Narrator: Jerry Collins

Interviewer: Steve Warrick

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Project Description: Folklorist Nancy Solomon has documented the maritime culture of Long Island through these interviews spanning the years 1987 – 2016. The collection includes baymen, fishermen, boat builders and other maritime tradition bearers.

Principal Investigator: Nancy Solomon

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Abstract: Jerry Collins, born on August 28, 1927, in Bay Shore, New York, is a lifelong resident of Sayville and a veteran clammer of the Great South Bay. Coming from a family with deep roots in the area, Collins followed in his father's footsteps, starting his clamming career as a child. After serving in the military, he began clamming full-time in 1946, primarily using traditional tonging methods. Throughout the interview, Collins reflects on the evolution of clamming in the Great South Bay, discussing the techniques, equipment, and challenges faced over the decades. He describes the physical demands of tonging, emphasizing the skill required to master the scissor-like tongs. Collins also shares insights into the community dynamics among clammers, the importance of having a reliable boat, and the camaraderie built through mutual assistance on the bay. Collins reminisces about the abundant clam populations during the mid-20th century and notes the significant decline starting around 1985, attributed to factors like the brown tide, overpopulation, and environmental changes. He expresses concern about the future of the clamming industry, citing the impact of modern developments and regulatory changes. The interview captures Collins' deep connection to the bay and his pragmatic view of his lifelong work. Despite the hardships, he conveys a sense of pride and fulfillment derived from his career as a clammer, underscoring the value of hard work and resilience in maintaining a traditional way of life.

Steve Warrick: This is Steve Warrick with Long Island Traditions, working on a project from Bay Shore to Patchogue. Today, I will be interviewing Jerry Collins, a longtime clammer. He is a tonger, and he has worked at the Great South Bay since he was a child. Today's date is July 10th, year 2000. This is tape 005, Side A. [RECORDING PAUSED] Could you state your full name to me?

Jerry Collins: Gerald Townsend Collins.

SW: When and where were you born?

JC: I was born in Southside Hospital, Bay Shore, New York.

SW: What year?

JC: 1927, August 28th.

SW: Have you lived in this area of Long Island for –?

JC: I've lived here all my life except for a couple of years when Uncle Sam took me for a little ride.

SW: Mostly in the West Sayville area?

JC: Sayville area, right here. Right here in Sayville.

SW: Were your parents from this area?

JC: My mother and father both lived in Sayville all their lives.

SW: What type of work did they do?

JC: My father was a fisherman, clam digger, and oysterman. He did all the things that you have to do to follow the water.

SW: Are you married?

JC: Yes, I am.

SW: How long have you been married?

JC: Well, my wife and I have been married eleven years.

SW: What is your wife's name?

JC: Virginia.

SW: Do you have any children?

JC: I have three children. I have two boys and a girl.

SW: Do they still reside in this area?

JC: My youngest son lives down in Patchogue Shores.

SW: How would you describe this area to someone who has never been here?

JC: Very crowded now. [laughter] Well, it's a nice place to live. They say if you can stand the weather on Long Island, you can live anywhere. But I don't know, I like it here better than anywhere else I've been.

SW: What were some of the activities you did when you were growing up out here?

JC: Well, Sayville was a small little town, and everything revolved around your school, your churches, and the fire departments. That was the big thing. That's pretty much what we did. Everything centered around those. It's somewhat like that today.

SW: Did you start working in the bay when you were younger?

JC: Oh, good Lord, yes. I was a little boy. Used to go with my father. I suppose I got in his way more than anything. [laughter]

SW: When did you start working full-time in the bay?

JC: 1946. I came out of the service, and that's when I really started.

SW: What did you do then? Did you clam?

JC: I was clamming at that time, yes. It was quite lucrative. That's what I did.

SW: Now, has this always been your occupation? Have you always –?

JC: Pretty much, yes.

SW: What type of clamming do you do? Do you do tonging?

JC: Yes, the tong. The old-fashioned tongs.

SW: Now, could you briefly describe to me the method of tonging, how you go about it?

JC: Well, it's a scissor-type – two handles put together with the heads on the bottom with teeth. It's a scissor-type operation. There's a knack to doing it. I'm not a great, big, strong guy, as you can see, so you have to develop a knack. It's physical work, but yet it's no harder than anything

else you might do, I guess. Of course, you have to face the elements. Sometimes that's bigger than anything.

SW: How do you develop a knack for it? Did your father show you exactly?

JC: Yes, you learn, and then you do it for a long while. As my father used to tell me, "The student is supposed to get smarter than the teacher. Otherwise, you haven't done a good job." [laughter] I don't know whether that's happened in my case or not, but that's what I did.

SW: How long have you been working in the bay? Since 1946?

JC: Since 1946, yes.

SW: Do you still go full-time, or are you now part-time?

JC: No. No more.

SW: How many days out in the week do you still go out in the bay?

JC: I go a couple days. Say two days. That's about it, and if you averaged it out throughout the year.

SW: Do you need a special license?

JC: Yes, we have to have a state license, a state digging permit to do it. We also have to have a license from Islip town. That's the only two licenses. We have to conform to their laws and regulations.

SW: Are they difficult to get?

JC: The clams?

SW: The license.

JC: No, I don't think so. To my knowledge, there's no restriction on how many licenses they'll issue.

SW: What area have you worked mostly in?

JC: Mostly in Islip town. I have worked in Brookhaven town, which is an adjoining town. Babylon town also, which is an adjoining town. But mostly in Islip town, yes.

SW: Why Islip?

JC: Well, the area was pretty productive for the most part over the years until recent years.

SW: Do you still dock your boat?

JC: I still dock my boat in Islip at White Catfish Company, yes.

SW: Have you worked alone most of the time or with a partner?

JC: I used to have someone with me off and on. Different guys would get out of work that I knew, and they needed to make a couple of bucks, so I'd take them with me. But for the most part, I was pretty much alone.

SW: What is your day like when you're out there alone then? What are you doing? Are you tonging the whole time?

JC: Well, I'm working the whole day. I don't go out there to eat sandwiches and [laughter] play around. When I'm out there, I'm dead serious if I only go two days a week. But that's the way I approach it.

SW: What time of the day do you start?

JC: I start about, say, 6:30/7:00 o'clock. Now I work till about noon, the days that I work. That's it.

SW: How long would you work when you were clamming full time?

JC: I used to work from 6:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon.

SW: Was that a pretty standard –?

JC: Yes, it was pretty standard. Five and a half days a week. We'd work half a day Saturday. Depended on the individual. I pretty much stuck to it when I was really serious. I was there six days a week, no doubt about it.

SW: What about Sundays? Was it not advisable to clam on Sunday?

JC: Well, we never did too much. I have at different times. Now they have an ordinance in Islip town where you can't clam on Sunday. So, that's pretty much out. But after you do it for six days, you're ready to stay home for a day. [laughter]

SW: How do you feel at the end of the day once you've done all that tonging?

JC: Well, for me, sure, I was physically tired. I used to hear fellows say they hurt here and there. I never really could say I hurt. I tried to use my strength to the best of my advantage as opposed to being a weightlifter or something. It isn't all strength. You have to know when to use it at the right time. You can't use it all the time. You just can't do it. Your system will break down.

SW: Do you recall any guys who've had legendary status among the other clammers?

JC: Oh yes. They label everybody. [laughter]

SW: What are some of the things they label them? What are they saying?

JC: Well, I work pretty hard at it. I guess I was called a lot of things, some of them to my face and [laughter] some not. Sure, there was a little personal rivalry, I guess, but not very malicious at all. No.

SW: Were there stories about some of the guys?

JC: Oh, sure. Different guys, sure.

SW: Could you think of one for me?

JC: Well, [laughter] I can only use myself as an example. A lot of the young guys used to tell me I could catch them on the main road. So, I don't know. That's [laughter] stretching it pretty good.

SW: How about nicknames? Did you all have nicknames?

JC: Oh, yes. They nicknamed me the Bald Eagle. I can't imagine why. [laughter] If you look at the top of my head, you know.

SW: Do you think that is all part of the camaraderie of working with the guys out on the boat?

JC: Yes, I would say so. I think it was more years back, too. Everybody had a nickname. I don't know why that was, but it was more prevalent then than it is now.

SW: What type of equipment other than the tongs do you need to go clamming?

JC: Well, you need a good boat. That's an absolute must. You have to have a good boat and a good engine so you can go when you want.

SW: What type of boats have you used?

JC: As I told you before, I had a World War II landing craft, which was a very good boat. But it was getting old and tired, and I decided to have a new one built. I did, 1974. That's the one I still have. That's the one I'm going to end with [laughter] very shortly.

SW: Could you describe your landing craft to me? Why was it a good boat for the –?

JC: Well, it was flat. It was pretty heavy. It was thirty-six foot. It was one of those LCVPs [landing craft, vehicle, personnel]. It was cut down, and it didn't have the trapdoor on the front, whatever you want to call it, with heavy oak sheathing on it to go through the ice and the cold

weather. That was an excellent boat. It was just excellent. But as I say, it got tired, and I wanted a new boat. I had this one built.

SW: How long did you use your first boat? How many years?

JC: I think I had it twelve, thirteen years.

SW: Your other boat, is it made out of wood?

JC: My boat is made out of wood, yes.

SW: Is that pretty typical of the clam boats that you would see here?

JC: Not now anymore. They're mostly fiberglass. Fiberglass over wood. Some of them are solid fiberglass. However, my boat was built down in Whitestone, Virginia. Being old-fashioned, I had to have a wooden boat like the old South Bay sloops. That's what I got – thirty-two-foot boat, eleven foot wide. I have a small diesel engine and a six-cylinder diesel engine in it. That's what I used.

SW: What is the advantage of this type of boat for working out there?

JC: Well, it's comfortable. I can sit down and eat a sandwich. I have a heater on it in the winter and I can keep warm. It's an ideal boat for doing what we do in the South Bay, or at least it was an ideal boat for it.

SW: Does the flat surface help you?

JC: Well, yes. You can move your tongs along. Some people say, "How do you keep from falling overboard?" But you got these tongs on the bottom, and you're standing on deck. I wouldn't say it's tricky, but it's a knack to it when it's a little rough.

SW: About how deep is the water? Are you tonging in all depths of water?

JC: Yes. But we usually don't tong on much more than nine feet, ten feet once in a while out of water.

SW: What is the biggest pair of tongs you use?

JC: That I use?

SW: Yes.

JC: I used an eighteen-tooth head with a high basket on it when there were a lot of clams. When there wasn't a lot of clams, I used smaller heads and tried to move a little faster. [laughter]

SW: How about the length of the handles?

JC: I used up to eighteen-foot handles. I never used anything longer than that for any length of time. A couple of times, I used twenty-foot, but that's pretty tough. Even the eighteen-foot handles. Most popular was sixteen-foot and then fourteen-foot, down to twelve-foot. That was it.

SW: Now, have you ever thought about getting into another type of clamming? Say, raking or anything like that?

JC: Well, I was a little too old to change over when the raking got really popular. They developed those rakes that raked in a hard bottom, which they didn't do years ago. They only used the old rake that they used in the mud bottom. So, by the time that got popular, I was getting near the end of my hard-working career, [laughter] so to speak. So, I never got into it for that reason.

SW: You are tonging then. You are tonging in a softer bottom?

JC: We tong in all kinds of bottom: hard bottom, tacky bottom, shells, gritty mud. Wherever we can find clams, that's where we clam. We're constantly on the prowl looking for more fertile fields, so to speak.

SW: Now, do you remember a time when the clams were really plentiful?

JC: Oh, yes. All during the ’50s, ’60s, and ’70s, even into the ’80s, it was pretty darn good. I think the decline actually started around 1985 until we got to the point where we are now, where it's pretty poor. Pretty poor.

SW: When clamming was good, were there special spots out in the bay that were especially good?

JC: Well, yes. Certain areas would be more productive than others. But they seem to set in certain areas at a certain depth. That's where we were constantly looking, trying here and there to find the best possible place.

SW: What depth is a good depth for –?

JC: I would say between seven and nine feet in general.

SW: Any idea why?

JC: Well, that's the way the edges run in the bay. That seems to be where the [inaudible] gets dropped because of the tides and the eddies and whatever Mother Nature provides.

SW: Are you working on natural grounds or lease grounds?

JC: Yes, it's all public grounds that I worked on. I didn't work on the private grounds.

SW: When you are working on the public grounds, is there respect for territory where you're clamming?

JC: Yes. Because of the mechanical dredges, they're not allowed to work on the public grounds. I guess they infringe a little bit, and we infringe a little bit on their property. But in general, yes, I would say.

SW: If you're out there on your boat and somebody else sees that you are doing well, what do you think when they pull up next to you? Does that happen a lot?

JC: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, that's sometimes when the sparks fly. [laughter] Some of the part-time guys that used to come out, they'd lay an ambush, so to speak, for us guys that knew what they were doing. I used to once in a while say something, but I never got too excited about it.

SW: How about with the full-time guys? Would they respect the distance with the other clammers?

JC: Yes, to some degree. When the climate was real good in the Great South Bay, everybody had a day off, whether he'd be a cop or a schoolteacher or whatever. They'd go out there and try to make a couple of bucks on the Side. You can't hate people for that. I always respect people that have a lot of ambition, [laughter] even if they infringe on me.

SW: When times were good, what was, say, a day's catch worth?

JC: We used to figure years ago, if you could catch a bushel of clams an hour, it was pretty good. We did a lot better than that, and we've done a lot worse than that. But in general, I mean, we used to figure about a bushel of clams an hour, and we'd say that was pretty darn good.

SW: What type of clams? Were you trying to get little necks?

JC: Well, yes. We always tried to get the highest-priced clams. Demand is for the real small clams as opposed to the large clams. So, yes, that's what went after.

SW: Have you noticed a change in labels for the clams? What used to be, say, cherrystone is something else now?

JC: Oh, yes. They've graduated the size up there a little bit. Whatever the traffic will bear, I guess you could say.

SW: Could you tell me the different types of clams? What are they other than cherrystones and little necks?

JC: Little neck, cherrystone, and a chowder clam. They also classify one now as a top neck, which is smaller than a little neck. There again, it's whatever the traffic will bear. If there's a demand, then they'll accept them and pay a price for them.

SW: What is the legal limit on a clam? The size of a clam that you can have.

JC: They have to be one inch across the heel.

SW: What is the best time of year to clam? Is there a good, specific time of year?

JC: We always figured in the spring. The early spring, the bottom would loosen up, and the weather would get a little bit better. Also, in the fall for a while until the winter got real – the real winter came, which was generally – we used to figure around Christmas time, it would start to get really tough then. You had to pull your neck down in your shirt, be really serious, or you weren't going to do it. [laughter]

SW: Did you clam in all types of weather? Rain, sun?

JC: Yes. If it was lucrative enough, we stayed right there and faced the elements. There again, I always had good foul weather gear to keep dry and warm. Because you can't do that work every day and be wet and cold because it'll take you down, and you'll be out of the game. [laughter]

SW: Do you have to have a good understanding of the bay in order to work out there?

CJ: Oh, certainly. That helps. As I always say, everybody's a champ at his own stadium. Got to know where to go, what to look for, and try to do it the easiest way you can.

SW: How about knowing how the water works out there, knowing the different tides?

CJ: Oh, the tides? Yes. That plays into it, too. What we used to do was sometimes when the tide would be real hard, one direction, say a flood tide, we'd try another place where it would be a little easier for us.

SW: How about the wind? How bad is the wind out there?

CJ: Well, at times, it's real bad. [laughter] It gets to the point where it's unbearable, and then you have to give up and go in. But it depends on how good the climate is. You can stay there pretty well if the climate is really good. You could get through it. I'm talking about twenty-five, thirty-mile an hour. When it gets up over that, you're pretty much finished.

SW: Can you explain the differences in the bay out there? Are there more safe areas to work in than some others, or is it all about the same?

CJ: Well, now, with all the boat traffic, everybody – years back, not too many people had pleasure boats. Now, it seems like everyone has one. Yes, it gets a little crowded, and the wake blows you because all the boats go fast. But I never felt unsafe. Maybe sometimes I should have, but I didn't. [laughter]

SW: Have there been accidents out there on the bay that you can recall?

CJ: Yes, relatively few. Not with the commercial boats too much. I think the speed on the water now is what causes a lot of the accidents aside from the alcohol and drug situation.

SW: If you were to get in trouble out on the bay, were there other men working out there who always –?

CJ: Oh, yeah. Well, we always looked after each other. I'm going back to before we had radios on the boat. If somebody didn't show up at a certain time, we'd try to find out whether he is stuck out there, whether he's got his boat hauled out or he went somewhere else with it. We pretty much knew. We pretty much knew.

SW: So, people are willing to help out one another?

CJ: Oh, yeah. Well, we didn't have the services. Now, they have Suffolk County police boats and town boats. What we did, as I say, [was] we looked after each other, took care of each other. We took care of other people, too, if they got in trouble. I always did. A lot of the other fellows did, too.

SW: Do you think that's just part of working out there?

CJ: Oh, yeah. I think if you work on the water, you have an obligation to – if you see somebody in trouble, you just can't go by them and say, "The heck with you." I've towed people in it, but out there all night, they broke down. My always concern is the kids. I have a love for kids. The grownups can take it. If they're cold and hungry for a night, they get through it, but for little kids, it's not so pleasant. I've towed some of them and got some letters from some of them that I did four years back. That meant more to me than anything. [laughter]

SW: You were telling me earlier about somebody you towed in who was near the inlet out there.

CJ: Excuse me?

SW: You told me earlier about somebody who was near the inlet in a small boat.

CJ: Oh, yeah. Well, I was fishing at that time with a friend of mine on a dragger. It was in the summertime, and it was very quiet and ebb tide. We were coming in the inlet; I guess it was 12:00/1:00 o'clock in the morning. I got my eye on this little boat. I happened to see the lights and ended up it's a little rowboat, maybe sixteen, eighteen foot long. I guess these guys had a few beers. They were drifting out of the inlet. So, we went and checked them out. They didn't even know where they were. So, we said, "You keep going like you're going; you're out to sea, and anything can happen after that." So, we towed them back into Bay Shore, pretty much up to the dock where they came from.

SW: Is it easy to get lost out there if you do not know exactly –?

CJ: Oh, sure. A lot of people don't have a clue. They get a boat and go. Of course, in the

daylight, it isn't so bad. Dark or fog or something, that's another story.

SW: How bad can the fog be out there?

CJ: Oh, real bad. Real bad. In the spring, we have it quite heavy at times. So, we pretty much know what we're doing or think we know what we're doing. We get where we want to be, and we're able to do what we have to do.

SW: How were you able to navigate through the fog with no radar equipment?

CJ: Use a compass.

SW: Use a compass?

CJ: Magnetic compass, yes.

SW: Do you still have one on your boat?

CJ: Oh, absolutely. I wouldn't go out there without a compass. [laughter]

SW: Do you think that's the best way to navigate?

CJ: Well, now they have GPSs and radars, which, for what I do, doesn't warrant me having a radar. I should probably have a GPS, yes. If I was doing it full-time like I used to, I would have it.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SW: This is Steve Warwick continuing the interview with Jerry Collins working with Long Island Traditions. Today's date is July 10, 2000. This is tape 005, and we're on side B. We've been talking about Jerry's experiences clamming out in the Great South Bay. Now, have you yourself ever gotten trapped out in the bay on a sand bar or set adrift?

CJ: No, I haven't. No.

SW: Do you feel lucky that you haven't?

CJ: I feel lucky that I haven't. My engine wouldn't run a couple of times. But as I said before, we always took care of each other. I don't even remember who towed me in, probably.

SW: You've had pretty good luck out there?

CJ: Oh, yeah. Well, over the years, you learn. Yeah, I've hit the bottom. But I never had to stay overnight because I couldn't get off and get home. Mostly my own doing.

SW: How about the bay? Does the bay still freeze in the wintertime?

CJ: Absolutely. Not like it used to, though. We don't seem to have the severe winters like we used to. I think there's more tidal flow, too. So, that has a bearing on it.

SW: What was it like when it froze years back?

CJ: Real thick. [laughter] I remember it'd get up to eighteen inches thick and stay that way for a long period of time. Even back then, though, they had winters when it didn't freeze very much. But there was something you pretty much looked forward to every winter. It usually was in general, right after Christmas time sometime. You'd be messed up with the ice for a month or two.

SW: Now, did you clam through the ice? Did you go out?

CJ: I clammed on the ice. I went through it with my boat. Any way I could do it, I did it.

SW: What is it like out there, clamming in the winter?

CJ: It's chilly, to say the least.

SW: Do you have to take extra precautions then, or is the ice –?

CJ: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

SW: Were you able to get your boat through the ice, or were you [inaudible]?

CJ: No, it gets just so thick, and you couldn't get through it anymore. You just couldn't work. Especially if the ice is moving, you can't work.

SW: When you could, did you saw through the ice? Were you able to –?

CJ: When we worked on the ice, yes. We had saws. We had the big old ice saws and the ice axes. But then we got the chainsaws, which cut it a lot faster. But the saltwater raised Cain with the chainsaw after a while. Didn't take too long, either. But you could cut a lot more ice with those than you came with a hand saw – a lot easier. You have to cut it on a bevel so you can slide the cake under the ice. You can't sort straight down. You have to slant it so you could push the ice down and push it under the – that's what we did.

SW: Was it good catching clams in the winter, then?

CJ: At certain times, we did pretty well at it, yes.

SW: What effect does that really have on your job and on your body over the years working out there?

CJ: Well, there again, I say if you stay warm and dry, I don't think it has too much effect on you.

Banker sits in a bank, and he's got a backache. [laughter] You would think I'd have the backache, and he wouldn't have any problems. So, there you go.

SW: Your experiences working out in the bay –? How has that shaped your life?

CJ: Well, it's just been a way of life. I never knew anything different. I never really thought about it too much until I got older, and I thought maybe I should have been doing something else because if you don't take care of things, you're going to be in bad shape when you get older.

SW: Do you feel fortunate to have –?

CJ: Oh, I feel very fortunate, yes. I'm in pretty good health. Real good health, really. I can't complain. A lot of people wish they'd done a lot of different things. I guess I do, too, with certain areas, but I made my bed, so I slept in it. That's the story.

SW: What is the reason you stayed with it all these years? What do you like about going out?

CJ: Well, I like the freedom naturally, and I could make pretty good money at it. That was what kept me going.

SW: So, you like being your own boss out there?

CJ: Yeah. Oh, yeah. That's pretty nice. I didn't have anybody – no one was breathing, telling me to do this or that or another thing.

SW: Would you call yourself a clammer or a bay man? How would you classify yourself out there?

CJ: Somewhere in between there, clammer, bay man. Mostly, clamming, though, is what I did, yes.

SW: Is there a certain pride that you place on having –?

CJ: Excuse me?

SW: Is there a certain pride that you place on having done this all this time?

CJ: Well, as I said before, this is what I chose to do. So, I worked really hard at it to try to be successful. I guess that pretty much answers it.

SW: What did your family think about you working out there?

CJ: Well, they probably wished I had done something else. But I wasn't a rocket scientist, so that's what I did.

SW: What do you think is in store for those who work on the bay now?

CJ: Well, I don't think anything too good. Number one, you can't do what I did out on the bay anymore and survive. It's just not possible. It's over.

SW: Do you think there will ever be a good natural set of clams out there again?

CJ: Do I think there will be?

SW: Yes.

CJ: It's a great possibility.

SW: Do you think you'll see that?

CJ: I doubt it. I doubt that I'll see it, no. I think the brown tide we've had here for, as I say since 1985 has pretty much decimated the shellfish industry. I can't see it changing. I don't know what it would take to change it, to be honest with you. Everybody has a theory on it, including me, but the things I think I don't think will ever happen.

SW: Well, what is your theory on that?

CJ: Well, I think we probably need another inlet somewhere, but who's going to –? Can you imagine the political fights? "Don't put it here, put it there. Where are we going to get the money?" So, I really don't think it's going to happen. No.

SW: What do you think are some of the biggest changes that have led to the bay going down as far as production? Do you think that overpopulation or pollution –?

CJ: Well, yes, I would say so. There's a relatively small amount of marshland. It's mostly been pumped and there's houses on – where it used to be marshland is all houses now a good part of it. A good part of the bay on the north Side of Great South Bay is pretty much bulkheaded. They got these million-dollar homes on up from there. But that's had a lot to do with it, too, I guess. The runoff and the population, sure.

SW: Are there any other factors that have contributed to that, say with the shell fishermen themselves?

CJ: Well, I guess the Southwest Sewer District took all the freshwater. At least, we think so on the South Shore, not in my area here. But to the west of us, Southwest Sewer District starts in, I think, around Great River somewhere and goes on up all on the South Shore there to Bay Shore and beyond. Yes, I would say that's had a big effect too. I honestly don't know how much of an effect, but definitely had some.

SW: Do you see a lack of other populations, say birds or other wildlife, since they have taken –?

CJ: Yes, I don't think we have as many ducks anymore as it used to be around. We have plenty

of Canadian geese, though, more than we need.

SW: But you don't see the migrations of the ducks too much anymore?

CJ: No. They come every year, but not the amounts that they used to be. That's probably along the whole coast, East Coast of the United States, I would say.

SW: What do you think about aquaculture? Do you think they will ever be able to do –?

CJ: Well, in certain areas, I guess they can grow clams, and they can grow oysters. They have fish farms. How successful it's going to be? I couldn't begin to guess. You still, at some point, have to put the clams or oysters out in the wild, and then you're susceptible to all the predators and all the other things that play into that picture. There again, you're trying to replace what Mother Nature does. It's a pretty difficult thing to do.

SW: Had you ever thought about getting into aquaculture yourself?

CJ: Well, I had planted oysters through the Cornell Cooperative Extension and through a grant they had in Islip town. I had to put them in a certain area, and they grew fairly well. But there again, you have to get them up off the bottom, which I wasn't rigged up to do that. You're talking three years before you can harvest them. At seventy-three years old, I didn't think it was maybe the right thing for me to be doing anymore. So, I gave it up. But really, after I got into it, I was sorry I even started because the brown tide has just retarded everything. What it hasn't killed, it's retarded.

SW: How long have you been seeing the brown tide?

CJ: As I recall now, first we saw around here was in 1985. We've had it pretty much every year since. I think last year was one of the best years as far as brown tide goes. We had the least of it last year. Then last fall, when you would think it would clear up altogether, it got worse to the point where this year it's the worst that anyone has ever seen. All the studies and the samples that they've taken have proven that out, too. So, that's pretty much the story on that.

SW: What would you say are the biggest changes you've seen out here?

CJ: Well, the population growth on Long Island, it's been tremendous and the boat traffic. Everybody and his brother have a boat now. Everybody wants to play. I guess they have as much right to play as I do to work. [laughter]

SW: What would you like people to know about those who have worked out in the bay?

CJ: Well, we were just average people. We weren't any different than any other people and walk of life, whether it be a banker, carpenter, or plumber. If you want to be successful at something, you have to work pretty hard at it, no matter what it is. As my father used to tell me, "If you don't hurt a little bit, you're not working hard enough." So, that's it, pretty much in a nutshell, no matter what you're doing.

SW: Well, I would like to thank you for participating. Thanks a lot.

CJ: Well, it's a pleasure to do it for you, Steve.
----------END OF INTERVIEW----------
Reviewed by Molly Graham 5/3/2024