

Narrator: Joe Scavone

Interviewer: Nancy Solomon

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Project Description: This project looks at how Superstorm Sandy affected the seafaring community, its residents, and its maritime traditions in Long Island, New York. The project was funded by NOAA/Preserve American Grant.

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Abstract: In this interview, Nancy Solomon from Long Island Traditions speaks with Joe Scavone, a veteran bayman and fisherman from Freeport, New York. The conversation, conducted on December 30, 2015, focuses on the impacts of Superstorm Sandy on Scavone's life and work. Scavone recounts his over 40-year career in commercial clamming and fishing, detailing how the storm drastically altered the bay's ecosystem. He notes significant changes in fish populations and water quality post-Sandy, including a marked decrease in fish like striped bass and bluefish, and the persistence of murky water conditions. Scavone explains how the storm's aftermath severely impacted his livelihood. The waters were closed for clamming for several months, forcing him to rely on ocean clamming aboard the *Day Star*, a boat he had worked on since his teens. Despite these efforts, his income dropped to 20% of pre-Sandy levels. Scavone also describes the physical destruction caused by the storm, including damage to his boats, loss of equipment, and the devastation of his home. He reflects on the broader ecological changes, noting shifts in habitat and ongoing issues with debris in the bay.

Nancy Solomon: This is Nancy Solomon of Long Island Traditions. Today is December 30, 2015. I am talking with bayman and fisherman Joe Scavone of Freeport, New York. Today, we're going to talk about Superstorm Sandy, as well as other changes that you've seen in the bay in the course of your lifetime. So my first question is if you could tell us a little bit about how long you've been working on the bay and in the ocean.

Joe Scavone: Over forty years, clamming. Commercially clamming. Fishing very close to forty years. Probably did it recreational with my dad when I was younger. But yeah, ever since I was a teenager, been clamming.

NS: Can you tell me some of the different types of things that you've harvested and what you're currently harvesting?

JS: Right now, I'm clamming. I fished up until two weeks ago. I had a seahorse one day. I just added a new hermit crab to my tank at home.

NS: You said you were fishing up until two weeks ago. What kinds of things were you fishing, and how were you catching them?

JS: I was looking for striped bass, but I caught more spiny dogs than anything. But I also caught herring, butterfish, weakfish, which was a real surprise because weakfish usually pass by in October there. By October 20th, 25th, they're gone. You never see another one until next year. But there they were two weeks ago. What else? Codfish. Caught a couple of cod. Two days in a row, I had a codfish. I didn't sell them though. I'd rather eat those. That's what we did.

NS: Can you tell me a little bit about how much you caught of each of the different species? Roughly.

JS: Oh, it was about – after I cleaned up the sharks, there was about five hundred pounds of meat. Herring, there were about seventy pounds, which I didn't sell. I fileted them all and pickled them. Right now, I'm in the process of taking them out of the pickling and putting them in jars. Since it was towards the end of the season, the only thing I sold were the sharks because I'm eating everything else. I won't fish now for at least two and a half months, maybe three. So I'd rather fill up my freezer than –oh, and butterfish.

NS: About how much butterfish?

JS: Not many. It was maybe eight pounds, ten pounds. It wasn't a lot. Here again, they're usually gone by October. This year just stayed a little warmer, and I guess stuff hung around a little longer. But I actually haven't done a lot of fishing since the storm because it hasn't been that good. The first year, the water – it just changed the color of the water. I don't know what happened. It looked like a slatey, greenish-gray color. You couldn't see through it. If you put your arm in the water, you couldn't even see your hand. That was right after the storm. Then they also closed the waters for clamming.

NS: Who? Can you tell me more about that?

JS: I'm not really sure who closes it. I guess New York State shuts it down and also our town helps enforce it, Town of Hempstead. Let's see. The storm was October, the end of October. We didn't reopen for clamming until sometime in March. Fishing? Forget it. There was no fishing going on. I worked on an oceangoing clam boat after the storm. I was out in the ocean clamming. Even there, we were restricted where we could go. We had to stay more east. We had to be from Jones Inlet and east. We couldn't be west of Jones Inlet.

NS: What boat was this?

JS: I was on the *Day Star* then.

NS: Can you tell me a little bit more about the *Day Star* and what kind of clamming you were doing?

JS: Well, the *Day Star* was brought into town when I was seventeen years old because I was fishing a lot back then. I remember when they started clamming and actually where they started clamming. They were down off Atlantic Beach. They used to use that boat.

NS: Who owned the boat?

JS: That was (Bob Doxie's?) boat. That was skimmer clamming. That was ocean clams, the kind that you see in Campbell's Clam Chowder and other baked frozen clams in the supermarket and other companies that make chopped clams, like Progresso. Those were all ocean clams. They were a lot bigger than bay clams. The minimum size is four-inch. They have to be four inches or bigger. They go as big as – God, I've seen them ten, eleven inches one end of the shell to the other. They get really big.

NS: After Superstorm Sandy you were working on the *Day Star*. Can you tell me a little bit about what time you left, how long you spent – you went out, how much you were catching?

JS: Well, sometimes we were traveling seven hours each way to the grounds. We would leave at eleven at night if we were down by Moriches or Shinnecock. We'd get down there around six o'clock in the morning. We would work sunup until sundown. Then the ride back, another six, seven hours back to the dock. That right there alone was about twenty-one hours. By the time you unloaded the boat, it became twenty-four hours. So it was a twenty-four-hour trip. That was about the only game in town. That was about all you could do after the storm.

NS: How often were you going out?

JS: If the weather was right, we were going at least two trips a week, possibly three. Besides that, the state asked us to work more to the east because when you come up the Jersey Shore and then into Long Island, it creates a corner. The storm came pounding into the corner, you might say, where all the waves came together, was in that corner up near the city, which actually washed all the clams out of the bottom, off of Rockaway, off of Atlantic Beach, off of Long Beach. The beaches were covered so thick with baby clams after that storm. They were all over the place. They just got all the little [inaudible] – they just got washed out and were destroyed. Still, the ocean bottom hasn't come back yet. It just hasn't. So we made it through that winter. Then the following winter, which was two winters ago, it was bitterly cold. Everybody

remembers the last winter, the past winter, as bitterly cold. But the winter before was just about as cold. Because once the bay reopened, I was clamming in it, and it was brutal. Both winters were just brutal. So besides them closing the water zones for a long time, Superstorm Sandy, when she came through the bay, it had to be – I think people were saying it was eight feet above normal or nine feet above normal tides. That just washed all the clams off the sandbars. So that did damage to the sandbars. Then that was that storm, but then the following winter, with all the cold weather, everything on the bottom froze and died. Right now, still, up until two days ago, I'm still digging in areas where you see all these clams that are still together like that, with nothing inside. You'll get patches of them, like, say, in a ten-by-ten area. There'll be, god, fifty, sixty clams that are still under the bottom, that froze, and they're dead. Even the stuff that grows on top of the bottom, you could always tell where these areas are because they're bald spots. Normally, there's seaweed and this kind of hair that we call angel hair that grows on top of the bottom. Well, where the bottom really got affected, that stuff isn't even growing on the bottom. It's bald. Very strange that something above the bottom wouldn't grow, but that's how bad it froze. So whatever roots are in there for stuff to grow, it all just froze. So I'm hoping for a warm winter this year because all the little baby clams froze, too.

NS: Now when you talk about catching the fish that you just caught, can you tell me how you catch them and how that's changed before and after Sandy?

JS: Well, I catch them in what's called gillnet. It's a net with – naturally has floats on top and lead line on the bottom. When you set it out off the back of the boat, the net will sink to the bottom, but the floats will keep it open. They'll keep it from top to bottom open. I call it open; it'll stand up straight.

NS: With Sandy, were you able to catch similar amounts before and after Sandy? Or have things – the fishing actually changed?

JS: Fishing definitely changed since the storm. I don't know if I could blame it on the storm.

NS: Well, what have you noticed?

JS: I noticed that the last few years before the storm, I was catching plenty of fish. I was doing great. I was definitely catching plenty of fish. I even bought a camera to take pictures of some of these fish. Never owned a camera before. Right up until the last day before that storm, was catching fish like crazy. There were whales around –

NS: If you could quantify it, how long would it take you to catch X amount of fish?

JS: Oh god, there were so many fish that if you left your net in the water too long, it became too hard to handle. You couldn't even put your net in the water for that long. You put it out for no more than a half-hour because if you left it in more than a half-hour, too many fish would gather up in it and make it so heavy you could barely pull it in. But up until that storm, each year, there were whales. There were porpoises. There were weakfish. There was bluefish, striped bass, butterfish like crazy, bunker, herring. Oh my god, there were all kinds of fish. There was striped bass. I even caught cobia. I had two cobia one week, and those fish are born in the Gulf of Mexico, and they were all the way up here. I even had a lot of seahorses the September before

the storm. Gee, there were just – it was great. It was a couple of really good seasons before that storm came.

NS: How long was a typical day for you?

JS: A typical day would be, gee, leave in the dark. So let's say I left at 5:00 in the morning. By the time I got out in the ocean – I used to like to have my nets in the water right around sunrise for some reason. That's when the fish are waking up and starting to feed, and they're swimming around. But then, after you put out a couple of nets, it would take you all day to pick the fish out. I would pick the fish for about ten, sometimes twelve hours. Then the ride in. Then unloading the boat. I mean, it was definitely – you had twenty hours into each day, each fishing trip.

NS: About how many pounds of fish were you catching in those days?

JS: Oh, it was probably getting on the average about two thousand pounds of fish a day.

NS: Wow.

JS: Yeah. That was along with some sharks. There were some pretty big sharks around. We were cleaning sharks back then. We'd come in with hundred-pound pieces of meat from sharks, thresher sharks, these other sharks called porbeagles. You were allowed to catch them then. Now they're outlawed. Only within the last year I think, year, year and a half they shut them off. They shut off all shark fishing except for threshers – what they call smooth dogs, or what I call summer dogs – what they call spiny dogs, or what I call winter dogs. Those are the only three sharks that you're going to be allowed to catch in 2016 commercially. I'm not sure of the recreational laws. I'm not even sure of the commercial laws; they change them so often. I just never know what's allowed and what's not anymore.

NS: So today, how long does it – how much are you catching in that same period of time?

JS: I am actually – when I go fishing lately, I don't even go to the same area where I've been fishing most of my life. I'm actually going probably almost ten miles from that area.

NS: So you're going further?

JS: Because after the – yeah, ever since the storm, there hasn't been anything in that area.

NS: What area are we talking about?

JS: This would be off of Long Beach and Atlantic Beach, as far out as a mile from the beach. I don't know why. It seems like the further east you go on the island the more fish there are. Because the eye of that storm really came up through this way and towards the city. The waves were so big that I can't say – I don't know – well, I can say that they ruined the bottom with all the growth on there that maybe fish eat. But I guess even when clams are on the bottom, when clams are breathing through the bottom, fish like to swim on top of that because fish eat clams too. Even codfish and striped bass will actually dig their noses into the bottom to dig a clam out. You can tell because when the fish comes up you'll see the whole top of their nose is rubbed off.

So you could see that they were digging on there, on them. They wear their skin off. But like I said, I'm not God. Nobody's God. So nobody knows, even the marine biologists, nobody could actually say is it because of the storm. I don't know. There's no way of telling. There's just no way to really know.

NS: Now, are you able to catch two-thousands pounds of fish today in a day?

JS: No, no.

NS: About how much are you catching?

JS: Lately, I haven't even – I haven't gone out in over two weeks. Before that was three weeks. I've been going out on an average of two times a month. Every three weeks, every four weeks, I'll go and try and just see what's out there. Then I come back and I realize, well, there was no profit in it. It only cost money to do it. But you just can't have the boat sitting at the dock either. You have to use it because you have to run the motor sometimes. You just can't let everything sit. You need to keep the boat functional. If it just sits there, it'll rot away.

NS: So those times that you went out, about how much were you catching in a day?

JS: If you included bunker, maybe four or five hundred pounds. Not much. You don't get much for bunker. They're just crab bait. Nobody eats them. Lobster bait, crab bait. There really hasn't really been any good food fish. I haven't seen any bluefish this year. Bluefish used to be a big part of the income. As a kid growing up, that was the biggest part of the income. The striped bass, actually in four months time of striped bass when I was a kid, was equal to, in money, eight months of bluefish because when they came along, they'd stay here for a while. Back then you didn't say when they came along. Nowadays you wait for them to come along. That doesn't always happen.

NS: Before Sandy, were they always around?

JS: Before Sandy everything was around. All the fish were around. They really were. I guess it's more than a coincidence. It's not just a coincidence. I guess it really had to have had to do with the storm because so much stuff from land – there was eight feet of water on top of the land. All this junk washed off the land. Everybody's oil tanks were – the ones that were on the outside of the houses were floating all over the place. So there was a lot of oil in the water. Even a month after, two months after the storm, wherever the oil tanks – you saw where they tipped over. When it rained, you'd see people's front lawns glistening those different colors from oil.

NS: Did you also see those kinds of slicks in the bay after Sandy?

JS: You saw it for a short time. It went away. The water was dirty. There was definitely a dirty surface. There was even so much debris in the air that when we would go out at night on the clam boat, we would use the spotlight to look for the buoys on the way out. The dust particles in the air looked like a snowstorm. That was one of the reasons I stopped working down that area because I started realizing, I'm breathing all this stuff in. I don't want to be breathing it in. I did wind up with a sinus infection that took five months to get rid of. I don't even really know if it's really fully gone.

NS: Wow.

JS: Yeah. One time I actually passed out. I was driving home, and I passed out, almost in front of my own front door and hit the tree in front of the house. That was because of that sinus infection. But from the storm to now, it really had a big effect. I guess it did have a big effect.

NS: Can you talk about, if you're comfortable with this, how this has affected your livelihood? Was there a big change in your income after Sandy?

JS: Oh, definitely, because they closed the waters for clamming, so you couldn't catch clams. So there was no income from that. Because when you're fishing, if you have bad weather, you could always go clamming. You have two boats – one for fishing [and] you have one for clamming. So even when things are good, when you get nasty weather and you can't go out fishing, you go clamming that day. But the waters were closed. I think they were closed for five to seven months. Then when you would go out fishing, you weren't catching anything. Even the nets were coming up with a slime on them. I even had to start wearing these rubber sleeves because you didn't want to get the water – you didn't want to have the net – when the net comes in, you couldn't have it rub against your skin because it was giving you these rashes. I noticed that this year I didn't get any of those rashes. So maybe the water is cleaning up. But I was getting – when those lines come in, the top line and the bottom line, when you're reaching over to pull a fish out and you're rubbing on the line, I was winding up with these rashes right where your arm would hit it. I even had to go to the doctor and get some kind of cream to make it go away. Yeah, that was expensive. That was a good couple of hundred dollars to go see the doctor.

NS: So if you had to look at your income, say you made twenty-thousand one year, what did you make after Sandy? How much did it change percentage-wise? I'm not looking for actual numbers.

JS: Actually, you might say the only clamming I did was on the *Day Star*. So the only money I had coming in was from that company I worked for.

NS: Was it half what you would normally make, three quarters?

JS: Oh, it was probably twenty percent of what I normally make.

NS: Wow.

JS: I really didn't make any money. When I did my income taxes that year, my accountant said it's considered a loss because you really have no – the money that it cost you for gas in your car and your other expenses – you still have expenses. You still have boatyard bills and stuff like that. He said it cancels out whatever you made. So it actually was the first year in my life that I kind of made nothing.

NS: How about now? How was this last year?

JS: Well, fishing-wise, there really hasn't been any income. Fishing is, since the storm, five percent of my income. Most of my income now is strictly from clamming. Actually, since the storm, they closed all waters where when they reopened it, we only got back about fifty percent

of our area. They never really reopened all the area that we had. About forty to fifty percent of the area has been closed since that storm, I would say.

NS: Before Sandy, most of your income was from fishing as opposed to clamming, and now is it totally reversed?

JS: Now it is definitely totally reversed. Now it's just from clamming, and that's it. That's why I go every minute I can, seven days a week. Because then you get the cold weather in the winter, and it holds you back. Pouring rainy days when the wind's blowing really hard – too hard to work. Two days ago, it was very windy. It wasn't rainy. It was just very, very windy. Made it tough. I'm no spring chicken anymore. That adds to it. [laughter]

NS: Which do you like doing more, fishing or clamming?

JS: I like fishing more. I love clamming, don't get me wrong. But fishing, you just never know what's going to come up in the net. You just don't know. One year I was fishing; I was picking a bluefish out of my net. This is way before the storm. The next fish coming up was a weakfish, and as I was picking out the weakfish, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a big eyeball. I looked, and it was a giant striped bass. That thing was so big. I remember an old-timer told me, "Never look a big striped bass in the eye." Because you make eye contact with a big striped bass, and they go crazy. They start kicking, and they just go nuts. I'll never forget that; he told me that when I was a little kid. So I couldn't look at the fish. I didn't want to lose it. He wasn't really stuck in the net too good. He was just stuck by the side of his gill. When the net comes up to the back of the boat, it's like in the shape of a tube because you got the floats on one side. Then all the webbing is hanging down. Then on the other side is the lead line. So the fish was on top. He was inside the tube coming up. He wasn't hanging off the bottom. When he finally – as the net was coming out of the water, that fish kicked. He felt himself coming out of the water, and he kicked and turned. When he turned, his head disappeared in the water before his tail came around. He had to be somewhere between six and seven feet long. I remember that night when I got home, I went to my catalog because I said, I'm catching that fish next year. I ordered webbing that was so big, big webbing, and made this net in my living room over the winter. It was ten-inch mesh. Two weeks after I made the net, the New York State DEC [Department of Environmental Conservation] came out with the law, no targeting striped bass with anything bigger than eight-inch mesh. [laughter] I said, "Oh man, now I can't put this net in the water." You're allowed to catch sharks with it, but you cannot catch striped bass with it.

NS: Can you talk a little bit about the damage to your boats and your nets, all of your equipment from the storm? What happened?

JS: Well, luckily, I didn't get any damage to my nets, and I put my boat at a marina with very high poles that you tie up to because I knew the storm wasn't going to go twenty feet high. Then the guy who owned the marina said, "Sure, you can take any slip you want because all the boats are coming out of the water." They started taking all the boats out of the water thirty-six hours before the storm got here. All the boats that were on land in the boatyard floated all over the place. They weren't stacked high enough. My boat was in the water, and I couldn't believe it made it. The only thing that got damaged was the back of the boat because one of the floating docks broke loose and kept hitting the back of my boat. But it didn't sink, and I got lucky

because that was a fairly new motor in that boat. I think the motor in the boat was only two or three years old at the time; didn't have many hours on it. My little boat, my clamming boat, I just tied a long line to the dock, and I threw all these anchors in the middle of the canal, and I just left it tied to the anchors. When I was able to get down here because I couldn't get down to the property until about – it was a full – it was another full tide. The storm hit at night around ten, eleven at night. Ten, eleven in the morning, the streets were all flooded again. So we couldn't get down here. I think it was about, by twelve, 12:30, I could get down here. That was the following morning after the storm. There was my little garvey still floating out in the middle of that canal. I couldn't believe it. [laughter] It didn't sink either. So I lucked out with that. But everything else on my property floated all over the neighborhood, and it took me a week to get it back.

NS: Tell me about some of those things that were on your property.

JS: I just got a load of lumber because I was getting ready to build a shed. They were all twenty-foot-long pieces of wood, and there were seventy-five of them. Each piece of wood must weigh almost three hundred pounds. They were very wide and very thick. That wood went all over the neighborhood. It was everywhere.

NS: Were you able to get any of it back?

JS: I got back every piece. I got seventy-four pieces. I got back everything but one piece. It took me a week to get it back here because I tied a line to each piece, tied it to the back of my pick-up truck and dragged them back, and stacked them up. Before that storm, I tied everything. I tied a lot of ropes around everything and it to the neighbor's fence. But when they floated, it didn't seem to matter, and the wind – I did lose a brand-new fishing net. It was actually a spearing net for spearing at the end of the summers, which I haven't done since that storm, since before the storm. That net went – it crossed the canal, and I didn't know it when it crossed the canal. The lady across the canal wound up cutting it up into pieces and hanging it on her fence. She waited four or five months to do it. I was coming in from clamming one day when I saw my net hanging on her fence. She cut it up into pieces. She made decoration out of it. It was a brand new net. Spearing haven't been good, catching spearing, because that's something I do for a month and a half at the end of each summer.

NS: What do you use to catch spearing?

JS: A seine net. It's not a very long net. I think that my new net was sixty feet long, six feet deep, and it had a six-by-six-by-six bag. The bag was eight feet deep, but it was six feet top to bottom and six feet side to side. But it went back eight feet. I actually couldn't afford to buy a new one lately. But from what I hear, the other guys aren't catching many anyway. Spearing you could sell as bait or food because I used to sell a lot of it as food because I used to catch a lot and sell it in bulk. It was a lot easier, a lot less work to sell it as food than in bait. You didn't have to package it in little packages. Just make ten, fifteen-pound units out of it. That was a good part of my living, too, really for about a month and a half. I started doing that when I was a little kid out of a thirteen-foot boat. I did that every year for years and years. I started doing that – I've done that for forty-three years. So you might say I did it for forty because I haven't done it in three years. I started doing that when I was, like, thirteen.

NS: Wow. So you lost that brand new fishing net. Did you lose any other things? Any traps or rakes or tools that you used?

JS: You know I did lose other things, and at first, I didn't realize what I lost because stuff floated away. It was, like, out of sight, out of mind. And then, as time went on, I realized, "Where is this?" I realized, "Oh, it's been gone since the storm."

NS: What were some of those things?

JS: I had a freezer. I had a flip-top freezer that God knows where that went. I had a big plastic tub that I usually used to store nets in when I change nets on the boat. I'd put them in this big tub. That was gone. I can't remember right now everything that was gone. But I had a box of floats to start making a new net. That was gone. The lead lines all stayed. That didn't move anywhere because they're meant to sink. What else did I lose?

NS: What about any rakes or any tools?

JS: Not in the sense that – tools, yeah. I had tools that the saltwater ruined, but not that they drifted away. But there were a few things ruined. Luckily, I didn't have electric on the property yet because the water went higher than – the water on this property was about six feet high. It was just a little over my head.

NS: So let's talk about your home. What happened to the apartment where you were living?

JS: That's a whole other story. [laughter]

NS: Well, let's hear it.

JS: I forgot about that. Well, that got trashed. That got washed out with the storm.

NS: Well, why don't you describe where you were living and where it was.

JS: I was living on the other side of town. My girlfriend was in Florida at the time.

NS: What street?

JS: I was way down the end of Guy Lombardo, overlooking Hudson Canal. You could see the [inaudible] Bridge. You were right up by the Meadows. Matter of fact, you were so far out into the bay where we lived that those ospreys came down and actually swooped up one of our cats. Took our cat. But that was after the storm. So the house was trashed. You couldn't stay in it.

NS: Did you evacuate before the storm?

JS: No. I evacuated for the storm itself. I knew I wasn't going to stay there.

NS: Where did you go?

JS: But I went up to – I went up into North Freeport. Not that far north, but I had a friend that lived up there, and I spent the storm with him and his girl. Boy, the water came pretty close to

his house too. About a hundred feet to his house. Never went in his basement. Must be a nice high piece of land there. You don't realize it until you're looking at all the water and seeing what's underwater and what's above water. Because only about two blocks away down the street, the cars were underwater, completely underwater. If you went three blocks another direction, some cars were floating around. But the house got destroyed. It got trashed.

NS: Now, was it a house? Was it a condo?

JS: It was a condo co-op type.

NS: Like a townhouse?

JS: Yeah, that kind of building. A community of houses, and nobody was there after. But I actually stayed for another three weeks. I was using the barbeque. I was cooking all the food in my freezer. I had to run everything on a generator. There was no electricity. It was starting to get cold. I told my girl, "Stay in Florida. There's no point in coming here." There was no gas at the gas stations. I was riding my bicycle. Good thing before the storm, I bought fifty gallons of gas. I filled up my truck. I filled up gas jugs because I didn't realize they were going to close the waters for clamming. So I wanted to have – I just wanted to have extra gas. I just didn't know. I filled up all the jugs I had. We couldn't get gas for, I think, around three weeks. I was afraid to use up my gas, so I was riding my bicycle. Then we had a snowstorm.

NS: Now, was your house physically – what happened to the house?

JS: Well, it didn't fall down. The bottom – the water was – luckily, we were on high ground there too. The water was about thirty inches, twenty-four to thirty inches in the bottom of the house, where it ruined all the sheetrock, and there was mold everywhere in all these units. I was in an upstairs apartment, so I got lucky that way. But coming down the staircase, everything else was just ruined. It ripped off the outside of the building. Next thing you knew, raccoons were coming in and cats. Like I said, it was just – I was living off of a generator and candles. Oh my god, I burned so many candles. There was so much looting going on that one night my cat woke me up. Somebody was shaking the front door. I got up quick, and I saw a shadow going. There was nobody in that whole entire community. I was the only one there. I was not leaving. Three weeks later, when it got down to about thirty-two degrees, I said, "All right. Well, I guess I had enough." I actually rented a house in Elmont. The only thing good about that was I was closer to the Fulton Fish Market. But there was no fish to catch where I'd sell the fish. So that took about, oh god, we weren't back in that house until around June. About June, I think we finally were able to get back in. But the piles of garbage were everywhere – twelve feet high. I mean, piles of garbage were high. They were higher than twelve feet in some spots. They were just bulldozing everything into piles. It was a living nightmare. Something I never want to experience again because besides the waters being closed for clamming, you couldn't even drive through town. There were boats in the roads everywhere. It took a couple of weeks for bulldozers to get rid of boats. There were boats blocking people's front doors. Boats that knocked down fences. It was devastation. The more you think about it, the more you remember. Actually, basically what I did was I was just going around town helping people out for the next year. Helping old people with stuff, some friends that are old. Then there were a lot of old people that didn't have the strength or the money to clean out their houses, and their houses

wound up being condemned. Even a year later, because we had a storm – I think it was called Irene, a year before that storm. I remember one lady's house; they put all the garbage in these big Hefty garbage bags, big contractor bags. After Sandy, all that stuff was never taken away, and everything was just still filled with water. It was a living nightmare. Even my customers, some of my restaurant customers where I've sold clams to, their restaurants were destroyed. So they weren't using clams the following year because they needed to rebuild. It was only my customers that were away from the water that were still operating. That was bad. That was really bad. It seems like nothing really has come back since. I guess, in a way, the storm really – it's just not a coincidence. The storm really did have a big effect on it.

NS: One of the things we can talk about is, have you seen similar changes after other big storms in the past? Like, the '92 northeastern, that's one of the ones that I'm thinking of.

JS: Yeah, the '92 northeastern didn't really – that wasn't bad. Yeah, the water was up a few feet, but it didn't have an effect. It didn't hurt fishing, as far as I was concerned. Didn't hurt clamming. Same thing with Gloria back in – what was that? – '85 or '88. It didn't really have an effect. I was fishing two days after Hurricane Gloria. There was still a big swell in the ocean, but I was catching fish like crazy. Didn't seem to affect it like this. That was a big storm too, that Gloria. That was a big storm. Those swells in the ocean were big. But I guess the storm came at a different angle. It actually didn't – the center of the storm came up through Amityville. It didn't hit the corner, what I call the corner, the Jersey Shore into Long Island, where it all gathered together. It stacked up. It made the waves stack up because they were coming like a bus hitting a wall. It all came together in the corner. So it made the waves so much bigger.

NS: Are there places where you used to be able to go clamming that you can't anymore because of debris or things that are still in the bay? Can you talk a little bit about –? Because I've heard stories about cars ending up in the bay and oil tanks, a lot of different things.

JS: There were a lot of things. There were boats tied to floating docks that broke away. There were oil tanks. There was so much debris, so much wood, and Styrofoam and life jackets and – oh my god, they brought in this kind of boat that had a ramp that came down that was pulling up on the beaches. Guys were getting off of this big fifty or sixty foot, maybe seventy foot, I don't know, with machines. There were crews of guys from FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] cleaning out – just cutting down trees so they can make paths to clean all this debris out. It just filled up the sides of the parkways.

NS: I'm talking about in the bay.

JS: Well, the parkways run through the bay, really, when you think about it. The one parkway runs right across Green Island. You got the Wantagh Parkway that goes across the islands. All this stuff, since the parkway's higher, all gathered up on each side. Even bay houses were washed away. One bay house that sticks out in my mind broke off on outgoing tide. When the tide changed incoming, it got washed way up to the north. That was up alongside the Loop Parkway. Down in [inaudible] Creek were ten houses. After the storm, there were only five left standing. Five just disappeared. Except for that one that was up against that Loop Parkway. It definitely had an effect where the deep water is and where the sandbars were, and sandbars still are. But it also washed the sand off a lot of these bars and filled in areas where the water used to

be deep. It's not as deep. It changed the coastal line, you might say, the different – what that word is, like outline.

NS: The habitat.

JS: Yeah, the habitat. There haven't been any killies [killifish] in the water since. The guys trying to catch killies – there haven't been any. I'm hoping that spearing – I mean, we always hope for stuff, but I'm hoping that spearing and killis come back for this next spring or summer season.

NS: What about the horseshoe crabs?

JS: Horseshoe crabs, well, horseshoe crabs migrate. They say that they spawn mostly down in Delaware. I'm not really sure how true that is because this year – horseshoe crabs and clams – and this year is one of the years that I've seen the most baby horseshoe crabs – just this past summer. Even up until now, I see these little baby horseshoe crabs. Not as thick as in the summer. Because I think they do go out the inlets and start to swim in the ocean. They do head south. Any horseshoe crabs that were in the ocean when that storm was coming got washed and turned, and I'm sure a lot of them died because anything that was in that water got tossed around. Nothing would have withstood it. Years ago, I know areas, even up to this day, where I won't pull my clam rig because I know where they bed down, all the little babies. I could just fill up my clam rig with them. So I stay away from those areas. Even if I come across a new area where they've bedded down, if I make one or two grabs and I see I'm catching horseshoe crabs, I won't stay there. I move.

NS: I know you talked about how the offshore clam boat –

JS: But there's billions. There are literally billions of baby horseshoe crabs.

NS: You were talking before about how the offshore clam boat now goes further east. Are you doing that with your gillnet boat?

JS: I'm not going that far. I go as far as Fire Island lately. Go down to the inlet, maybe a little past Fire Island Inlet.

NS: Had you ever been there before with your gillnet boat?

JS: As a teenager, yeah. I've been down that way. But I guess in the last thirty years, I really haven't traveled that far. You didn't have to. You didn't need to go that far. When you're a kid, you like to explore. So yeah, we used to travel. When we were younger, we used to make – the grass is always greener on the other side. So you figure the further you go, the more you're going to catch. But it doesn't work like that. But now it's back to heading down that way again. It's going east again. The water is cleaner over that way.

NS: So are you going there more often now?

JS: Yeah. That's what I do now; I travel that way. It's a lot more in fuel, a lot more time and hours, a lot more ice, a lot more expense, a lot more hours on the engine, a lot more complaining crew. [laughter]

NS: Speaking of crew, have you – do you work alone? Do you work with other people sometimes?

JS: I work alone a lot. But I do like having somebody else on the boat. It's always good to have another person on the boat. I always try to bring somebody else. It's a long way to where we go fishing now. So I'll probably travel fifteen miles. What's bad about that is when the weather turns bad, it's a long ride home if the weather's not your way.

NS: Well, I think we've covered pretty much all the things that I would like to talk about. Are there some more things that you would like to share?

JS: Well, you want to know something funny? If you didn't ask me these questions, I wouldn't have realized how much of an effect it really did have. Strange the way that works.

NS: Are there things you would do differently if you knew a similar storm was coming?

JS: Oh, you bet. [laughter]

NS: What are some of the things you would do?

JS: I would take both – well, I don't even know if I would take them out of the water. You want to know? I was safer by having them in the water. I mean, my little boat, I could get on a trailer and move it away from – go further north on the island, up higher ground. My fishing boat, I would probably do the same thing because I hope that I'll never see another storm like that in my lifetime again. But everything on land here, I would have to get off the ground, get up higher. Gee, I just – it's too soon. I don't even want to think about another storm. I don't know what I'm going to do about fishing. If fishing doesn't get better in the next couple of years, I don't know what to expect anymore. Nowadays, there's so many rules and regulations. They never say, "Okay, we're taking away your fishing license because you can't go fishing anymore." They don't do it that way. They do it where when the fish are here, if there's any fish here, you're not allowed to catch them then. But after the fish is gone and may be over by Rhode Island, then it's, like, "Okay, now you can catch it." And as soon as – it's very, very unfair; they make you fill out these trip reports. You're teaching people that sit at the desk what took you all your life to learn, and that's the part that really irks me the most because it's not like you put a certain size net in the water, and you're going to catch that certain kind of fish. It just doesn't work like that. To people, that may appear – that may seem like this is the way things work. It doesn't work – fishing and clamming doesn't work as saying, OK, I'm going to get in my car, and I'm going to drive to Dairy Barn or 7-Eleven, and I'm going to buy a quart of milk. It doesn't work like that. That you can say exactly how you're going to do it. Fishing isn't like that. By mailing in all these fishing trip reports, it's you're telling them what you do during the day, which is really private as far as I'm concerned. Then they make new laws according to the data that you're sending them. That is just wrong. That is just so, so wrong. Now, out on the water, they are starting to enforce – they want me to keep my logbook on the boat. Now when I'm out clamming, I need to write down on a tag – first of all, my name and my clam license number is

stamped on a waterproof tag. Then that day, I have to put the date on it, the area where I harvested the clams, what kind of clams – chowders, cherries, top necks, littlenecks. So I have to sort through my clams, and I have to count them and separate them. You could say quarter bushel, half-bushel, whole bushel. Or you could say hundred, two hundred, or three hundred. So now, to me, that's on paper; that's a form of a log. But instead, they still want you to have a notebook on the boat. So when it's pouring rain, or it's so cold you can't bend your fingers, they expect you to write down on paper, which is so stupid. You have to fill out all this stuff. It's just wrong. The tag itself is a form of a log. Why do I need to bring a book out? Then they give me an answer, well if it's raining, you go to Staples, and you buy what you call write-in-the-rain paper. Yeah, just what I need, another expense, special pencils, and special paper so I can write in the rain like a jerk. [inaudible]

NS: I thank you for sharing this very important information, your experiences, your observations. This is critical information for both the historical record as well as for people who want to know more about commercial fishermen and what happened during Sandy. If there's anything else you'd like to share that relates, that people don't know about what happened during Sandy – I know we've talked about some of the storms you got caught in right after Sandy, the snowstorm. So we've recorded that.

JS: I'll never forget it; I was riding my bicycle, trying to save gas in my truck. By the time I got here, there was four inches of snow on the ground. It was freezing, slipping, and sliding.

NS: How many fishermen are still on the water before Sandy and after Sandy from Freeport and this general area? Do you think we've lost people who used to work on the water?

JS: Yeah, I would say. I would say. I mean, a couple of the guys are getting older. One guy did die. But there's definitely less people. You go out in the ocean; you don't even see birds flying around. Used to see birds. You don't even see birds. You don't really see many people fishing. You don't see that many. You would think that you would do better because now there's less people. There's less people because there's less fish. Fish is like a magnet; it draws people. But I always keep thinking that next year is going to be better. That's the way my whole life's been. It's going to get better. It's going to get better.

NS: I hope you're right.

JS: Yeah, it will. I'll have those good days again.

NS: Well, I thank you very much for participating in this interview.

JS: You know how when you know you had a good day fishing? When you go home and take a shower, and when you come out, you still smell like a fish. [laughter] That's how you know you caught a lot of fish that day.

NS: Well, let's hope for more of those days. Okay. So that concludes this interview.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 7/10/2022