

Nancy Solomon: Going clamming with your father, what was it like?

Howard Pickerell: I was probably four or five years old. I was just a little bitty kid.

NS: Is being a bayman something that has been part of your family heritage or was he the first one?

HP: See, we live on an island here. Just about everybody back then had something to do with the water. Believe it or not, when I was a kid, there used to be scallop dredges in my backyard. I remember it was up the island there, down in Huntington. Apparently, there were scallops at one time. Imagine that.

NS: Wow.

HP: Yes.

NS: Do you know what your grandfather did?

HP: Carpenters. I come from a whole family of carpenters, house carpenters. It's probably where I picked up how to make boats and use tools, woodworking tools. It's pretty interesting.

NS: Do you remember what kind of boat your father had?

HP: I make Garveys nowadays, but it was just a basic rowboat, like a 14-foot rowboat. That's what we worked out of. It originated from a New Haven Sharpie they used to call them. The design came from New Haven, Connecticut, slab-sided, straight-sided. We didn't rake the clams, we used to tong them years back.

NS: Is that what your father did?

HP: Tonged them, yes. In the early days and then later days in the – oh, about the [19]50s, almost to the [19]60s, we started using rakes. Of course, they started getting thinned out a little bit. Rakes cover more area.

NS: Where did you go clamming with your father? What were some of the places where he went?

HP: Huntington Bay. Huntington Bay. I know that bay like the back of my hand. I can tell you what kind of bottom it is in wherever you go.

NS: Was he only harvesting clams?

HP: At that time, that's all there was, was hard clams. Because all the oysters were on the oyster lots which are owned by Long Island oyster farms.

NS: In Huntington?

HP: Yes. Yes.

NS: Did you know any people who worked for the oyster farms?

HP: I know them by face. I don't know their names. It was a big company. Oyster farms had a big company. They had their dredge boats. They owned a good part of the Huntington Bay, all the deep water in Huntington.

NS: Do you remember when they shut down their operations?

HP: Well, what happened is that it's the township of Huntington. They had a ninety-nine-year lease on it, and the town of Huntington did not renew their lease. I'm guessing, I'm not sure. But I'm thinking it's about 1978, right in there somewhere, when their lease ran out. The town of Huntington did not renew the ninety-nine-year lease. Then it just opened to all the baymen, but they picked up all the oysters before they lost the land. But there were a lot of nice clams. We did really good clamming there.

NS: What kinds of clams were you harvesting?

HP: Regular hard clams. It wasn't as hard. So, there was this regular what we call white clams, hard clams.

NS: But how many baymen were there when your father was working?

HP: In that town, there were three thousand baymen –

NS: Wow.

HP: – licenses given out, three thousand licenses given out. Imagine that.

NS: About what time period are we talking about?

HP: In the [19]60s, [19]70s, all through there, lots and lots of baymen. I mean, everybody, their part-time job was working on the water, clamming, and they all did good.

NS: Were the majority full-time or more part-time?

HP: I would say full-time baymen. Back then in that town, it was probably eight hundred to a thousand full-time baymen.

NS: Okay. So, it is about one-third –

HP: Yes.

NS: – full-time bayman –

HP: Yes.

NS: – or two-thirds.

HP: Yes. Yes.

NS: So, when did you start working on the bay?

HP: When I was about seven, [laughter] so do the math.

NS: Okay. So, what about for a living? Was that something that you wanted to do?

HP: Actually, all through school, that's how I paid my way, [laughter] clamming. I'd go down after school and scratch up some clams.

NS: Who were some of your customers?

HP: At that time, we sold all our clams to Kelsey's Seafood in Centerport. That was the big name back then. It's Kelsey's Seafood. They used to ship all over the country. They used to ship off to Campbell Soup, the chowders.

NS: So, you were getting chowder clams and little necks?

HP: Yes. But they used to sell their chowder clams to Campbell Soup.

NS: Do you remember how long it would take you to harvest a bushel of clams?

HP: Back then we could do a bushel an hour.

NS: Wow.

HP: A bushel was actually like six to seven hundred clams. So, nowadays...

NS: It is more than a count.

HP: Yes. Nowadays, they do it in counts, and it's only five hundred to a count. I mean, there were a lot of clams in a bushel. [laughter]

NS: It sounds like you were doing a pretty good living.

HP: Yes. Considering there was only \$8 a bushel, really, it's amazing. But for a little kid, I made good money.

NS: So, what happened when you finished high school?

HP: I went on to bay full-time and did very well.

NS: Did you stay in Huntington?

HP: Until 1979, yes. That's when I moved here.

NS: How old were you when you moved here? What brought you here? You are in Noyack now.

HP: It was getting so crowded up there. You can see I live in the woods here. [laughter] The population got so crowded. I was doing good clamming there. But I come down here, I did very well clamming here, too. I know the bay. I know the bottom. I can find clams, and I did.

NS: Did you know any of the Southampton baymen before you moved here?

HP: Not really. I kind of like minded my own business. Believe it or not, after a year or so, it got to the point where they were following me around.

[laughter]

NS: Tell me why. What happened when you came here?

HP: I can find clams on the sidewalk. I mean, most baymen can't find them because they don't know how to work the bottom edges and so forth. So, if you don't show them where they are, they're never going to find them. I have this kind of a trait, I guess. I can find clams. I can find them. If they're there, I'll get them. Then after a while, they say, "This guy comes into the clam shop with a whole bunch of clams." All of a sudden, they follow you down the road the next day.

[laughter]

NS: Who were you selling them to when you came out here?

HP: I was selling them to John Morris. You know John, right?

NS: In Southold Fishing Station?

HP: No, no. It's Mattituck Shellfish.

NS: Oh, okay.

HP: Yes. He's in East Quogue now. He did real good, caught a lot of clams.

NS: What was your harvesting like when he came here? Was it similar to what was going on in Huntington?

HP: Actually, it was a lot easier here because the water is so shallow. Working in here, you're working in anywhere from 6 to 12 feet of water. Down there, you're working from 6 to 40 feet of water. So, it's a lot easier working here than it is there. [laughter]

NS: So, how long would it take you to harvest a bushel when you first came?

HP: Oh, when I first came here, you could do a bushel in an hour. You find them and take them out.

NS: When did things start to change for you? Well, first, were you always a clammer?

HP: Yes.

NS: Okay. You never did scalloping?

HP: Scalloping was a seasonal thing.

NS: Yes. Yes, I know.

HP: So, naturally, it's scallop season, everybody went scalloping. That's what you do. Working the wharf, you go scalloping.

NS: How would you harvest the scallops?

HP: Well, we dredge them, scallop dredgers. I tow six dredgers in my skiff. We did good. You get a couple of months out of it. Depends on the year, some years you only get a month out of it. Some years you get three months out of it. It was good. We had plenty of scallops then.

NS: What were some of the other things that you harvested?

HP: I really never got into anything else. I was a clammer, and that's – I was a clammer. [laughter] A lot of the other baymen around, they worked on conchs and soft clams and horseshoe crabs, et cetera, et cetera. But mostly everything gets legislated out of business. [laughter] I'm sure Pete's going to bring that subject up.

NS: Yes.

HP: [laughter]

NS: When did you first start to notice some significant changes in the bay? Where were you harvesting? Just generally, what part of the bay were you working?

HP: I was mostly down either in Shinnecock Bay or in Little Peconic Bay here in the creeks. Actually, out in the big part of the bay here, there's really no clams to harvest.

NS: When you first came here, were there more clams then?

HP: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

NS: So, when you first came, where were you working?

HP: I was in the creeks, little estuaries and nooks and crannies, poking around. If you look at the way the water flows and the runoff and so forth, with a little imagination, you can find clams. But at the bay, the bay here never really had any clams in to speak of. Never did, the open bay. It's all in the brackish water, I'm going to say. Clams don't like high salinity. One of the problems that we have with hard clams is the fact that the bay is so clean, the salinity is very high. Hard clams don't like high salinity. They like the creeks which are all freshwater fed.

NS: Did you have some favorite creeks?

HP: I worked a lot in Noyack Creek, Mill Creek. We worked in North Sea Harbor there – for later years, we worked in North Sea Harbor. It's very good in there.

NS: How many full-time baymen were in this part of Noyack?

HP: Then?

NS: Yes, when you first came.

HP: Well, you have to say it's Southampton town. You shouldn't say Noyack.

NS: Okay.

HP: So, in Southampton town then there, I think they gave out at one time six hundred licenses. Now it's down to almost nothing.

NS: Yes. Were there many recreational part-time baymen in Southampton or was it more full-time?

HP: Well, that's the beauty of being around here is the fact that any homeowner can go down and is capable of getting himself a mess of clams. But they never did any harm or anything. The clams that we have here are really nice clams.

NS: Was there ever friction between the commercial and the part-time?

HP: Never. I've never had a problem whatsoever. Say, we just come down and get a couple dozen or something like that. That doesn't put a dent on anything.

NS: What kind of boat did you use?

HP: Well, naturally, I used a Pickerell boat. [laughter] My clamming, I used one of my Garveys, an 18-foot V-bottom Garvey. I made hundreds of those for the Great South Bay for

clamming.

NS: It worked out here as well?

HP: Very well, yes.

NS: Were there any changes that you had to make to the design?

HP: To the Garvey, no. To the Sharpie – we're getting on another subject now.

NS: I know, yes.

HP: But on the Sharpie, I had to change the boat design somewhat for scalloping. I had to put straighter sides on it and higher sides. Because the guys in East Hampton, which are the heavy hitters as far as scalloping goes, they like the higher sided boat. The Garvey is not really a high-sided boat.

NS: Do you know why they preferred the higher sides?

HP: Tradition. [laughter]

NS: Okay.

HP: Tradition, the higher the sides – in all reality, the low freeboard makes it easy for haul stuff over the side. What your grandfather and his grandfather had, that's what you got to have.

NS: What is the difference between a Sharpie and a Garvey for people who do not know?

HP: A Garvey has a blunt bow on it. A Sharpie is, as it says, it's a pointed boat. It's like an old-fashioned rowboat is what it is. Garvey's a low-sided boat, very easy to work out of it, lays real good in the water, carries a load real good, and they're very seaworthy. All my Garveys have V-bottoms to them. So, it makes them really good sea boats.

NS: What makes your boats unique?

HP: What I do is I took the traditional boats that they had, and I put some salt in it. [laughter]

NS: What do you mean?

HP: It has more shape to the boat. It's not a boxy type boat, square looking. My Garveys, they look very nautical. They have sheer to them, they rise in the bow, and you get deep bottoms to them, nice rake on the sheer. It's a very salty boat. I guess that's probably a better way to put it.

NS: How old were you when you built your first boat for sale?

HP: For sale? Necessity is the mother of invention. So, I guess I was probably twelve or

thirteen years old. It wasn't very much of a boat, but it worked. [laughter]

NS: Do you remember who bought it?

HP: Actually, I was fourteen, and I do know the person who bought it.

NS: Who was it? What were they using it for?

HP: The guy's name was Stubbings. He's from Huntington, an old bayman from Huntington, a real old guy. He probably used it for about twenty-five years. I started out by making one for myself and also I made one for my friends and so on and so on. Here we go. [laughter]

NS: Do you remember how much you were paid for your first boat?

HP: It's a 20-foot boat, \$230 or \$240.

NS: Wow. How much does a boat go for now?

HP: That same boat is a little over \$5,000.

NS: Now have you changed it from your first...

HP: No. I still make that same boat, the same boat.

NS: Was it fiberglass?

HP: No. It's plywood.

NS: You can tell me a little bit about the materials in your first boats, and what you...

HP: Well, then we used to use a lot of oak. Long Island used to have a lot of nice oak on it. We used to buy our oak from Harned sawmill in Commack. I don't know if you've ever heard of it or not.

NS: How do you spell the name of this sawmill?

HP: H-A-R-N-E-D. They're still in business today. But now they have to ship all the wood in from out of state.

NS: Yes, and out of the country, I am guessing.

HP: No. The oak, there's still a lot in Rhode Island. There's still a lot of oak, a lot of big oak, long. There's still oak around. Not a lot out here anymore. It's all scrubby, snarly.

NS: When you were first building boats, was it Long Island wood that you would use?

HP: Yes. It was all local Long Island white oak. Then in later years, it changed over to red oak. Red oak has a nasty habit of rotting much faster than the white oak. But this day and age now, I'm using all the pressure-treated green wood because it's conducive to the – now everything's all epoxied together. Back then you just used either tar-type bedding compound. Now everything's solely encapsulated with epoxy. It really makes them last a long time. The epoxy sticks to the green wood really well. It's a good bond.

NS: Is it hard to get the wood?

HP: The green wood, no. You can get that, no problem.

NS: Is that one of the reasons that you use that particular type of wood?

HP: Well, you can't get any more good oak anymore, so you don't have any choice. That green wood is nothing more than longleaf yellow pine, southern pine. That's all it is. But it's treated with basically, now it's not CCA anymore. Now it's called ACA or something. All this is a salt treatment. Salt retards rot. That's basically what it is, it's salt. With some green number twelve food coloring in it. [laughter]

NS: When did you have to abandon the traditional woods for the pressure-treated lumber? When did that happen?

HP: The last oak that I was getting from Hartwick, New York, upstate New York. I was getting tractor-trailer loads full. That was in about 1980, right in there is when I ran out of oak. Then I went to the old green wood. That's for old framework in the boat. I still use the same plywood on the hull. The hull's all plywood now. But now what I'm doing in the last ten years is the plywood is fiberglass inside now. It lasts forever now. Back then I used to just fiberglass the outside of the boat, now it's fiberglass inside now.

NS: When did you first start using fiberglass?

HP: A long time. Oh, boy, about 1960 in there. I used to fiberglass the seams first. Then it got to the point where it was fiberglass the entire outside of the boat. Then later on, we started putting a color right in the fiberglass and then we have what we have today. [laughter] The construction procedures changed quite a bit over the years.

NS: What are some of the major changes?

HP: Rather than using tar back then we went to Weldwood glue. You've heard of Weldwood I'm sure.

NS: Sure. Yes.

HP: Then now in this day and age, we're using epoxy glue. Epoxy glue almost sticks to anything. [laughter]

NS: When did you start using the Weldwood glue? When did you switch over to the epoxy?

HP: I switched over to the epoxy probably six, eight years ago.

NS: When did you first start using the Weldwood glue?

HP: About 1970, right in the early [19]70s. I got it from a natural casein down in New Jersey. Believe it or not, it's made out of horses' hooves.

NS: Gelatin, yes.

HP: Yes. That's what it's made out of.

NS: Wow.

HP: So, it's very biodegradable, I guess you'd say. [laughter]

It's natural, it's green.

NS: [laughter]

HP: But that's what it's made out of.

NS: You mentioned that you came from a family of cabinet makers –

HP: House builders.

NS: – of house builders and carpenters. Did anybody get involved with you in building the boats?

HP: No. Not at all, no.

NS: What about any of your children? Are any of your children...

HP: They've made a few of them. Actually, all my sons have made a couple of boats here and there. Never any numbers of them. Just to work their way through school or buy something. Make a boat.

NS: Now, who were your customers?

HP: 90 percent of my customers are baymen. I cater to the commercial people. Very important. In the [19]70s, couldn't make them fast enough. Of course, the clamming was big on the Great South Bay. Couldn't make them fast enough. Actually, the first year I came down here, I was nine boats behind.

NS: [laughter]

HP: Most of them were the East Hampton guys for scalloping. Got to have a new boat for scallop season.

NS: Were there any boatbuilders around here?

HP: Oh, sure. There had to be.

NS: Did you make out who they were?

HP: There was a guy in Jamesport. He used to make skiffs. I don't know what his name is. There were a couple of guys in East Hampton that were making boats.

NS: Did you ever talk with them?

HP: No. I couldn't even tell you their names. [laughter] Because the baymen just came to me. They see one, then they see another one. I was actually making boats with the guys in East Hampton when I lived in Centerport.

NS: How did you make that connection? It was not like they were close.

HP: No. I don't know. They found out some ways. I guess, because actually, the scalloping is in state waters. So, some of the guys from up the island would come down here for scallop season. Scalloping was a big thing. So, they'd come down for scallop season. I guess they would see the boats and say, "Where'd you get that?"

NS: So, did you know baymen before you actually moved here?

HP: From out here? Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes.

NS: Who were some of the people that you met?

HP: The Lesters. How could you not know the Lesters?

NS: Okay. Well, there are a lot of different Lesters. Specifically, which...

HP: Richie Lester. What's the guy that got a whole thing?

NS: Stuart?

HP: Stuart Lester, yes, and Stuart Vorpahl. I guess you know him, right?

NS: Yes.

HP: Yes. He got a boat from me years ago. Billy Schultz, I don't know if you know him.

NS: Yes.

HP: Billy Schultz and Brad Loewen, I knew all those guys before I even came out here. So, I kind of blended in.

NS: Did you build boats for them?

HP: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Actually, for Brad, I probably made him three boats.

NS: What kinds of boats were they?

HP: If you're from East Hampton, you've got to have a Sharpie. [laughter] You've got to have a Sharpie. That's what they all were. The only guy that I converted over to a Garvey was Billy Schultz. [laughter] Because he used it for his fish traps. I put a well in the back. So, the motor was inside the boat. Did you see that?

NS: Yes.

HP: I put a well in the back so we can tilt the motor up, and it doesn't snag on the nets. So, then I made a couple more like that for his friends. I can't think of who they were. So, there was a few Garveys in East Hampton.

NS: Now, what is going on now with the boat building?

HP: Well, I cater to the commercial guys, and commercial fishing is over.

NS: So, how many boats are you building per year?

HP: Now, it's just like four boats, five boats, that's it. Nothing much. It's pretty much over. When I'm doing some of them, I'm taking my commercial hull and doing it real fancy and putting center consoles in it and stuff like that. So, pleasure people to get in them. So, they're really seaworthy, strong boats. Finish them up real fancy and so forth. But still the same old boat, same old design. Some people like, rather than the Clorox bottles, they like to have something a little traditional. You live in Long Island, that's what you got to have.

NS: When did you first start noticing the scallops declining?

HP: The year after 1985, when we first had the brown tide. The next year, it just dropped off, I'm going to guess, 75, 80 percent. It just fell right off. A couple of years after that, there was virtually none, and then we had one shot. We had a shot in, I guess, about 1990. Some ways or another, we had a shot. We had one good year. We had them in Sag Harbor. We had them in Shinnecock, and then it never happened again. Now why that happened, I don't know. But we had – it was about 1990, we did very good scalloping. This was almost ten years after the brown tide. Why? I don't know. I have no idea. Then it never happened again. That was in two places, too. That was in Sag Harbor – nothing in the bay though – Sag Harbor Cove and Shinnecock Bay. It's a big bay.

NS: What body of water is that? So, like in a map, what...

HP: Sag Harbor is where the bridge is.

NS: I know where Sag Harbor is. But when you were talking about the big bay, what body of water is that called?

HP: Little Peconic and Big Peconic Bay. Down here is Little Peconic Bay, and up west by the canal is Big Peconic Bay. They never come back there.

NS: Is that where you used to go?

HP: Oh, yes. We used to scallop right – oh, yes, yes. But it's never come back again there in the big bay. So, there it goes back to again is Sag Harbor Cove is all brackish water. Well, Shinnecock, the salinity is pretty high. So, why did it come over there? I don't know. I don't see that now.

NS: Had it always been high salinity in the bay or was it less so?

HP: No. It hasn't been. Actually, believe it or not, in the last ten years, the tide here is approximately 6 inches higher and 6 inches lower. Believe it or not. It's not global warming. But what they did is they opened up – they cut open – they dredged open Shinnecock Inlet deeper and wider. They cut open Moriches Inlet, deeper and wider. They have nasty habits of closing up. After they did that, the tide in this bay, from the canal naturally is higher and lower.

NS: Huh?

HP: I know. Ten years ago, we had 3 feet of tide. Now, we've got 4 feet of tide.

NS: Has the salinity changed with that? With the rising of the tide?

HP: Yes. Well, naturally, the salinity gets greater. We've got that much more – you know how much 6 inches of water is in the bay? You cover the whole bay with 6 inches of water? That's a lot of water. You know what I'm saying?

NS: Yes.

HP: So, the salinity naturally comes up.

NS: How does the salinity affect the shellfish?

HP: Shellfish, juvenile shellfish like brackish water. The juvenile ones, they like higher salinity when they get bigger. But it also affects the reproduction of them because they reproduce better in brackish water, in lower salinity.

NS: So, should not there be more shellfish as a result of that change?

HP: No. Because the salinity is too high for them to reproduce in the bay.

NS: Oh, it is too high.

HP: Yes. It is too high. They like to reproduce in the lower –

NS: That combination...

HP: – in brackish water, in lower salinity.

NS: Oh, okay. Okay.

HP: So, like I say, you can take an existing shellfish that's already this big, put it out in the bay, and it thrives. But it won't reproduce there. It's interesting the way that works. You should visit a hatchery someday, and they'll give you all the...

NS: Yes. I have seen the little tanks.

HP: So, seventeen parts per thousand. I think the ideal for the most part, this bay out here is seventeen parts per thousand. It goes down to like fourteen or something in the coves. It's pretty interesting the way that works.

NS: When was the last good clamming for you?

HP: Oh, my god. Long time ago, in twelve – when were we down in North Sea?

Diane Pickerell: A long time ago. [laughter]

HP: Thirteen years?

DP: Probably.

HP: Thirteen years ago, we did very good in North Sea Harbor.

NS: So, early [19]90s.

HP: Yes. Yes. It was a set I took to North Sea Harbor there. That's good clamming.

NS: So, what have you been doing for the last thirteen years?

HP: Well, after that, that's when I got involved with the oysters.

NS: Why do you not tell us about that, what that is?

HP: Well, what happened is Cornell got, I guess, a grant from the state. I'm guessing, I'm not sure where they got the grant to help the offset scallop, the baymen that got affected by the brown tide and the scallopers. What that was, they educated us on how to grow oysters in containment. I was the very first one to do it with Cornell.

NS: Were there other baymen involved?

HP: Oh, yes. I was kind of like the prototype, a scapegoat, whatever you want to call it. [laughter] Experimenter. I know Gregg over there, he's the initiator of the project.

NS: You're talking about Gregg Rivara?

HP: Yes, yes. Really good guy. He got us these plastic bags and gave us some oyster seed. We just experimented with it, and it worked.

NS: What exactly did you do? I mean, for those who do not know what the process is of raising oysters.

HP: They gave us, at the time, it was called ADPI bags, plastic mesh bags. They gave us, I guess, a couple thousand oyster seeds, 7, 12 millimeter right in there in size. We put them on long lines out in the bay.

NS: The bags you would put on the lines?

HP: Yes, on long lines.

NS: But how many bags did you have?

HP: Back then we had probably, when we started out, just maybe one hundred bags.

NS: What year are we talking about?

HP: 1990 about, and it worked. A tremendous amount of baymen got involved with it at that time.

NS: Well, let us back up a little bit. You put them on these lines.

HP: Yes.

NS: How close were the bags to each other? How long were the lines, I guess?

HP: About 10 feet.

NS: In between each bag?

HP: Yes.

NS: You had a hundred bags?

HP: Well, I had a number of lines.

NS: About how many lines did you have?

HP: Back then I had like four or five lines. They gave us spools of line, and we just put them out. You do it any way you want to.

NS: So, how long was each line more or less?

HP: About 600 feet because a spool of line was 1,200 feet average. You buy about a pound. So, it's about 600-foot each line.

NS: Were they anchored?

HP: Yes. I just put some cement blocks in each end and a buoy, and it worked good. Still doing it today, to this day.

NS: So, the bags are tied to these lines?

HP: Yes. They almost look like lobster pots on a trawl, but they're little thin plastic bags.

NS: How long would they sit for?

HP: That's the trick. You want to pick them up and clean them all the time. That's what makes them grow fast and grow good.

NS: So, how often did you have to do that?

HP: Depends on the time of year and how much grass is growing on them. In wintertime, you only have to touch them. In the summertime, you've got to pick them up every couple of weeks to a month and clean them because the grass grows on them. However, when the grass is growing on them, the oysters are growing at the same time. So, that's how you can tell if the oysters are growing, if there's grass growing on the bags. They all grow at the same time.
[laughter]

But you want to get the grass off the pegs, so they don't get fouled. You make a nice oyster when a lot of water flows over it.

NS: So, what was your expectation when you started this? What did you hope would happen?

HP: I hoped that I could possibly have some sort of an income. Because there's no more clams around. No more scallops around. Got to do something. So, I guess, they had a couple hundred baymen get involved with it, the first program that went through. 95 percent of them

disappeared after the first year. Because they thought you just put them out there and watch them grow. That doesn't work. You've got to put a lot of effort into it.

NS: How did you know to do that?

HP: I've been on the water all my life. [laughter] See what happens. A lot of guys jumped on it because they give you this and everything was free. You just stick them out there and watch the grass grow. It doesn't work that way. You got to maintain them. So, a lot of them just walked away from it. But there's a few of us that strived at it. Right now, I got nine hundred bags out there.

NS: Wow.

HP: [laughter]

NS: Now, where are your bags?

HP: I'm not telling you. [laughter]

NS: No. Just roughly, are we talking about Big Peconic?

HP: Little Peconic.

NS: Little Peconic, okay. Is this a year-round?

HP: I sell year-round. I have a steady market year-round. A lot of guys, they just got cold and left stuff out there. It got buried or died and stuff like that. You have to be at it all the time.

NS: How long does it take to go from a seed clam to something you could sell?

HP: Oyster.

NS: Oysters.

HP: [laughter]

NS: I am sorry.

HP: I can produce an oyster in eighteen months.

NS: Everything does grow to that size?

HP: In the wilds, it takes three years to produce a monster. Multiple size, I'm saying. With a lot of maintenance, you can do it in eighteen months. That's the trick. It's the maintenance on them.

NS: What is the best part of doing this for you?

HP: Being out in the water, I guess. That's it. I've got to make a living off the water.

NS: Who are your customers?

HP: I sell to mostly white-cloth restaurants, high-end restaurants. I sell them for a good price. I got a very high-quality product. So, it works out good.

NS: What is the part that you do not like of doing this or is there something that you miss from harvesting wild clams and scallops?

HP: So, the thing is when you're clamming, wild product clamming, you're just taking. When you're doing the oysters like I'm doing, I'm giving to the bay. I'm putting them in the bay. Shellfish are siphon feeders. Actually, they clean the water which is a good thing. So, that works out really good that way. So, you're putting them there. They're cleaning the water, and they're doing the bay more good than harm. Whereas when you're just claiming, you're just taking them. You're not putting any back. They're not coming back by themselves anymore. So, that's the way it is.

NS: Is there a feeling that you get from knowing that you are giving to the bay?

HP: Yes. It's good. It's a good thing. I'm cleaning the bay. [laughter]

NS: If you had to choose today between what you are doing now and what you used to do which...

HP: See, then you go out, you work clamming. You go out so many hours. The harder you work, the more you make, naturally, right? You come into the dock, and you get paid. Boom. Here, half the time I go out, I don't – I'm going out, I'm farming. So, if I could make money clamming, I'd be doing it. The only trouble with clamming is the fact that the price of clams now is the same as it was ten years ago. What's that? They're paying 15 cents and 16 cents for clams today. Ten years ago, they paid the same price. What did you pay for gasoline ten years ago? Something's not right there. You go up to King Kullen, they're selling clams, \$5 a dozen. I think the baymen are getting stuck, getting gypped. They don't come any easier. [laughter] You know what I'm saying? They're not making money. I guess, what the reason for that is because you can make a phone call. You can have clams delivered to your door from down in Virginia for 16 cents. So, what's the supermarket or the buyer going to do? Get as many as he wants. Make a phone call. The next day they're at your shop, your door for 16 cents. It's not the quality claim that we have here, but we don't have any claims here, any volume. But the poor baymen are getting really gypped, I really think so. We have a better quality, especially in our bay here that got that unique Peconic Bay taste to them, like the Peconic Bay scallop. You compare that to anywhere. It's a nice tasting animal, and our clams are the same way. It's the same water. But the poor baymen are not getting any money from it.

NS: What do you think the future holds for local baymen?

HP: The only way they are going to make it is through aquaculture, the only way. There is not even a question about it. That's it. There were a few guys making it a conch sporadically. Other than that, you don't do agriculture, it isn't going to happen.

NS: Is there something that you think local and other levels of government can do to help the baymen? I mean, if you could sit down and tell them, "We need X, Y, and Z," what would it be?

HP: I don't want to go that way. They need to find out what the story is with the water quality. That's basically what it is. They've been quote supposedly trying but with zero success.

NS: How many baymen are part of the aquaculture program today that were baymen before?

HP: You're talking about Southampton and East Hampton town?

NS: Yes, or also Southold and Greenpoint, the whole Peconic estuary.

HP: I'm going to say thirty. I'm going to say thirty. Full-timers, twelve, fifteen full-timers. That's about it. So, a lot of them started the program and just bailed out. But a lot of new ones come along as time went on.

NS: Are they part-time?

HP: Yes. Now you have a lot of – you've got some homeowners involved with it and stuff like that, which is fine. Fooled around. A couple of them have gone commercial with it. It's also an educational process, too. A lot of people live on the water houses, and they have to grow some oysters in the backyard. That's pretty neat.

NS: [laughter]

HP: It's education for them. They can learn more about the environment, how to keep the water nice and so forth.

NS: Do you see baymen being able to make a living in the future?

HP: No. It's not going to happen. It's a crime. Here, we live on an island surrounded by pristine water, and you can't make a living off of it. What's going on? It's a big thing.

NS: Do you think development might have something to do with the water quality?

HP: Not to the fullest extent. It does naturally, yes. However, the shellfish loves highly polluted water. Believe it or not, they love it. I mean, you can't eat them. [laughter]

But they love it. They thrive on that. You have an affluent cesspool running to the bay, I'm going to say. Clams just love it. [laughter] What do you put in your garden? You put fertilizer in your garden. What is it? It's fecal coliform. So, development does have an impact, yes. Development mainly meaning destroying the wetlands is very, very detrimental. You take and

put bulkheads and green grass right next to the salt water, that's a no-no. That destroys the environment and the water environment.

NS: Is that something that has been taking place here in the Peconic, in this area?

HP: Oh, yes, a lot. Our town is putting quite a bit of restriction on it. They cut that back a lot. They've got setbacks for fixed bulkheading and you can't cut down to Phragmites anymore. You can't fill in, make your own backyard beaches. The town is doing quite a bit. It's probably too late, but they're sure as heck trying. That is a major impact on shellfish and finfish. You know, developing waterfront, I should say.

NS: Have you ever had any of your bags stolen?

HP: I've got to say no. I've had very good luck with that.

NS: Is it something that people can easily see?

HP: I have most of my stuff set blind, meaning there's no buoys on them. But I don't have any problem with that really.

NS: Have you ever had any boats damage your gear?

HP: Oh, yes. A lot of times I'll have the buoys, you know, people drive down a bay in the middle of the night, they'll run over, they'll chop a buoy off or something like that. That's expected. That's not a problem. I call it set-blind, but I have a little cork on each end. People can't see it. They go to the waterlogged. So, I use a very light little string on it. I don't use a heavy line, so it doesn't damage their boat or propeller. Each end I have a little buoy, so if that one's missing, I know it's going to the other end. I got that pretty well figured out.

NS: I am guessing from what you mentioned before that this takes place mostly in shallow water?

HP: Yes.

NS: Where there is less boat traffic?

HP: Yes. I don't set into gear in any shipping lanes, you know, where there's traffic. I pretty much stay up in the shallows.

NS: Is it still a state-sponsored program or is it a town?

HP: I'm completely on my own now. It's only the first year.

NS: Do you have to get a permit of any kind?

HP: Oh, yes. I have a hatchery permit.

NS: From?

HP: From the state. I have an interstate shippers permit from the state. I have a shelter permit from the state.

NS: So, it is all from the state?

HP: Yes, state-issued permits. I actually own bottom land out in the bay which I own. It's in Southold town.

NS: How much does it cost? Do you have to pay anything for all of these licenses?

HP: You've got to pay taxes on it. On the license?

NS: Yes. The license and the permits.

HP: I spend almost \$500 a year just on licenses to the state.

NS: Okay.

HP: Because nowadays you've got to have a license for everything. [laughter]

NS: Right. That is what I was wondering.

HP: Years ago, you only had to have one license, you know, a bayman's license.

NS: Are you able to sell it all right away, or are there times when you have to put things in storage, you know, in your shellfish, the oysters?

HP: No. I can't get enough of them. [laughter]

NS: Okay. So, there is always...

HP: I can sell anything I can bring in. Yes. It's not a problem there. But I have the stuff scheduled. I can speed them up or slow them down. I've got a growth on them. Little techniques that I'm not going to describe.

NS: What is a typical day like for you now? Like we are in the beginning of the summer season.

HP: All day today I was out and I was cleaning bags, oyster bags. Didn't make a dime, but...

NS: So, what time does your day start?

HP: It's about 7:00 a.m. or something like that. We don't get up early anymore. When I was clamming, I was always out on the water by 6:00 a.m. I get too old for that. Now, it's like 7:00

a.m. or 8:00 a.m. But I spend the whole day cleaning the decks.

NS: How do you clean them?

HP: I have a pressure washer built right into my boat. Works really well. So, today I cleaned probably close to one hundred bags today. So, I make my own boat so I can kind of rig them up the way.

NS: Yes.

HP: Automation, you know. Some of the other guys are still scrubbing it with a brush.

NS: [laughter]

HP: I don't have the patience to do that. I've got to use a machine.

NS: [laughter] Do you work with anybody?

HP: No, just me. My wife, she cleans them and packs them for shipment.

NS: What is your wife's name?

HP: Diane. In the summertime, when she has off, she goes out on the boat with me. Picks the oysters and bags them up, counts them and so forth.

NS: Do you ever get people just buying them off of your boat?

HP: They always want to, but I don't want to. They always ask, because pretty much everything I have is dedicated already.

NS: If you had to pick one restaurant that buys your oysters, what restaurant comes first to mind?

HP: American Hotel.

NS: In Sag Harbor?

HP: Yes. It goes through a lot of oysters, which is good. They pay their bills.

NS: Are most of your restaurants here on the South Fork or do you have any North Fork?

HP: No. I could if I wanted to, but I don't have that kind of production. Everything's over the side. Yes. Once in a while, one of the wineries over there will call me up. Pick up some oysters. I guess they like it for their tasting events.

NS: Yes.

HP: I don't know too much about it. I guess when the guys over there don't have any, they call me. They know I have a nice product.

NS: Is there one winery in particular that has been calling you?

HP: No. Different ones. There's a bunch of them over there now. They're getting more and more. There's one that's actually involved with the American Hotel there, and he has a winery over there. I can't think of which one it was but that's how he found me. Pretty good.

NS: So, do you see yourself staying with this program?

HP: Growing oysters? Yes.

NS: Any sign of slowing down?

HP: Nope. [laughter]

Actually, I'd rather grow a lesser amount but a higher quality. With my oysters you can have a nice hard shell on them the nice and fat and round. The chefs like them because they can just take and jam the oyster knife right in the hinge and pop it open. Whereas most of the other oysters that are in the bay here from the other guys, the shells are a little flaky. All right. So, they have to go in the side. Then what happens is a lot of times, there's shell remnants in the oyster. Now, the customers don't like that. I can't blame them. Harry. Come on, Harry, you got to go up.

NS: [laughter]

HP: Come on. So, I'd rather grow a lesser amount with higher quality. So, you naturally get a higher price for it too. So, it's the same amount of effort.

NS: Do you think you will be able to?

HP: That's what I've been doing out here. That's what I'm doing. It's all maintenance. That's what it is. It's all maintenance. Taking care of them. You can't just throw them out there and watch them grow. It doesn't work.

NS: Do you see younger baymen following in your footsteps with the aquaculture?

HP: No. A lot of them try and they go away. Because what happens is it's so much work involved.

NS: So, what do you think?

HP: They see you come in with a boatload of oysters, "Oh, you're making money, right?" Meanwhile the five other times you went out before that you come in with an empty boat and

you can work on them. They don't see that. [laughter] Harry's got to go out.

NS: No, no. It is okay. What about the boat building? Do you see anybody following?

HP: No. That's kind of getting to be a thing of the past. It's very limited. Like I said, I cater to the commercial guys. The commercial guys aren't around anymore.

NS: Do you think any of your children would continue that tradition of building boats?

HP: No. No. It's not going to happen. People don't work like that anymore. Not everything is push button. Computer generated and that's it.

NS: If there is one thing you could say about working on the bay, what it is meant to you, what would you like people to know?

HP: Everything I got I work for. That's it, and nothing given to me.

NS: Is there anything else you would like to say?

HP: No. That's about it, I guess. So, when we go on to the boat, were you just going to ask me a bunch of questions?

NS: I am going to turn the machine off, so we can talk about the trip that's coming up. Thank you for this interview.

HP: Okay.

NS: Okay. Can you describe to me the setup for the oystering? What are the bags in and...

HP: The cages are basically made lobster pot wire. The ones that I have are 6-feet long, 3-feet deep by 3-feet high and they hold twelve of the bags. It's basically like a closet or a giant lobster pot with shelves in it. I slide the bags in there.

NS: How far apart are the shelves?

HP: The shelves are probably 5 inches apart on top of each other, four high. Each shelf you slide a bag into it. Then with my big body, I lift the whole cage up or you could call it a rack also, cage or rack. I lift it up and I open a door, it has a door on it like a lobster pot. You pull the bags out and you clean them and pick them and wash them and do whatever you do with them.

NS: How many cages do you have all together?

HP: Cages, I have fifty – no. I got sixty cages now. I just got ten more.

NS: Are they set near each other or are they scattered throughout the...

HP: No. They're all on the trawls and they're about 10 feet apart. You can cluster them up pretty good.

NS: Are they heavy when they are filled?

HP: About 700 pounds. When they're full and fowled, they're about 700 pounds.

NS: Each cage?

HP: Each cage.

NS: So, how do you get them out of the bay onto your boat?

HP: I have a winch and a mast and a boom. I pull them up.

NS: By hand or is it motorized?

HP: With an electric winch. It's a 2,000-pound winch and it pulls them up above the surface. They get real heavy when they come out of the water. On the water, they're only a couple hundred pounds. But out of the water, because all the salt water, is 9 pounds a gallon.

NS: [laughter]

HP: Plus the weight of the oysters in them, too. The fowling is where all the weight is. Because the sea grass is all water. It's mostly water.

NS: Has anything ever crawled into that cage that did not belong there?

HP: I constantly get scallops. I even get some clams once in a while. Wow. Well, there's no place for them to go. There's no eel grass around anymore, so the scallops are floating along in a water column. It's a good place to hide, so they go into the bag there. The holes in the bag are only three-eighths of an inch square. I get scallops in a bag that are an inch and a quarter, an inch and a half big. So, to get in there to have a nice place to live away from the predators and have a good old time.

NS: [laughter] Can you sell them along with the oysters?

HP: I could. I might have eaten them, but ... [laughter] We bring those home. [laughter]

NS: Do you eat oysters?

HP: Not really. I really wasn't much on eating.

NS: Were you a scallop or a clam eater?

HP: No, not really, not per se. My father always told me, you can't eat the profits.

NS: [laughter]

HP: That's what's his thought of it. I had some once in a while.

[end of transcript]