatoes and use their all jelly and make preserves, peaches and pears or whatever. Turnips, used to put them in boxes of sand in the cellar. Carrots, cabbage, they used to have that all. Then if they didn't work in the wintertime, then they'd use all that food, what they had stored. But the biggest part of the men would work in the oyster shops if the oysters were good. Some of the years they'd be poor and we wouldn't be able to sell them. But he said they used to work, but they never got any money. If they didn't have the food stored, why they wouldn't have existed.

JK: Most of the shops they would cull, they would not open the oysters.

JT: Well, they'd have some openers there, but they mostly handled shell stock.

JK: The openers, how did they open? Did they crack it open or side knife?

JT: Well, very few crackers, but they'd stab with an oyster knife. They call that stabbing. I know the one fellow when I was learning the trade, he was down there. He still works down the Blue Point. He must be in his late eighties. He used to crack them with this little hammer. Crack the end of the bill off. Then stick the knife in quick and cut the hard.

JK: He had a little anvil that he put...

JT: Yes, he had a little block with a sharp-pointed iron on. He'd lay that bill of that oyster, point that iron, hit his hammer on it and break the bill off. Then he could stick the knife in quick.

JK: But that that was an unusual method here.

JT: Yes. They never bothered much with that here. They used to stab them.

JK: Now, is the stabbing knife the ordinary oyster knife you might get in the store?

JT: Yes.

JK: If this is the oyster like this, did it go in the side or did it go in the...

JT: On the side. There were some crackerjacks, some of those fellows. Boy, could they open. Faster than you can count, they could open an oyster.

JK: Would you call that side diking?

JT: Yes.

JK: But you call it stabbing.

JT: They called it stabbing but I call it side opening for me because I've opened many an oyster in the day and you open them on the side.

JK: So, that was the method that they used mostly?

JT: Yes.

JK: They would stand at a bench and do this?

JT: Yes. They'd have a gallon pot and they'd have all little holes in it so the liquor would run out. It would be just solid meat when they had a gallon and then they'd mark it down on a card.

JK: Did you get a little chip to say how many gallons?

JT: Well, I never did open, but the ones that did it they'd have a man there. Just soon as they'd empty a gallon or so out, he'd wash them all up perfect and put them in these long bins with water. Then when they got so many gallons, well, they'd put them in these containers that held from 5 to 10 gallon of solid oyster meat. Then they'd put cracked ice all around the container. They'd have a wooden container where the ice was in and set the open oysters in the tin inside the ice. Then they'd have wooden covers on the top. Then that's where they shipped them in wherever they wanted to go.

JK: On the benches that they had to open the oysters...

JT: Well, they used to be very particular. They used to wash that all off clean with a hose and wash it and keep it clean.

JK: Did they have a hole? Where did they put the shells? They just threw them in a barrel?

JT: They used to empty them out of barrels into a wheelbarrow. Then they used to have heaps of shells higher than this house on a plank. They'd wheel up with this wheelbarrow and they emptied these out. When they got a pile, I'll say three, four thousand, five thousand bushels, well, they'd take them all out in the spring on the steamer and plant them on their beds. Then they scour them with a dredge and they'd expect to get an oyster set on these shells. Some years

they'd have a bumper crop and other years they'd go ten, fifteen years, they wouldn't have a damn thing.

JK: You mentioned how they put the shucked oysters in cans surrounded by ice. As a little boy, did they do that the same way when you were a boy?

JT: They did it as long as I can remember. I don't know how they do it now.

JK: How about when your father was little?

JT: They did that same when he was there. They used to have different types of containers.

JK: What are they?

JT: Sometimes they had an oval type with a tin cover, the same as the metal of the container. They used to put them in ice around too. It was all different types. Then they got tin cans with a cover on that hold from a gallon up to five. There are all different types of containers.

JK: Did you ever hear of an oyster tub?

JT: Yes, I heard of oyster tubs.

JK: What is an oyster tub?

JT: I wouldn't know. Like I said, there was all different containers.

JK: Did you ever hear of them putting oysters in, we will say a tub maybe about like this. Well, they put a chunk of ice in the middle and the shucked oysters right on top of the ice.

JT: No, never did that. If anything, that would be unsanitary. It was all inside containers, like I said. They'd have this big, wooden tub and all cracked ice around it. They'd set this container of the open meats right inside this ice. It would be wonderful. We sold a lot of open oysters.

JK: How many openers would there be in a regular shop?

JT: Oh, it varies all according to how much business they had. I've seen as high as ten, fifteen openers and more.

JK: Now, in your father's day, they opened also, did they not?

JT: They opened every day.

JK: When your father was...

JT: Yes, every day they'd be opening. Steady job during the winter months.

JK: When you were talking about the cycle, in the winter, the boats would be up. The men would be working in the oyster shops or else they would be working around the house. Now, when springtime came along, what did they do?

JT: They would put the boats back in the water again and go work back on the bay on the boat, whatever they were catching, whether it was oysters or clams.

JK: Now what about fishing? Fishing was not a big thing.

JT: No. They never went. But if they did, they'd really starved to death doing that.

JK: Any place in the bay or?

JT: No. There wasn't too much fishing here in this bay. Like I said to you with this, net with a weakfish, but they really starved to death. They never made any money.

JK: Now, when did you tong oysters in the ice? Was that just an occasional thing when you iced or tonged?

JT: Well, it was when they had orders. Like the shops when the bay was closed up solid, they'd have these orders to fill in. So, they'd get these teams and horses and men. They'd have these ice saws and plank and they used to go out there on the beds where the beds were located and saw, make a hole in the ice, and have plank across the open hole. Then they used to toll and empty them on the ice or pick them up and carry them in baskets. Sometimes they used to have a great, big sledge with a team of horses and fill up these barrels. Then they used to take them inside the shop where it was warm and sort them out. Father said one time they went out on the ice and he said it was one these threatening days. He said the wind busted out northwest, how can it come out sometimes? He said everything went to the beach. All the empty barrels that weren't fastened, he said they all went to the beach. He said right over the ice. He said they couldn't catch them, couldn't stop them.

JK: You mean it slid on the ice?

JT: The wind blew right up over the ice and lost all their paraphernalia. We used to do a lot of that my brother and I. We used to go out in the winter months and go out on the bed. We used to have a hired truck with a man or two men and go to East Islip. Our beds were right off the shore there. Saw a hole in the ice, toll, and put them in bags. It was a lot of work. Then at night we'd come home and put them in the shop and then either go down after supper and work and cover them up. Or it'd be stormy the next day, we'd work in the shop and handle them up.

JK: You'd put them in the barrel as well.

JT: Yes.

JK: But I guess the ice business it would not be a stuffy thing?

JT: No.

[end of transcript]