

Nancy Solomon: Well, my name's Nancy Solomon. What's your name?

Jim McKearn: I'm Jim McKearn.

NS: For the record, sir.

Milt Miller: I'm Milt Miller.

NS: Today is May 5th, 1997.

JM: [inaudible] I told them that thirty years ago.

NS: Now, where are the biggest problems [unintelligible]?

JM: In [unintelligible] Island.

NS: In Peconic Estuary, running Gardiner's Bay, East Hampton Bay.

JM: Peconic Estuary.

NS: Peconic Estuary is between the North and the South coast, Gardiner's Bay, Light Point, Albert's, [unintelligible], Planter's Bay, all the different parts on the inside of the two ports. Over the years in your travels, where has been the biggest problems with the runoff and dumping [unintelligible]?

JM: Well, that's been done for years. Every creek and [redacted] needs to be cleaned up.

NS: Did you see it happening in particular times or has it been going on for a very long time? When is your first memory finding a lot of garbage on the different creeks?

JM: It's been going on for a long time.

NS: How long ago? How old were you? What year was it when you first remember seeing somebody just dump a bunch of stuff in or coming across a [unintelligible].

JM: Everybody used to dump stuff. It wasn't certain people. Everybody dumped.

NS: I'm not trying to pinpoint anybody. I'm just trying to get a picture of how long it's been going.

JM: Well, it's pretty hard to say. I would say probably during World War II, [unintelligible] ship sunk and everything else. If they look right now and see an oil tank with some [unintelligible] and the oil started spreading around like it was during World War II, we would be up in arms. I think if you have oil coming out of the ocean there would probably be oil coming to the bay, isn't it?

NS: Are there particular parts of the bay where there's more garbage?

JM: [■] [laughter]

NS: Gardiners is the only clean place around you figure?

JM: No. That isn't as bad as that. A lot of people just don't [inaudible] to me, that's a lot of political war. What little [unintelligible] look what they have done. You know how much pollution is probably up in that river that they isn't telling you about.

NS: Have you seen other things around like a riverbed or [unintelligible] where there's been a lot of industrial pollution?

MM: Well, it's not really a big industry on that river, is there now?

NS: Where have you seen it?

JM: What?

NS: Industrial kind of stuff.

JM: I don't know where the hell [unintelligible].

MM: I wouldn't call it industrial. I would call it homeowners.

JM: These people see stuff and holler about it. What the hell they are talking about.

MM: The houses on the margin of the river and also the bays.

JM: There are very few industries we got anyway around the river and the bay.

MM: It's actually the runoff from the homes that goes into the cesspool and leaches into the soil.

JM: [inaudible] from farmland and lawns and stuff like that [unintelligible].

MM: That's a good point.

NS: When did you first start to notice it?

JM: What? The –

NS: The runoff?

JM: Well [unintelligible]

MM: Also, they sprayed in the fifties, DDT. It wiped out a lot of –

NS: Where did they spray it?

MM: All the salt marshes to get rid of the mosquitoes.

JM: All the way up from here to river [unintelligible].

NS: How often would they be spray? Do you know?

JM: Oh my God, they sprayed [unintelligible].

NS: Was it every day?

JM: Well, I don't know about that, but –

NS: What do you remember? How often would they be sprayed?

MM: Well, as I understand, there's still trace of it in the salt marsh and the salt –

NS: But how often were they spraying when they were really –

MM: I couldn't give you a clue.

JM: Well, every time there was a bug, all these people would come out here and holler that there were mosquitos. Then they would put [laughter] and start spraying. So, they couldn't stand the mosquito buzz.

NS: So, like once a week, once a month, a couple of times a week for –

JM: People like that, you could do without them. Because we don't need them around. They can't stand a mosquito.

NS: So, when you're talking about the spraying, how would they spray it?

MM: They sprayed [unintelligible] mostly.

JM: But I remember the time after World War Two that the DDT was so powerful, that's what killed all the soft clams. I was one of the ones that first [unintelligible]. We took the county to court and mosquito [unintelligible]. We did that about thirty years ago.

NS: You say you noticed it with the soft clams. What happened to the soft clams?

JM: Not only the soft clams, crabs, and everything. It just killed off everything before we got it stopped.

NS: Where was this? Where were you harvesting at that time?

JM: All over the bay. I went from Peconic Bay to Montauk Point to Florida, the same way. The whole Lincoln coast in North Carolina and Long Island.

MM: All forms of life suffered from it. From bird life, all sprays.

JM: All sprays. Lost a lot of songbirds.

NS: So, how many bushels of soft clams were you getting in those days? How much –

JM: How many there were?

NS: Yes.

JM: [laughter] We used to get wagon loads of them [unintelligible].

MM: I can recall in the seventies, they sprayed for the gypsy moths which almost just destroyed the Blue Jay population here on Long Island. They were decimating because one of their main sources of food was the gypsy moth caterpillar. I'm sure that [talking simultaneously]

JM: You know what's the trouble? Most people are doing this stuff now these do goodies. They don't know a damn thing but they want to get their name in the paper. Where were they thirty years ago? I told them at an outdoor meeting one night. We had all [unintelligible] the government's going to pay you a bunch of money for the cleanup. Everybody jumps in on it. Everybody gets all this money but the [unintelligible].

NS: When they started spraying the DDT, how many bushels of clams were you harvesting a day?

JM: How many could you get a day? [unintelligible] you couldn't get five or six clams after they started spraying DDT.

NS: Do you remember what year this was? This is like right after World War Two?

JM: I don't know. Yes. That's when they started the stuff with the DDT. [unintelligible] [laughter] [unintelligible]

NS: Were there other things that they were spraying?

JM: Well, they used to take that DDT, mix it with [unintelligible] and put it in the [unintelligible].

MM: I have an interesting comment to make.

NS: Go on.

MM: All the runoff from the roads leads to all the estuaries and streams.

JM: Yes.

MM: There's oil throughout all the road systems around here. It's a shame. All the drains run right into the bay system.

NS: When were those drains built?

JM: There's a river right here when you go down –

NS: When were the drains from the –

JM: – runs right into the back.

NS: When were they put in?

JM: What drains?

NS: The drains from the roads. They go into the bay.

JM: Oh, I don't know. They don't go into the bay. They just spray them until they overflow.

MM: Then they run off from the overflow down the road into the drain.

NS: So, do you remember when they started putting in those drains? You probably do.

JM: I don't. Well, the only other thing –

NS: What were some of the things you have been doing over the years? Some of the –

JM: What did you say?

NS: What were some of the shellfish that you harvested over the years?

JM: What were they? All kinds of shellfish.

NS: I know. But what did you harvest?

JM: [inaudible]

NS: What kinds of clams did you –

JM: [unintelligible]

MM: Quahog.

JM: – quahog.

MM: Piss clams.

NS: [unintelligible], right, the piss clams.

JM: [unintelligible]

NS: When did you start working on the bay?

JM: The day I was born, I guess, eighty years ago. [unintelligible] you were a pain in the ass today. [unintelligible]

NS: You told me to come today, so I came today. [laughter] That's okay.

JM: You're a bad [unintelligible]

NS: [laughter] Just better at the job.

JM: You're like this estuary people. You get out there to a meeting and they talk up a storm and they don't even know what the hell they're talking about.

NS: Well, I'm not doing the talking, you are.

JM: No. But I [unintelligible]. Now, this looks pretty good.

NS: Now, when you would go clamming, what kinds of tools would you use? Would you go treading? Would you go tonging?

JM: I've done every single of those. You don't have to make big enough [unintelligible].

NS: Yes.

JM: You got big iron up there. That's the right clam. The reason I go clamming with big rakes. I used to rake clams. [unintelligible] everything we got, scallops, clams. I've done everything.

NS: I guess when you were using the dredge they were mostly in the deep water?

JM: Yes, deep water.

NS: What were your favorite parts of the bay for clam?

JM: Well, you never had no favorite parts. You had to go where the clams were.

NS: Where was that?

JM: They don't always stay in the same place every year.

NS: Where were some of the places that you harvested?

JM: Oh, Montauk Point, Gardiners Bay, all over. I think all over the whole bay, all over Long Island. I couldn't name any place I haven't gone. Old guy I am, I guess I have discovered places. [laughter] I have walked all over Long Island.

NS: I heard you say that it was in the deep water. How far off from the coastline was it?

JM: What, the clamming?

NS: Yes.

JM: I think, the first one that I've ever fixed a clam [unintelligible].

MM: – and the freshwater mixture.

NS: Yes, I know. Where have you found the salinity to be the strongest, the most favorable for clamming?

MM: I would say with freshwater influx either through spring water, ground water, or a fresh water source coming in from the pond.

NS: Can you give me a for instance, in your travels?

MM: I'd say near the mouths of all the estuaries.

JM: That's where we all like to end up in the estuaries.

NS: Are you talking about the mouth of all the streams that come out into the estuary?

MM: No, about where it meets the bay.

NS: – back about ten years ago. Or is that the same place where you were getting clams then as you are now?

MM: I have been clamming for ten, twenty years.

NS: What about you, Jimmy?

JM: I don't do clamming now.

NS: Where were you getting clams ten, fifteen years ago?

MM: Great South Bay.

NS: You were working in Great South Bay?

JM: There you get clams all over.

NS: I'm talking about in the Peconic Estuary. Where were you finding –

JM: Well, the Peconic Estuary takes in a lot of clams.

NS: – clams and scallops? What were the best places to –

MM: I would say in mud flats and mud bottom.

NS: Any particular parts of the estuary? Which areas were you working in?

JM: All of them, forty-five. Now that makes –

NS: Was it around East Hampton in this area?

MM: Well, another thing is the houses on the estuaries. Everyone dumps ammonia, phosphates, [inaudible] all kinds of chemicals [inaudible]. It all leaches out to the bay.

NS: What happens in the bay? I know that there aren't as many clams or scallops or any of the shellfish. What else has happened in the bay from all of those wonderful activities?

MM: All species are being depleted because of the pollutants. The development on the estuaries [unintelligible].

JM: They still develop. [unintelligible] put that development –

NS: Is there any particular development, for instance, that springs to mind that really started accelerating the decline?

JM: Besides road [unintelligible] all the runoff from the rain and storm runoff directly into the harbor. That's why they pipe everything now. First thing you do is pipe the lawn right down in the harbor right off the road. They need a car built or truck or another that doesn't leak a certain amount of oil. Soon as it rains, all that oil runs off the road and [unintelligible].

NS: When did they first start closing off the bay after?

JM: I don't know. They closed off [unintelligible].

NS: From the time that you first started working the bay or –

JM: No, we never had them.

NS: So, when did that –

JM: Hey, do you know what the DEC was like when I first started?

NS: What?

JM: There wasn't DEC. There was conservation department like it should be right now. The DEC right now is one of the worst Gestapo's Hitler ever had.

NS: Well, you don't have to tell me that.

JM: Hitler had to have them for his SS troops.

NS: So, how old were you when they started saying you can't go clamming after then? How old were you?

JM: That hasn't been that long ago. Since the DEC got involved. Just figure out when they took power.

NS: Give me a year. [laughter]

JM: Let me tell you what.

NS: I'm trying to get a timeline here. [laughter]

JM: Hey, I remember my first clam license [unintelligible] license to start. You know why you had to get it? Because you got [unintelligible] those days, they didn't have too much of a cure for –

MM: Hepatitis.

NS: For TB.

JM: TB, right? So, if you didn't pass, it was going to cost you \$2 to get a physical examination that gave you the license to catch clam, which made some sense. All the damn sense. Now I got about fourteen different licenses to work on the water. The only damn thing they do is they shove money in the DEC's pocket so they can put laws and regulations against the people that are paying the license. I'll tell you that. [unintelligible]. But now after you get –

NS: I want you to really think when did they start closing off after?

JM: I don't know.

NS: How old were you? Were you an adult? Did you have –

JM: I don't know. We didn't have the waters closed off here that long.

NS: Like twenty years?

JM: Different areas, yes. [unintelligible] we didn't have that much.

NS: So, when did they first start closing it off?

JM: [unintelligible]

NS: How long ago were they starting to close things off?

JM: How long ago?

NS: Yes. Was it ten years, twenty?

JM: The first time I ever heard that was probably about twenty-five years ago, probably, twenty years ago. But –

NS: Something had just happened that made them start closing it off?

JM: No. They just do that anyhow. They got a bunch of drips in there that close go off anytime you feel like it. They make laws [unintelligible].

NS: But the first time that they closed it, had something happened?

JM: Not that I know it, but –

NS: You remember seeing anything that happened twenty-five years ago that would've –

JM: – warranted it, you mean?

NS: Yes.

JM: No, not me. I don't know.

NS: Were there any big oil spills in the estuary?

JM: No. They just do that to show power. It's a Gestapo outfit. The [unintelligible] people in New York State should realize that that's the biggest Gestapo outfit [unintelligible] started from Hitler. Started in Germany.

NS: What was the worst thing you ever saw happen in the estuary in the bay? What was the worst thing you ever saw?

JM: Outboard motors. First outboard motor made was most detrimental thing that ever

happened to the water.

NS: You use outboard motors though.

JM: Of course everybody uses one. Hell, I got a car, too. But I don't have a horse and wagon. When I was a kid, they had a horse and wagon. You think it had any pollution? The horse would take a shit on the road [unintelligible] take a leak and the sun would dry it off. Now a car goes down the road and leaks the oil out and runs into the bay. So, we aren't going to go back to a horse and wagon, are we?

NS: I was just asking.

JM: All right. [laughter] Hey, two thirds of the damn people hollering about all this pollution and stuff don't own one car. They own three or four. Those are the people that are bitching and hollering about pollution. You know that? The same people bitching and hollering about it are the same people that are doing all the damn polluting. They all own outboard motors and these big boats that are putting – did you know that on the East Coast of the United States every year, there's enough oil put in the water through outboard motors. Outboard motors, two-stroke engine. Did you know that?

NS: No, I didn't.

JM: Every time they go ahead – the only reason that they put the – the oil is mixed in with gasoline. It isn't like a regular inboard engine. That lubricates but it goes out through the exhaust. Now we figured that out ten years ago [unintelligible 00:23:52]. Now the East Coast of the United States, there's as much oil put into the water through outboard motors, two-stroke outboard motors, that that oil spill raised much hell up in Alaska. That went down. It's hard to believe. But you know how many millions outboards there are in the East Coast of the United States? Millions of them.

NS: Do you see a lot around here?

JM: Let me tell you about outboard motor. A twenty-five-horse outboard motor uses a pint of oil to every five gallons. It goes direct into the water. That oil isn't being put in the base of like a car engine. It runs right out into the back. Now, what's happened? Now, you got motors that –the first motor had about a three horse. Now they're up to 300 horsepower. They have two of them on a boat. They're pushing through 300 gallons of gas a day mixed with the oil. So, if you put a pint to every six gallons, how much oil do you think one boat can dump in the water? But you don't see it. Nobody sees it. Because that boat's going so damn fast. Just a little bit trickling in. But it'll still last. They're hollering about brown tide. They don't need to go nowhere to look for brown tide. Look for an outboard motor. You get all the brown tide you want. People make me sick. They talk about all this stuff. They don't have enough sense to realize what's actually going on. Those people are probably the ones doing the most hollering have got a boat. See this boat right here?

NS: [affirmative]

JM: That boat right there can dump about two gallons of oil, pure oil, a day right in the water. You won't see it. How many of such boats do you think there are on the East Coast of the United States?

NS: The one that's up by the [unintelligible].

JM: Yes. She got two big outboards on it.

NS: Oh, they're millions.

JM: Well, you multiply them by half a gallon of oil that they dump into the water and see how much oil is going in. You don't have to worry about brown tide. I'll tell you there's no need for the scientific knowledge that we got today. I remember the time when they built it – very simple. You know why the outboard motor companies won't change the style of the exhaust system and [unintelligible] the oil? Because they have to tool over. They make millions of dollars on the rigs that they got today because it's the same one they made fifty years ago. They haven't changed a thing. They're still dumping the raw oil right into the bay. If I went down to the bay and [unintelligible]. You do some research and –

NS: Well, I'm asking you. I – [laughter]

JM: – do some research and –

NS: – no. I don't research in the book so I got to ask you.

JM: – full cycle gas engine with an underwater draw and see how much – you run one in the tank or something and see how much oil is coming off the top [unintelligible 00:27:19] they're hollering about brown tide. They wouldn't have to holler about brown tide.

NS: Did you ever go oystering or scalloping as well?

JM: [unintelligible]

NS: What were the different places where the scallops were most plentiful?

JM: [unintelligible] were where you found them.

NS: I know. But were there certain favorite parts of the bay for you?

JM: No, not really. You go where you find scallops. You got an idea where they are from year to year but you don't have to look for them.

NS: What about oystering? How has the oystering been?

JM: Oystering [unintelligible]. Oystering went out thirty years ago. There isn't anybody who is

going to bring back the oysters because these [unintelligible].

NS: Where were the oysters?

JM: I think the people that were growing them in hatches weren't getting grants from the government. They couldn't stay in business any more than fish farmers growing fish in shrimp county. The only thing different is that a fisherman has got to go out and keep his stuff going. He doesn't have Uncle Sam to give him a grant to catch fish. Those guys are raising fish but they're raising fish [unintelligible].

NS: Well, I wasn't asking the question that this is something that's going to be brought back. The reason I was asking is because they don't understand that where oysters like to live apparently is this [unintelligible].

JM: This area down through here up to oyster valley all down through all the south was the most productive place on the East Coast one time. They shipped oysters all over the world.

NS: Were there oysters in particular parts of the bay throughout?

JM: No. They planted them oysters there. They came from Connecticut River and up – did you know they came [unintelligible] the Hudson River was so bad that they – we used to get them all the way up to West Point.

NS: Were there any natural oyster beds in this area?

JM: Yes. But you couldn't have natural oyster beds. You couldn't get [unintelligible] East.

NS: I know. But where were they?

JM: Well, there were plenty of them that used to be oyster ponds. The only place that we had left [unintelligible].

NS: Where were they before that? Before they started to die out.

JM: Where they?

NS: Yes. Where could you get oysters?

JM: Well, anywhere there's a freshwater runoff and there's lot of planks. But the trouble is the freshwater runoff today they stretch these [unintelligible] to feed. They got so much community. Three miles used to be loaded with oysters. But now they only have a trickle going out of there. No big inlet going in there. Now you got 4, 12, 14 pounds of water running in there. They keep dredging it all the time.

NS: Do you think it's the dredging that's [unintelligible] for the oysters?

JM: Well, the dredging and oysters won't grow whether it's saline or heavy salt water. They have got to have fresh water.

NS: When did they start dredging that area?

JM: Well, probably they [unintelligible] oysters around here fifty years ago. [unintelligible] except they spend more damn money on these yachts coming in.

NS: What parts of the harbor did they dredge?

JM: Well, they dredge the channel. But it brings in all the salinity, the high salinity of salt water.

NS: Was there a particular area that they dredged that used to have a lot of scallops or oysters and you could [unintelligible].

JM: Well, it really didn't matter because that's what killed off all the oysters. Oysters won't grow unless there's a freshwater system close by, natural oysters. Do you know all the oyster –

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