

## Interview with Edward “Lowell” Ockers

**Narrator:** Edward “Lowell” Ockers

**Interviewer:** Nancy Solomon

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**Project Name:** Long Island Traditions

**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 builder, and other maritime tradition bearers.

**Principal Investigators:** Nancy Solomon

**Transcript Team:** National Capital Contracting

**Abstract:** On February 3, 2004, Nancy Solomon interviewed Edward Lowell Ockers, or Lowell, as part of the Long Island Traditions Oral History Project. Ockers was born in West Sayville in 1933 and has remained a lifelong resident of the area. After serving in the Navy, he began to work on the bay, catching eels using traps purchased from his father—who had also made a living as a local bayman. During the conversation with Solomon, Ockers shares his family’s history with the local maritime industry, recalling his summers spent assisting his father with pound trap fishing. He also speaks at length on West Sayville’s former businesses and community members, including the boat builders and boatyards that operated in the region for decades. Long Island Fish Company and Bluepoints were two of the most prominent companies involved in the fishing industry during the twentieth century. Ockers discusses the processes of shucking and culling oysters as well as the reputation of major companies among local residents—especially in relation to working conditions and practices. Finally, Ockers explains his own methods of storing and selling eels and the decline of full-time baymen in West Sayville.

Nancy Solomon: This is Nancy Solomon talking with [Edward] Lowell Ockers. Today is February 5th, 2004. This is tape one, side one. So, you were telling me about the Bishop Boatyard. What do you remember? Where was it first of all?

Edward Lowell Ockers: It's still here at South Bay Boat Works now. It had the railways. Of course, that's all they had years ago. But he built boats there. He was a bunker fisherman. He had the contract out of the city to buy the tar. Anybody that had (traps?) had to go to him to buy the tar.

NS: Who are you talking about? What was his name?

ELO: His name was (Ben Bishop?). My father.

NS: Where exactly was the boatyard? What village?

ELO: It was in Patchogue. It was on the west side of the Patchogue River. Like I said before, it's where the South Bay Boat Works is today. Yes, it's still there. (Weeks?) was there and all that. They built a lot of boats down there though.

NS: What kind of boats did they build?

ELO: They built oyster boats, clam boats. Most of them were boats that you could sail years ago. Then the sailboats were converted over with engines and that type. I built all different kinds of boats. Then there was a lot of boat builders around, (them?) days.

NS: Do you remember some of the boat builders, who they were?

ELO: Over here in the Creek, West Sayville it was (Jim Lamden?). There was (Walter Lightner?) and there was (Sam Jurgensen?).

NS: (Jurgensen?), I know him.

ELO: (Jurgensen?).

NS: What time period are we talking about?

ELO: I forgot there was—before (Lamden?), there was a guy by the name of (Dykstra?). I don't know his first name.

NS: Yes. I think (Mike?) mentioned him.

ELO: Then we had—we're going back. I never remember (Dykstra?), but (Lamden?) and (Lightner?) and the (Jurgensen?), I remember those. They were there when I was a kid, sixty years ago. They're gone today. [laughter]

NS: So, we are talking like in the '40s?

ELO: Then we had (Chris Jensen's?) machine shop over there. (Chris?) was a real good machinist, and he was smart. But he drank too much. [laughter] During the war, he did something with propellers for torpedoes. There was an old type of shop where all the legs and the mills ran off of one belt. One in, one motor. Had all pulleys and belts that—the main shaft ran through the middle of the building with pulleys on it. Then it had a big old belt that ran down to the lathe. You could switch it over and make it run faster or slower. It's quite a...

NS: Where was his shop?

ELO: It was between (Sam Jurgenson's?) Boat Yard and (Lightner's?) Boat Yard.

NS: Is the building still there?

ELO: No, the building—the county finally, when they took the property over, they plowed it down.

NS: So, it was where the park land is by the museum. Is that where all of these boatyards are?

ELO: We did a lot of work over there. They put up a fence and they built a boardwalk along the water where you can walk. I only went over there with a truck and took a look because I see they were working over there. They were cutting the reeds down. I didn't hear but from what I could see, it's going to look nice.

NS: So, how big were these boat shops? What size buildings were they [inaudible]?

ELO: Well, (Sam's?) was quite big because he could build like two boats at a time in that shop. It was probably, say one building. The old part of the building maybe was forty-foot, and the other one was fifty-foot. They were built right alongside of each other.

NS: So, they were side by side.

ELO: (Jensen's?) Machine Shop, that was a long narrow building, probably twenty-foot across the front. Maybe forty-five-foot, forty foot long. (Lightner's?) too was a long high building.

NS: Now, were they Dutch background? What were their backgrounds? Do you know much about them?

ELO: (Sam?), he was Swedish. (Jensen?), I would say he was probably a German. (Lightner?), I don't know what he was, but (Lamden?) came from Maryland somewhere with his wife and two children. He had a son and a daughter. He bought (Dykstra's?) building. Then he had it right after the war, I think. Then (Sam Jurgenson?) bought it off of him.

NS: How long did these boatyards operate?

ELO: Oh God, at least sixty years.

NS: Wow.

ELO: Then (Lightner's?) burnt and then they rebuilt it. Then it was like a lobster and a clam place for a while. The co-op was in there. Then finally—I don't know whether they took the building down or they plowed it down. I think they plowed it down.

NS: When was that?

ELO: That was probably ten years ago. That building. There was also a rowboat station on the end.

NS: Yes?

ELO: Yes.

NS: Who ran that?

ELO: First it was (Ted Hill?) that started it. (Lightner?) built the rowboats for him. He sold it to (Ben Hustletop?) who was Casey's brother. I don't know his first name. He ran it for quite a while. Then a guy by the name of (Marguisse?) come along.

NS: Now, were they renting rowboats? Were they selling rowboats?

ELO: Yes. Renting rowboats.

NS: Who were the customers?

ELO: They were people. I met a guy when I worked up the airport. They came out of Sheepshead Bay, and they used to come all the way here. He knew where that boat—he told me where the thing was. That rowboat station must have been there anywhere from forty to fifty years at least. Because I was a kid when they did it. I think he started it right after the war.

NS: So, what kinds of people came?

ELO: All kinds. Then sometimes they had a power boat, and they would tow them out there on a long cable and drop them off where they wanted. Then they could row around if it was nice. But then in later years, they got small outboards they could rent. That rowboat business, there used to be a lot of them.

NS: Where were some of the other ones?

ELO: There was one in Amityville. There was one in Bayshore.

NS: Around here, were there any others?

ELO: There was one in Great River, the (Remmers'?), they had the restaurant. That's how they got started. Then there was (John McRye?) from Snug Harbor on the end of Vanderbilt Boulevard. He had one there. Then there was (Ted Hill?). Sayville there was, Brown was his name. Oh (Bill Brown?). (William Brown?).

NS: Did (Lightner?) build all the rowboats for the guys or did most of the owners build?

ELO: (Bill Brown?) used to build his own. His wife worked. I think in the later years, he never made any money there he just had it. He would rent a rowboat to like Camp Edie and he'd bring it up there in the spring, all painted it up. He probably rented it to them for a hundred dollars. They kept it all year. Then he goes back with his trailer and pick it up and bring it back. [laughter] He made some money there years ago. Of course, then they had the weakfish in a bag and you didn't have to go very far. And then (Bill?)—

NS: How many boats did a typical rental place have?

ELO: (Margie's?). He probably had twenty. But (Bill Brown?), he had more. I would say he had forty boats.

NS: Do you remember how much it cost?

ELO: It was probably cheap. Probably, you could rent a boat for four dollars a day if you wanted to row it.

NS: Did you ever work for any of these guys?

ELO: No.

NS: What did you do when you were growing up?

ELO: When I was a kid, my father had pound traps. When we were kids, we worked for him in the summer. Because it was during the war and fish were kind of demand and we'd catch a lot of weakfish. He would gut those weakfish and the blowfish would come. We had to skin them. All the nets were cotton in them years. Now, like today with the Nile on it don't hardly—it does wear out. But there was always the chafed on the poles and it was a real—all summer long we all worked for him. I remember skinning blowfish, we'd get two dollars for eighty pounds of meat and ten, twelve dollars a week we'd make, fifteen. Boy, we thought we were [laughter] but fish was cheap in them years. He'd get eighteen, twenty cents a pound for blowfish. Weakfish, they were nice sized. But I've seen them already took thirty-five boxes of fish out of one trap. They were looked like they came out of a machine. They were all the same size. [laughter]

NS: Now your father, did he do any shell fishing?

ELO: No.

NS: He was strictly a pound fisherman.

ELO: His father passed away when he was, I think, thirty-three years old. My father, he did get through like eighth grade, but then he had to go to work. So, his father had a sheer in South Bay. He worked there. My father just went to work on the water—pound fisher, when he was probably sixteen, seventeen years old then. He worked there until they sold that in '54. Because they couldn't make it pay anymore. They couldn't catch enough fish and the expenses.

NS: Did you know people who worked for Bluepoints?

ELO: Oh God. Yes. Well, upstairs there was—we used to call him old man (Mercer, Paul Mercer?) Then there was Mike Van Essendelft. There was a guy there by the name of Whip. The (Stiles?). Oh, (Andy?). Not (Tony?).

NS: Do you remember any of their stories about working for Bluepoints?

ELO: No. But their father worked there. He worked in the float room.

NS: What's the float room?

ELO: That's where, like in the winter, when you go down there, and you look at that building there's a white building.

NS: I have some pictures.

ELO: It's in here for weeks. You got that off the dock. Now, see this part here? Up here. This was the offices. In this part, underneath the offices kind of was like what they call—when they opened oysters, they used to have things in there that they were like a bubbling machine. They used to bubble them oysters all down through here. That's where they opened the oysters.

NS: The Shucking.

ELO: Shucking. Then they had this one room. It's still there, that room, if you can get in the building. That's where—and it's got an old ice. They never had refrigeration there. They always used the block ice from (Stall's?) in Sayville. (Gus Stall?) had the ice business. (Gus?) got that thing on. [laughter] That's good. That's another landmark. That's gone too. You know when you go through Sayville and you get going through Sayville and you go down under the bridge and you go past Friendly's and there's a road that goes just before you get to, there's a road that goes up that way to the right. (Stall's?) was back in there.

NS: And it was like an ice operation.

ELO: He had an ice plant there. I don't know if he made ice there or he bought it somewhere. I never seen any. I used to go there and get ice when I first—they shipped stuff. My father got ice. He delivered ice. He delivered it to Bluepoints and he put it in this big cooler where they kept the oysters when they opened them. Then when Long Island Fish Company was down where

Kingston's is down here across from this Kingston's across the street. That's where my father was. Long Island Fish Company was there too.

NS: What was the Long Island Fish Company?

ELO: Long Island Fish Company was a pound trap company that fished in the ocean. They had three traps. They was the same as Sunrise Fish.

NS: Oh okay, Doxsee's, sure.

ELO: Doxsee had one. Doxsee's, they were somewhere. Bob Doxsee's father. Bob Doxsee, you know him?

NS: Sure, I know him very well. He is a good friend.

ELO: Tell him you want to see the film.

NS: I've seen it.

ELO: You've seen it. [laughter] But he brought it. It was going back quite a while. He was going back ten, twelve years. He brought it out. He was really friendly with (McMillen?) over—used to live over here, (Joe?). We went down to the museum and probably had ten, twelve guys down here. He showed that full film on that old sixteen millimeter.

NS: Yes, sixteen millimeter right. [laughter]

ELO: But getting back. Then see this thing, this (peaked?)? That came out further and that used to have a conveyor, that belt. It went right down when the steamer come in loaded with oysters, that went on a deck. Them guys, they shoveled into that.

NS: Into the conveyor belt and it brought it inside.

ELO: It brought it up in here inside. And they used to dump it from the top. I don't know if they dumped it into a little cart and pushed the cart down. I think that's the way it worked. Pushed the little cart down and it opened on the bottom, and it went down in. Or they run it down in the bins because them guys, they just opened oysters open. But over on this side—

NS: Did you know any of the shuckers?

ELO: Oh yes.

NS: Who were some of the people you remember?

ELO: (Mr. Quake?). He lived next door. (Gabriel Quake?), he opened. There was the (Ryders?) that opened. They had a lot of them. Some of the Van Essendelfts, a lot of the Van Essendelfts,

worked in there. Then the (Stiles?). All the oysters were opened in here. Now if they had to cull oysters for the half shell trade. They went—see this peak here? This is another one—

NS: Can you back up a bit? Culling oysters for the half shell trade. What are you describing?

ELO: If two oysters were grown together, they used to—

NS: Yes. They had to separate them.

ELO: Knock them apart.

NS: And that's what they call the culling?

ELO: Culling.

NS: Oh okay, because culling fish is a whole different process.

ELO: Then they had small ones, and they had half shells. I think they had large, maybe. The big ones they called them box oysters. They were big things, old. But all those oysters went in— there was another conveyor here. That went into this part of the building, and that's where the culling was done. But this was all like offices up above here. Then if it went a little further, where that hatchery is today. (Jimmy Conkel?), he was the fixer upper or anything that broke he fixed it. He kept the place going. He had a shop there with tools and stuff. On top of that shop, they used to have a big water barrel. The old type. It had Bluepoints painted on it.

NS: Wow.

ELO: And it was white. Then further across where this goes around like this, the water.

NS: Yes, it's like a horseshoe.

ELO: Over in here, they had a big stone thing where they got the water for in the bay, because once they was in the back here with that, on this side of the building. Then over here there's a white building. But over here there's a big high pit, quite a good size piece of building. It's got a pitched roof on it. That used to be called a float room. They would take oysters that they culled that they didn't sell, or it looked like it was going to freeze. They'd put them oysters in the floats and they're cement, they're still there, they're cement. I think they had racks in the bottom of them, I'm not sure. They used to put those oysters in there and they would pump water in there and they would keep them alive until they could sell them. If the bay looked like it was going to freeze, then they'd fill the float room up. Then they'd keep shoveling and old man (Stile?). I can remember him yet, he had a fork, a big hay fork and it had a piece on the front so it didn't stab him. He'd be in there with his boots on shoveling them oysters, [laughter] smoking his pipe. [laughter] But over the years they got rid of these conveyors. They didn't have any. Then after the war when our oysters went bad, then they started getting skimmers in there. You know, surf clams?



NS: The clams.

ELO: There was a lot of guys like the (Dykstras?). They opened them and (Alan Dunn?). He was another one that opened. (Flinny?) from Sayville. (Sonny Zimmerman?) and his brother (George?). My father. They used to work in there maybe in the winter for a couple of months, just opening stuff. Then they canned them. “Forty Fathom Clams,” they called them. [laughter] About a size of a soup can. They used to put them in the cans by hand with a scoop and put a salt tablet in them. They used to go through the machine, put the lid on them. They had big racks and out on that to the east side, they had these big steam kettles. They’d cook them, you know, steam them. They had a labelling machine. But it was funny, everything went under “Forty Fathom Clams.” But say if white rose wanted some clams and they had white rose labels and [laughter] they had different labels for—

NS: For the different customers.

ELO: Whoever, I suppose if Campbell wanted, they put. They had three or four boats of their own they used to go (skimming with?). They had different guys run them. Like (Ollie Bishop?) ran one of them boats and I think (Leon Cinder?) died, he ran one of them boats for them too. Catching skimmers.

NS: Now were they just like day trips where they [inaudible]?

ELO: Yes, they would be a day trip. There was nothing for them. Catch a hundred bushel with one of them.

NS: Wow. Those were good days.

ELO: A lot of times they had a truck here. They’d unload them somewhere else and had them trucked. They would truck them here, open them. Because sometimes, like now they couldn’t get up the bay. So, the boats—they’d see the bay was going to freeze. They’d go down to the beach, lay there somewhere, maybe in the Coast Guard station and work out of there. Or they go to Doxsee’s and Freeport, or they go to (Bill Grano’s?) over there and do that too. But old Bluepoints [laughter] But then after (Cliff Aaron?), he went down south and seen that they could catch clams, soft clams [inaudible] escalating dredges like they got now. He brought one of them back here. He built one. Before they got those, they were using like a basket dredge that they would use for skimmers in the ocean. They used those. First, they went—I got ahead of my story. First, they went, there was a guy he went over to North Shore, and he watched flowers. Flowers towed a harrow behind the boat.

NS: What’s a harrow?

ELO: It’s one a farmer uses, and it’s got curved looking teeth on it. What this harrow would do—you’d pull it and it would loosen the bottom up. It would pull them clams out of the bottom.

NS: Kind of like a (clam rake?)—

ELO: Then they would harrow for two or three hours in one place. Then they put cutting board dredges on, same as they would use for oysters. Kind of. They would take the clams up. Then from there they went to these basket dredges. Like they caught skimmers with. From there they went to these escalating dredges which was, they could really—

NS: What did the escalating dredges look?

ELO: That's the one that's got a belt on it. That has a head on the bottom. It goes along and the clams come up.

NS: Were they square in shape, rectangle, oval?

ELO: They were kind of square in shape. They were built like this. Like that. It had a manifolded water pressure. That's how they penetrated the bottom, water pressure. They did the same thing with the basket dredge, but the harrows no, it was just.

NS: Now, at some point, didn't they outlaw the dredging in the bay?

ELO: Oh yes. Yes.

NS: When did that happen? Do you remember?

ELO: I don't think they ever outlawed. What you might be thinking of—right after the war, they used to drag in the bay. Had small boats. (Larry Thompson's?) father had one down here. I thought it was three or four of them. There was a guy by the name of (Skull?), he was from Bay Shore. There was numerous, say there was eight or ten of them. (Gary Layman's?) was another one. I think that's how (Harold Leach?) got in the business, dragging in the Bay. They would go fluking in the Bay during the summer. The clammers got together and they says, "well with them heavy doors that they used to have—"

NS: Right, right, to get the (clams?) open.

ELO: They would bust—they were breaking the clams and chipping the bills on them.

NS: Oh boy. So, they banned the dragger boats.

ELO: They went to Islip town and the town fathers must have seen that it was a good idea. They did away with it.

NS: So, that was in the '40s?

ELO: Yes.

NS: Well, what about the clam dredges? Because I think that at some point, they outlawed the use of motorized dredges in the bay too. No? Okay. I'm mistaken.

ELO: No, no. You might be, because up to the west there, there was a guy from—don't know if he was in Amityville or what. He made what they call stick dredges. Up in them creeks and Freeport through there, they used to—there was a small dredge, and you had a handle on, and you shoved them in the mud, and they towed them off of the (pow?). They could really catch some clams. Of course, they outlawed them, but it didn't do any good.

NS: Yes, that's what I'm remembering.

ELO: I know the fellow that built them. I'm pretty sure (Armor?) built them and he still—

NS: Now where was he?

ELO: What? Right now, he's in like West Islip. He's on the north side of the sunrise. I could find him if I have to. He makes clam tong rakes and heads.

NS: Now, when you were growing up, were there blacksmiths or welders around here that made the clam rakes? Who were some of those people?

ELO: We used to go—there was a fella in Patchogue. He was by the name of (Alexander?). I remember going—

NS: That was his last name, I'm assuming?

ELO: Yes.

NS: That's okay.

ELO: Might have been (Alex, Alexander?), I don't know. I remember (Alexander?), but anyway he made probably one of the first all-steel heads.

NS: What did you call it?

ELO: All-steel because—

NS: Hits?

ELO: Head. The head for a clam tong.

NS: Oh okay, you're talking about tongs.

ELO: You got the tongs with the wood with the bottom part with the teeth. The teeth, mostly they were made out of—they had a wooden yoke in them. You've probably seen one over at the museum. But they had these flat teeth in them. They were for oysters, but they had the ones for the clams, which they had the regular spike tooth. I only seen a couple of those, but oyster tongs, yes, I've seen a lot of those. He made a steel one, and then after him there was (Louis Monkowitz?) from Sayville. He went across the street from the movies where the beer distributor

is today. He had a big blacksmith shop in the back. He made a lot of heads. But the best one was (Milt Oakley?) from Bayshore. He was on Brentwood Road. His building is still there. He worked for somebody like (Grumman?) for Republic. He started learning how to make them in there. After the war, he started making them for all the clambers around. But from what I could see of him, he made one at a time. It was like piecework. He didn't mass produce it. Then after he died, his son took over. He never made it. He just went out of business and went.

NS: What a shame.

ELO: But then there was a guy over in Huntington. He started making them with a round bar. With the teeth welded on a round bar. I think (Georgie Klein?) got him to do that. (George?) was from Babylon. He made a lot of handles. That was his thing, making clam tong handles. He made thousands of them.

NS: Now I'm going to change our conversation back to Bluepoints. Keep in mind, we're recording this, but it's confidential. What were some of the complaints about Bluepoints as a company that you heard?

ELO: When they got into this clam business, and they would take from the bay. They would just take and put hardly nothing back. Then they got dredging clams. They had trouble getting another set of clams, and they would dredge these chowder clams up in Nyack, which was polluted. And they tried putting them in different places in the bay. They called boxes. They had one over here in the cove, and they had one off in the middle of the bay. They had a couple over towards the beach, but they were like polluted clams, and they had to watch them. Another big thing was, I presume sometimes it did work. Another big thing, they always said they never owned a property. One time they did away with all grants down in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina. But this was the only company on the Eastern Seaboard that was able to keep their grant. Why or how, I don't know. But you ask any old bayman he'll tell you they stole it. There was people like (Frank Rogers?), he had lots. They just took them right over.

NS: When you say he had lots, what did you mean?

ELO: Oyster beds that he had. It was on some of that.

NS: That weren't on Bluepoint's—part of Bluepoint's leases?

ELO: I think he had one off Bayport there, which was over the line, but I think he had some that were this way. Right in front of Sayville used to be what they called Terry's Bed. I think that was one of his lots. Was on that piece of property. They claimed that that grant came from the (Smith heirs?), who knows where it came from. That was a complaint. Another complaint was that they worked the Dutchman, they got them down here at seven o'clock in the morning, and they worked until five, six o'clock at night with the oysters. They paid them nothing. My father used to tell me, (Jake Ocker?) said—there was no relation to ours, but he used to. It was a big old grocery store down in—

NS: (Green's?).

ELO: Sayville. No, no.

NS: A different one.

ELO: Was it (Gerber's?)?

NS: Yes. That was taken over. It was originally (Green's?).

ELO: (Jake?) he used to go down and pay him on Saturday night. So, him and (Gerber?) were in some kind of cahoots together.

NS: Yes. Well, it was a company store, basically.

ELO: Yes. It was like a company store. They had to spend their money, or they did spend their money.

NS: They had to.

ELO: He'd sit on a sugar barrel, they told me. It was amazing. Well, in them years you could get away with that, I think [laughter] today you wouldn't. But it was generally—and then they said, “well, they won't get the clams out of the seaweed,” but gradually they kept going and going and going in that grass and cutting it down and cutting it down. That was one of the biggest mistakes, I think.

NS: When was that happening? In the '70s?

ELO: Yes.

NS: That's what I was just wondering.

ELO: We'd always get a set of scallops along over that. Say over there by Cherry Grove and Sailors Haven through there up to Point of Woods. God, they were way east one time. They were way on the other side of Davis Park (getting?) scallops. After that, I mean they'd get a few scallops yet in (Babylon?)—they set up there, the Southwest Sewer District. That didn't do us any good either. No. But Bluepoints they never—for being a company that could help the town, they were like (Mr. Bates?) up here. They never did any much for the town. If you went down there and you (found?) a half a bushel of clams for the fire department meeting, they'd give them day.

NS: Did a lot of the people who lived around here work for Bluepoints?

ELO: Another rumor was if you didn't go in the oyster shanties party the first of September, nobody would hire you. But then there was (Fred Oakers?), he was a better person to work for. Some of them, you'd get a winter like now, and they couldn't go clamming. But as long as they could go clamming, they could make more money clamming than they could work in the oyster

shanties. Some of the Dutch that came over here, they were real poor. Like the (Bebe's?) that lived next door to me, there was, I don't know, five or six kids. They had a garden in the back, and they ate salt pork and they pickled herring and salted them. They got through the winter that way. But everybody had to work. Of course, everybody had chickens and hogs, [laughter] eggs. Bluepoints, no. I don't know after the '50s and we got some—there was always clams in the bay. You could always make a living. Sometimes it wasn't—you get a winter like this, it wasn't good. But if the bay stayed opened you could do pretty good. Gradually, the clamming got better, and it got more of them—but today, the clams come from Florida, from the Key West to Nova Scotia. They're farm raised. They're of a certain size. They're nice looking.

NS: They are tasteless.

ELO: Yes, you're right. [laughter] They don't seem to care about that.

NS: They'll just sell anything.

ELO: It's just the looks. These clams here got a gray look to them.

NS: How many pound trap fishermen were around here?

ELO: Here?

NS: Yes.

ELO: My father and his two uncles had the Bay. The (Brandt?) brothers, I don't ever remember, but I know they had traps in the Bay over in the West Channel and me.

NS: Where did your father set your traps and where did you set your traps?

ELO: He had one off of Seaview. He had two on the north side of the channel. He had one over there.

NS: Which channel are you talking about? Up by Fire Island?

ELO: Yes, by Fire Island off Ocean Beach. He had one over where Atlantique is today, and another one down by Saltaire. A couple of years he fished a couple over in the West Channel, but they didn't do as good, so he got rid of it.

NS: So, he had four traps?

ELO: Five.

NS: Five traps. Was that a typical number or was he one of the better ones? [laughter]

ELO: No, that was it. I think that in one year they fished six. They didn't fish one on the north side of the channel. They went over in the West Channel and fished out—

NS: What about other pound trap fishermen? Did they have as many traps as that or?

ELO: Like me, there was these eel traps in the fall. Those belonged to my father and his uncles. I come out of the Navy in '57, and they had went out of business in '54. So, he says to me, "You ought to buy them." He says, "You can go alone." He says, "I'm pretty sure you can make some money." So, anyway, I bought them, and I fished them. The first year I didn't make a lot of money and I started converting stuff over gradually to nylon, which I could fish more of. I got as high as eleven.

NS: Wow. [laughter]

ELO: He fished fifteen traps with three men. With the three of them. He had a lot bigger boats and rigs than I ever did.

NS: What kind of boats did he use?

ELO: He had a big, I think she was thirty-eight foot. (Dudel Lotto?) built her down here in a lot across from Bluepoints. He built that boat. She was around until maybe good ten years ago. The last, she was used for a freight boat running out of Sayville over to Sailors Haven. They ran freight with her. After that, then he hauled her out and she sat on the land and she dried out. Finally, the guy over there (named Harry?) said, he asked my father—he didn't ask my father, he asked the fire department if they would burn it. They burned it. So, anyway, that's what happened to that boat. But yes, then there was—and it was Long Island that fished out of here. They had three-pound traps in the ocean. Then there was Sunrise. They originally fished out here—

NS: Near the Captree Islands.

ELO: Yes, they went into Islip and then there was Whitecap. They fished and then there was Doxsee. (Hank?) and his son's, oh man. But gradually, the only one survived real good because they had a freezer—and Whitecap had a freezer, but Whitecap never had a very good fishing rig they. There was anything that would fly. [laughter] I mean, if you got rid of an old net, they took it for the rope. [laughter] Oh God. They were that. But anyway, they built the freezer after Sunrise did. They opened skimmers down there first.

NS: Let's back up. What happened to your fish once you brought it back to shore? Where did it go?

ELO: I kept the eels until Christmas.

NS: Where?

ELO: In, right in the creek. In big cars. Mainly the most of them I sold to (Crommet?). He was from Maine. He was an exporter.

NS: So, he would come down with a truck?

ELO: He would come with a truck. He had a tractor trailer even.

NS: And he'd go around and [inaudible] everybody. Yes, I've heard about guys like this.

ELO: He'd pick up from me and he may go down to (Duffy's?). They had a few eels. So, on down the line. There was also Superior. He bought eels. There's only one left now and that's Delaware Valley Fish. His father was part of Superior years ago.

NS: What was Superior?

ELO: Superior Fish. They came around and they tank truck mostly. And they bought carp.

NS: Now what about the fish that you caught in the pound traps? What did you do with that?

ELO: The fish that went for the pound traps, they went to—I sold them. Well, some of them went to Whitecap, depending on what it was. (Lester Sergo?), he had a fish store in Patchogue, he was a good—that was my father's cousin. He was a good person to sell to. Him. Last off, I sold most of all my stuff went to Mastic, Mastic Seafood. Small—if I had a lot of stuff, I would ship it. Because you couldn't—say if you caught two boxes of perch, you had two hundred pounds of perch. (Freddy?) didn't want two hundred pounds of perch, so he might take fifty pounds. So, the other you had to get rid of somewhere. At times you'd catch a lot of crabs. I'd have to bring them to peddle. [laughter] Yes, I'd go to Lindenhurst to B&B and wind up in Freeport. There was eleven fish stores in Freeport at one time.

NS: I know.

ELO: There was no problem selling anything. Just start up the head of the road and went back and forth until you got to the end was (Fiore?) Brothers. (Fiore?) Brothers, I sold them a lot of eels. They were good people to do business with. Very good.

NS: I love them. [laughter] I do stuff with them [laughter] very good people. Around here, are there particular houses that have been here a long time that were fishermen's deal houses?

ELO: The man next door to me, he went clamming.

NS: Which number? Fifty-one or forty-seven? Is it to the left?

ELO: See, I'm forty-nine. He'd be forty-seven. Yes, he did it. He worked the bay until he passed away. Then the (Powys?) they lived next door. Their father, (Mrs. Powys' father). He worked on the bay— [RECORDING PAUSED]

NS: This is tape one, side two. I'm Nancy Solomon talking with Lowell Ockers. It's February 5th, 2004. Okay. We were talking about your next-door neighbors. Now before you get too far, the numbers get smaller as you go down towards the water. Right?



ELO: Yes.

NS: Now are you heading towards the water? Is that what you are heading towards?

ELO: I'll head towards the water.

NS: So, that will actually be forty-seven.

ELO: I'll start over. This house here, this belonged to (Anthony Vesport?). He pound trapped in the ocean. He was one of the original owners of Long Island Fish Company.

NS: Wow.

ELO: Next door was Mr. (Quake?), (Gabriel Quake?). He clammed, he opened oysters, cold oysters in the winter. He also opened skimmers. Next to him was (Mr. Powy?). Now (Mrs. Powy's?) father, he worked on the bay. He worked in the oyster shanties. But then next door, a couple doors down, there was old (Josh Newhouse?) used to live there. He worked for (Vanderberg?). I remember him culling clams and putting clams in barrels and getting them ready for (Mr. Tucker?). (Mr. Tucker?) used to take as high as three loads of clams a day to (Lundy's?) [laughter] Sheepshead Bay.

NS: I was going to say in Brooklyn. I know (Lundy's?).

ELO: In barrels. Three bushels in a barrel. He had a flatbed truck. He had—old man (Tucker?), he lived over there. He had horses over there. I never remember him, but I remember his barn.

NS: Is his house still there?

ELO: Yes.

NS: What street is that on?

ELO: Atlantic.

NS: On Atlantic?

ELO: Yes.

NS: Do you know what number?

ELO: No, but the barn is—

NS: But it's the one behind your house, right?

ELO: It's a white house. It's down maybe four or five houses, and now it has a house in the back. Then the (Verbeakes?), they live down a little further. They always went on the bay, and they hauled fish with haul seines and stuff. They went skimming and then it was (George from Wine?). He lived in there. In one of them houses down there. He worked in oysters, and him and his father, they were watchmen for like (Vanderberg?) and (Rudolph?). (Rudolph?) was another one. Where (Charlie Hart?) is today on this end, where all the boats are. That used to be (Rudolph's?) and he was in the oyster business too. He's also in the real estate business.

NS: [laughter] Well, it comes with being a watchman. [laughter]

ELO: The (Bebe's?) live next door. The house that lived—was next door is now down in the Marine Museum. That gray one that sits over on that side.

NS: That was whose house?

ELO: (Bebe's?). You got to remember another thing. There was a lot of Dutch in West Sayville that was no relation. There was a lot of (Bebe's?) and some of them.

NS: Yes, well like Ockers.

ELO: Yes, like me.

NS: Well, you've got a family that comes in the sixteen hundreds.

ELO: The Van Essendelfts the (Seervelts?). You can go on and on with them. The names were familiar, but "oh maybe he was your cousin." Nah, nothing [laughter] But going up the street too, there was some of the (Vermine?) lived up there in a couple of those houses. There was a (Baykler?) that lived up there. The house is a kind of a dark gray looking. It's got a yellowy looking trim. He lived there. He worked on the oyster boats. He was a captain. Taught Sunday school. And the (Lockers?), a lot of the (Lockers?), they were kind of all one family. Most of them, they were a family that was kind of looked up to. When a lot of those—they worked in the oyster shanties, they went clamming, they sailed yachts. There was one down, he lived in Sayville. He didn't work too hard, but he sailed, say a yacht for somebody up in Babylon or that was his job in the summer. Keep the yacht clean. He got laid off. There was a (Chris Locker?). He worked over at Point of Woods. He taught kids how to sail. [laughter] He worked for Peanuts, but at the end of the year, all of them people would give him fifty dollars, a hundred dollars. He'd really make a nice day's—and he lived over there for nothing. He would rent his house [laughter] over here during the summer.

NS: Did other people rent their houses during the summer?

ELO: There was (Kaler?) that lived up on Brook Street. He had the job before (Chris?). Because we lived in the back of him at the time. He would rent his house in the summer, and he'd go over there. By the end of September, he'd be back, and he'd go clamming in the winter if he could or find something else to do. A lot of the Dutch, they were pretty smart like old man (Dorough?).

He hardly went to school. He went to fourth or fifth grade, that was all. [laughter] But, he kept the books for Long Island. He was smart enough to do that. Do that kind of thing.

NS: Were there any hotels around here?

ELO: No.

NS: Okay. Because I know Patchogue had a lot of hotels.

ELO: Blue Point—oh, in Sayville they had hotels.

NS: Were any on the water?

ELO: Yes. The old Cedar Shore was on the water.

NS: Where was it?

ELO: On the foot of Handsome Avenue. It was a big old building. It caught fire one night, and it just...

NS: Do you remember going there?

ELO: Yes.

NS: What was it like?

ELO: It had the hotel part and then out over the water, they had a big pavilion where people, they had parties. It was a more of a summer thing. I think—(Alley Freeman?)? No, that was the shore. I got ahead of myself. The one that burned was the Cedar Shore. (Alley Freeman?), he was a judge from Sayville. The (Freeman's?). There was four or five of those too. He had the shore. It sat on the end of Foster Avenue. It's the Islip Town Park now. It's alongside a port of call. But there was a couple of boarding houses, like up the street on Foster Avenue too. There was a lot of people that came from the city.

NS: Yes, that's what I was wondering, because I know that happened in Patchogue.

ELO: They had big hotels down here, but I doubt—you might be able to find one down south Ocean Avenue yet. There might be one there.

NS: Yes.

ELO: But Blue Point had a few.

NS: Where were they?

ELO: They had Blue Point Avenue. On the end of Blue Point Avenue.

NS: Oh you're talking about the Village of Blue Point. I thought you were talking about the company. I always get those two confused. [laughter]

ELO: There was a big old one there when I was a kid that I guess they plowed it down.

NS: Were there any home like lemonade stands to sell to the people who were coming in from the city, that kind of stuff? People making things to sell you know, to—

ELO: There probably was, but I don't—

NS: You don't remember anything like that?

ELO: I don't remember anyone. I remember little small bars and stuff. Like up in Oakdale, it was (Max's?) Log Cabin.

NS: Yes, I've heard about this place. [laughter]

ELO: He had a big old grill in the front.

NS: Yes. You could drive up and get hotdogs and hamburgers. Yes, I've heard about the trips to the Log Cabin.

ELO: Then there was—

NS: (Flo?) and (Bill?) were talking about that.

ELO: Then there was (Gross's?), he was on the curb in Oakdale just past where Wendy's is. There's a curve in the road, there's a—what's his name there today? Gulf. They don't pump gas anymore either. It's between a mutual of—

NS: Right by the train station and—

ELO: No, no it's between. There's a Mutual Bank there and there's a Gulf gas station there. The Gulf gas station is there now. They plowed it, (Gross's?) down. Then over here by (Hoi Mings?), that used to be (Lou's?) Red Anchor. That was a popular place in the summer. Everybody went there and drank beer. Then we got to the camp down here.

NS: What?

ELO: The camp.

NS: What was the camp?

ELO: West Oak Recreational Camp.

NS: When was that started?

ELO: Oh boy. They were a bunch of campers in the Heckscher State Park. They had platforms and they used to put up tents. They came out from the city. There was a few of them.

NS: So, this is before the state park?

ELO: No, it was a state park.

NS: Oh okay.

ELO: (Taylor?) had lost it to—he didn't pay the taxes on it, so the state took it. And they camped out there. They would come out of Ridgewood and places like that in the city. When Moses got control, he didn't want them. So, he kicked them out. So, then they went over here. A feller by the name of (Walters?) had this big piece of property.

NS: Where was it?

ELO: It's between where La Salle is—between La Salle and the Golf Course. They went in there and it was during the depression. They paid rent, and they saved him, or he would've lost that property over the taxes. He owned a lot. He owned property across the street from them. He owned (Wallace?), like this side where you get over here by the gas station all to the west. He owned that all the way up to Brook Street. He owned quite a bit of property. Of course, then we had—

NS: Who was he?

ELO: I don't know—

NS: Did you know anything about him?

ELO: Nope, the old man—

NS: [inaudible] his name?

ELO: (Walters?) is. I know that was the name. I don't know how he got this property. I mean you could buy acres for a thousand dollars. Minimal amount of money.

NS: Did he live there in your land?

ELO: I think he lived somewhere—we used to call it Chicken Street, but Dale Drive. He lived up that street. If you ever go up that street, you see a lot of houses that were the same. They're like—

NS: And that's in Oakdale or in Sayville?

ELO: No, that's kind of when you get going—yes, it's in Oakdale. It's just on the other side of Oakdale. When you get down past the golf course and you go past (Hoi Ming's?) and it's the next street on your right. If you go up there, there's a lot of houses that looked there like Spanish type houses, stucco. All that the—

NS: With the ceramic tiles on the roof?

ELO: Yes, yes. Well, some of them has been changed and some of them built—

NS: I'm sure. [laughter]

ELO: But those people worked for (Bourne's?) down where La Salle is today. That was (Bourne?). He was the Singer sewing machine. I don't know if he invented it or stole the patent. I don't know what happened, how he got a hold of it, but anyway. Most of those people worked for him. Then to the north of that, he had a farm. He ran all the way to the railroad tracks. (Mrs. Hard?) who owned this piece of property where the county's got now, where the golf course is, he gave that to her for a wedding present. She lived there and built that nice house.

NS: Around here in Sayville and West Sayville, are there particular places that have had a very long history connected with the water and the bay that come to mind besides Bluepoints and museums?

ELO: No, most of them. There is no baymen [inaudible]

NS: Yes, I know.

ELO: I'll tell you what goes on in bays. Somebody that's a fireman or a city cop that works—

NS: On the side, yes.

ELO: He works, he's twenty-four hours on.

NS: But what about fifty years ago? Were there places that are still here even if they're not used for the same thing?

ELO: No.

NS: —Or big enterprises.

ELO: You go down the shore there where Kingston's in that building. It's kind of a grayish looking building. It's this side of Kingston's. There's a guy who's got a big tin building there. He's got lobsters in there. But that building there, where it says "Kingston's Clam Bar," that was Fred Ockers's place. If you can go in the back there, up that driveway and look in there, they probably got lobsters in there. But the old float—the north side of that, between the two roads with the north side of that building, the floats are still in there. They kept lobsters in there.

NS: So, that is an important place?

ELO: Yes. I would say that's...

NS: What else would you hypothetically put on this "bayway trail" for people that want to learn about the history of maritime stuff around here?

ELO: I mean, I made a good living on the bay until, say, fourteen years ago. Today, your expense goes up and you don't have the gross product. Right now, clams come, like I told you before, come from Nova Scotia to—

NS: Yes, all over the place.

ELO: All over the place. And southern clams are cheaper. A clam is a clam, and you can't compete with it. You just can't.

NS: What I'm trying to get at though is that if you can put it—somebody who doesn't know anything about the history of this place. If they were to come to Sayville and West Sayville, what would you want to show them that reflects this long heritage?

ELO: Well, something like Bluepoints, you'd have to show them that. You could take them into where Kingston's Clam Bar is. In the back there, there's a guy that sells fish. You could go into (Vanderberg's?). He was in the middle. They broke out most of the float room, but the ups and downs of the floor is all the same. The buildings are the same. Where what's his name was— (Rudolph's?) where (Charlie Hart?) is today, that's all been rebuilt. That's a boatyard today. Or you take them over to marine museum—

NS: Right, obviously.

ELO: —which is a real decent place. You can spend quite a bit of time over there. I mean, you couldn't really take them and—

NS: So, those would be the places?

ELO: Yes. You really couldn't—

NS: That's what I wanted to know.

ELO: You really couldn't take them—

NS: Because sometimes you miss something that everybody else knows about.

ELO: You couldn't really take them and show them a pound trap, but I got one in [inaudible] [laughter]

NS: But where could we show them where pound traps were set? Where would you go?

ELO: Just the picture.

NS: Well if you could, what would be the closest piece of open land that we would take them to?

ELO: I had a trap on the end of Handsome Avenue. If you go down the end of the dock and I had two to the west of the dock.

NS: Which dock?

ELO: West Avenue dock, to the west. Both of them were on county property.

NS: Okay so that's where you would set your pound traps?

ELO: Yes. You know you'd start [inaudible] after Labor Day and try to get the net on by—

NS: What about the boat builders? What buildings are left for the boat builders?

ELO: None.

NS: None. They're all gone. Wow. What about the guy who rented the row boats? Where was his—

ELO: That's gone, too. That was on the county property. The county plowed that down when they took that over three years ago.

NS: What about that hotel that you mentioned? Where was that?

ELO: Oh, the Cedar Shore?

NS: Yes.

ELO: That was on the end of Handsome Avenue.

NS: So, that was the same place where you set your pound traps?

ELO: The Shoreham was over on Foster Avenue. There was probably a couple more. There's a couple of big houses on Foster Avenue that I'm pretty sure. Then there was the Alvin.

NS: What was the Alvin?

ELO: The Alvin was a big boarding house.

NS: What street was that on, Foster?



ELO: Oh, Jesus. No, it was the side of Foster, but I'm not sure. It's still there, though. I'm pretty sure. And then there was the Lafayette. They tore that down. That got to be a bad place. They rented it, the bums. That didn't work. They plowed it down. A guy from (Crickets?) bought that property. I think he put two or three houses on it. I mean, the town got rid of him. [RECORDING PAUSED]

ELO: —Remember anybody, only (Chris Locker?) and (Cole Kaler?) renting their house. I can't remember.

NS: Yes. Well, it's understandable. They're small houses. [laughter]

ELO: For like a summer residence. Of course, the beach, that always rented—like Fire Island, that—

NS: Yes. Oh, yes.

ELO: Yes.

NS: That goes back a long, long time.

ELO: Like the Grove. Not the Pines so much. I call that the high rent district. Oh, boy. Oh, boy. Oh, boy.

NS: So, that wasn't part of the economy around here?

ELO: No. I remember going with my aunt.

NS: Did a lot of people come out during the summer?

ELO: Yes, there must have been. I can't remember them. I remember they would come out and they'd stay in the Cedar Shore and the Shoreham.

NS: How many people do you think would come out for weekends or daytrips, that kind of stuff? Are we talking like hundreds or thousands?

ELO: No. They probably got fifty or sixty. That was a lot. But (Freeman?), they would rent rooms by the season if they could. Shoreham, he probably had—that was a big building, nice shingled building. The old man and the kid, they kept it pretty good. He used to fence—there's picture of it. He used to put a fence out in the bay for the jellyfish and put a dock in.

NS: [laughter]

ELO: Yes, yes. Oh, yes. And the wet pants, the sailboat people. That wet pants club, they're still in existence. They're pretty old.

NS: Do you know when they were founded?

ELO: Oh, hell, they've been around fifty years.

NS: That's all? Not longer?

ELO: Yes. Well, he's going, too. I think (Harvey Garrett Smith?) was one of the original—

NS: Founders.

ELO: Did you ever go in the bank up here and look at that picture that he did?

NS: No, no. Which bank?

ELO: Bank of New York, next corner.

NS: Yes, yes. I've never been inside.

ELO: He's got a picture of them. They're catching oysters down in the west channel. It's got the lighthouse. It's got some bush stakes.

NS: Did a lot of people do that kind of thing?

ELO: Yes, years ago. Yes.

NS: Just the local people who lived here?

ELO: Local, yes. Then there's, I think, two or three boats, but one of the boats is the old type of cat boat that sailed.

NS: Yes, yes. The Gil Smith boats.

ELO: Yes, yes, yes.

NS: Would you say that just about everybody who—

ELO: Do you know where that come from? There's a postcard over there in the marine museum. They got it off of that. Yes.

NS: Would you say that just about everyone who lived in Sayville and West Sayville worked on the water?

ELO: West Sayville, yes.

NS: West Sayville. Not so much Sayville?

ELO: Yes, some of them from Sayville. All the (Collins's?), they lived in Sayville. They were baymen.

NS: Yes. (Gerry?), yes.

ELO: (Markowitz's?) there was a bunch of baymen there. I think the Bevelanders, they came from West Sayville, really. They lived up the street here.

NS: Right. So, that was pretty much what everybody did?

ELO: Yes. Well, Donald Bevelander, he's still alive. He might be a good one to get a hold of, but he's in a nursing home. (Nicky?) goes to see him. He says he's pretty sharp.

NS: I think Steve probably interviewed him.

ELO: He used to go over to the museum a lot. He would give them a lot of good information. I mean, he lived in Sayville. His brother (Bill?) lived in Sayville. He had another brother who worked for the conservation. He lived in Sayville, and they had one that lived on the West Coast. He was a captain, I think, of a steamer ship.

NS: [laughter]

ELO: He worked in steamships, yes. Now kind of the old (part?). It's like you go to a fire department meeting and you get upstairs, and you look around. "Geez, I don't know that guy." You know the four or five that's sitting in the front row.

NS: Right. [laughter]

ELO: There's some older members. There's some that don't come at all, social members. The fire department, too, that was a big thing in this community. It was like between the churches and the fire department—that was like the center. And at the back end of the fire department, there's a basketball court in there. It's not one like today. I think finally, they got rid of them. The Christian school used to use it. Finally, they got rid of them. The floor is getting bad in there. They want to build a new building, but they can't get any bonding for it. So, I don't know what's going to—I guess a three-car garage, but anyway. But that was the center of.

NS: Which church?

ELO: The Christian Reform Church. They moved up on Rollstone, or well it's New Life now. But the other one was up on Cherry Street—the Dutch Reform Church, the Christian Reform Church.

NS: Yes. I was thinking it should be Dutch Reform. It became a Christian Reform?

ELO: No. This is the Christian Reform Church. I think it was the Dutch Reform Church and then it went to the Christian Reform. Maybe it was the Christian Reform Church first. But this church over here that's over here, that broke away from that church.

NS: Where did most of the baymen go to church?

ELO: [inaudible] Protestant churches, yes. There was very few. When I was in high school, when I was in grade school, we had one Catholic kid. He lives in Oakdale. Then he was like an outsider.

NS: Were there any special events that the baymen had to mark oyster season or scallop season?

ELO: No. I read it in ancient history where they used to have oyster opening contests.

NS: Yes?

ELO: Yes. (Andrew Derider's?) father, I forget how many oysters he opened.

NS: [laughter] When did they have the contests?

ELO: Oh, God. Probably sixty, seventy years ago.

NS: So, it wasn't something that you remember from your own life?

ELO: No, no. I remember them opening oysters there, but I never remember them racing. I remember them racing, opening skimmers, how many bushel you could open.

NS: Was there a baymen's festival or anything like that?

ELO: No. You mean like down south where they have a (crab?) festival and an oyster roast or?

NS: Yes.

ELO: No.

NS: They never did any of those kinds of things?

ELO: No. The churches, they'd promote maybe a covered dish supper.

NS: [laughter]

ELO: You'd bring the noodles, I'll bring something. They used to have fairs. The church would have a fair, like a strawberry festival. You get a piece of sponge cake or a bunch of strawberries.

NS: Do they still do that?

ELO: No.

NS: No?

ELO: Not to my knowledge. I'll tell you, the church over here, the Christian Reform Church, they have a fair once a year. (Old Lester Sergio?), he used to make all kinds of jelly. He used to send me in the store to get five pounds of sugar for him because they'd only sell—it was a bargain. It was probably eighty cents at the time. He'd go in and out the store two or three times and get the sugar. He'd send me in a couple of times. I remember going. [laughter] Then he [inaudible] “Go [inaudible] Peter. He got sugar.” I said, “Okay, Lester.”

NS: [laughter]

ELO: But he was a good contributor. They would have women that would make aprons and they would have food. They would make these oliebollen [Dutch pastries] with the raisins in them. They were good. But the old lady that run that, she used to live over here, just on the other side of the church parish. She used to make them, and they were light and fluffy.

NS: That sounds good. I'm getting hungry.

ELO: They weren't them things that stayed in your stomach for three days.

NS: Oh. [laughter]

ELO: Oh, I ate some lousy ones. Don't worry. Three hours later, you're still burping them.

NS: Were there any traditional oyster recipes or clam recipes that you might have?

ELO: No. My grandmother could make forty gallons of clam chowder. Put a chowder clam on a string. No. Years ago, they always used salt pork.

NS: Yes, I know.

ELO: At the fire department, we have a special meeting. I remember one. And we'd always serve them clam chowder, right? So, we used to make it. Well, that was, “Whose recipe you're going to use?” “Okay.” Then finally, the heck with this, we go down to (Charlie?)—the fish store—like get it off of him.

NS: [laughter] That was smart.

ELO: So, then somebody says, “Jesus, Campbell makes good soup.” [coughs] I says, “yeah.” So, anyway, it comes in, I don't know, cans like that. In it goes.

NS: [laughter]

ELO: So, we go down to (Peter?), down here, get fifty chowders. Somebody brought in the old.

NS: Grinder? [laughter]

ELO: Grinder. Right. In it would go. Oh, delicious, delicious. So, finally, we still use the cans. [laughter]

NS: For the broth, yes.

ELO: We go down to (Charlie?). We'd buy one of Doxsees' milk cartons.

NS: Right.

ELO: Right. Throw it in a microwave, thaw it out, dump it in.

NS: [laughter]

ELO: Put a little more thyme in it. They come, "Boy, that's good soup. Where'd you get that?"

NS: [laughter]

ELO: That's an old Dutch recipe. We're not letting it out.

NS: [laughter]

ELO: Yes, they come. You'd be surprised and tell you how good it is. But see, the difference between hard clams and skimmers, skimmers are a little sweeter in taste. I think that's where the change is. Yes, they'll come, "Boy, where'd you get that?" "Dutch recipe."

NS: Do you make New England style or Manhattan style?

ELO: Manhattan. Yes. My son, he likes Manhattan. I don't know why.

NS: But you said you make Manhattan, though.

ELO: Yes. Preferably, I'll make Manhattan. But if I get some chowder clams off of (Peter?), I usually get them ones that come out of—over on the north shore, say, Mt. Sinai or Port Jeff or [inaudible]. Say, you get a dozen, and you'll open ten of them and the next two will be just as orange as that ladder out there.

NS: [laughter]

ELO: They tried planting them over in this bay and thought maybe they would change color. They really don't. Well [inaudible] these aren't really worth looking into either, but seeing what causes it. But I don't know.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Cameron Daddis, 07/08/2024