

## Interview with Don Kearsley

**Narrator:** Don Kearsley

**Interviewer:** Nancy Solomon

**Date:** May 10, 1987

**Location:** Freeport, NY

**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 builders and other maritime tradition bearers.

**Principal Investigators:** Nancy Solomon

**Transcript Team:** National Capital Contracting

**Abstract:** On May 10, 1987, Nancy Solomon interviewed Don Kearsley as part of the *Long Island Traditions* oral history project. Don didn't come from a family of fishermen, but was interested in learning due to his proximity to the water near Atlantic City. He developed his fishing under the mentorship of an experienced fisherman. The interview covers the traditional methods of clamming and offshore fishing, the evolution of fishing equipment, and the transition from using cotton and linen nets to nylon and poly nets. Don describes the challenges he faces, including dealing with nature's unpredictability and the importance of understanding weather patterns and marine electronics. He also recounts his experiences working on different types of boats, including scallop and clam boats, and the camaraderie and mutual support among fishermen in the Freeport community.

Don Kearsley: Don Kearsley.

Nancy Solomon: Kearsley?

DK: Yes.

NS: You grew up near Atlantic City?

DK: Atlantic City, New Jersey.

NS: What was the name of the town that you came from?

DK: Linwood.

NS: Linwood. Is that on the water?

DK: It's on the bay. It's like the bay side.

NS: What was the name of the bay that you were on?

DK: It's called Skull Bay.

NS: You were primarily doing ocean fishing?

DK: Well, when I was a kid, I went out in the bay hunting, fishing, whatever. Same thing they do around here.

NS: You learned to do fishing from a friend of your's father?

DK: Yes.

NS: What was his name?

DK: (Harry Tone?).

NS: Was he a professional fisherman?

DK: Yes. He was professional. He had a big boat, a seventy-five-foot boat. Went out for a week at a time.

NS: Do you know how he got started in it?

DK: Well, as jobs got tight, he just started fishing. He was in World War II. He was in tugboats. He knew how to run a boat.

NS: When were you born?

DK: 1940.

NS: So, you're thirty-seven?

DK: No, forty-seven.

NS: Forty-seven. I'm sorry.

DK: Not quite.

NS: Math isn't too good.

DK: Not quite.

NS: Where were your parents originally from? Were they born here in this country?

DK: Yes. It must be Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

NS: Your grandparents?

DK: One came from England, and one was from Ohio.

NS: Had any of your family been into fishing?

DK: No. Nobody.

NS: So, you were the first one.

DK: First one.

NS: How come you got interested in it?

DK: Because of where I grew up on the water.

NS: Did you spend a lot of time there as a kid?

DK: A lot of time. I used to catch clams in the summer, weekends, to make money. [inaudible] clam.

NS: This guy taught you how to go clamming?

DK: No, this guy taught me how to go offshore fishing.

NS: Who taught you how to go clamming?

DK: Just old-timers around the dock. Just followed them out, watched what they did, or went with them.

NS: Had they been doing it for a long time?

DK: Yeah. Generations of them have been doing it.

NS: Where were some of them from?

DK: From South Jersey.

NS: But their ancestors. Were they English or Irish?

DK: I guess mostly English.

NS: So, they were mostly one of several generations?

DK: Most of them went back to – there's a guy down here called Somers [inaudible]. The town next to where I lived was a mansion called Somers Mansion. He was a colonel in the Revolutionary War. He settled it. The part where I live, there's a town –

NS: Kind of like the (Rainers?) here?

DK: A town called Somers Point named after him. There's a lot of people related to him.

NS: So, the way you learned was probably a really traditional way,

DK: It was more or less up and down the coast. Clammers used to migrate. So, they learned what they did in New York and Virginia, and they just – whatever the best method was.

NS: Where did you get your tools for clamming?

DK: Bought them. Sometimes, you just use your hands. You reach down in the mud and grab a clam.

NS: Really?

DK: Yeah, really. Or you find with your feet, and you reach down and grab them. It's called treading.

NS: How could you find them with your feet?

DK: Just step on them. Yeah, bare feet and step on them.

NS: Was this at low tide or high tide?

DK: Mostly low tide. But you could do it at high tide, too, certainly. In the old days, there were plenty of clams. Now it's mostly low tide.

NS: What would you use these clams for? For bait?

DK: No. They sell them to eat, for chowder or for clams on half-shell, stuffed clams – you name it. Clams casino. You ever had that?

NS: Oh, yeah. I know a lot of people here, when they go clamming, use it for bait. I was wondering if –

DK: Yes, we did that too. We just catch our own bait.

NS: When was the first time you went out on an ocean –?

DK: On a boat in the ocean to catch fish?

NS: Yeah.

DK: On a commercial boat, I was, I guess, in junior high school. I went out in the summertime on my day off. I went out to see what it was like. Got seasick.

NS: Were you paid for this?

DK: No. It was just like an adventure. I went out with a kid's father. It was fun.

NS: Can you tell me what happened the first time you went out?

DK: I got sick. Sick as a dog.

NS: What happened?

DK: Huh?

NS: What happened?

DK: I just threw up my lunch.

NS: [laughter]

DK: Laid on a deck. At first, I thought I was going to die. Then, I was afraid I wouldn't. [inaudible]

NS: When did you decide that you wanted to make your living at this?

DK: When I got out of high school, there wasn't too many jobs around. Money wasn't too

much.

NS: You got over the seasickness?

DK: Yeah, eventually, you get [inaudible]. It was only a couple of times I got sick. Each time we went out, it was less and less.

NS: How long did you stay [inaudible] Atlantic City and Linwood?

DK: I'm still around here. I commute.

NS: So, you live down there, and you drive here?

DK: Live down there, and I stay up here and fish. Go home when the weather's bad.

NS: When did you buy the boat that you are on now?

DK: I don't own the boat I'm on. Somebody else owns it.

NS: When did you start using it?

DK: About a year and a half ago, I guess.

NS: But before that, you were still in Atlantic City?

DK: Well, before that, I had another boat up here I ran, and before that, I had my own boat. I sold my own boat to get a bigger boat, and I never found a boat I wanted. So, I didn't buy it. I'm still looking.

NS: So, when did you first come up this way?

DK: 1967. I came in here Freeport.

NS: How come?

DK: Well, I met some fishermen from here up at Shinnecock, and they said, "Come on down here. Fishing's good."

NS: Did you know them?

DK: I met them up there. They had boats. They were out of town. I was out of town, so more or less had that in common. They said, "Come on down here. We have good fishing at certain times of the year." So, I came in here. Been coming back ever since.

NS: Did you know anybody there?

DK: Just the guys I met there, that's all.

NS: How did it feel to be in this community where a lot of these people have been doing it for generations? The new guy on the block?

DK: Well, most of the guys I knew hadn't been doing it for generations. They just had started. They had been in as long as I had.

NS: Did you feel uncomfortable being on that team?

DK: No, they were very friendly and treated me all right. So, I stayed around. I went home that summer when it was over, and I came back the next year. Off and on, I come back. When I didn't have a job down there, I come here and get a job.

NS: Was there somebody here who you learned a lot of things from?

DK: There's a couple of guys here.

NS: Like who?

DK: A guy named Jimmy Lyons. A guy named Mark Cummings – boat called the *Sturgeon*. He knows the way the fish habits are, and I just sort of pick up on what he knows. I work for him. [inaudible] He makes money off of what I catch. I make money [inaudible]. A lot of stuff I know myself.

NS: What kinds of things have you learned from him?

DK: Well, where the fish are at certain times of the year, what's good to catch, what's not good to catch.

NS: What kinds of things do you catch this time of year?

DK: Right now, we're catching whiting, ling, a few flounders – not many. Pretty soon, we start catching summer fluke. Whiting [inaudible] catching fluke all summer long.

NS: Is this area different from Atlantic City in terms of what you fish for?

DK: The only difference is that you get different runs of fish. Like here you get the whiting in the winter. We used to get whiting down there, but they don't seem to come down anymore. Here, you get cod fish in the winter. They come from the north. We don't get them down there anymore. We used to. Down there, we get a lot of trout in the spring and summer, and they don't have trout here. We get them down there.

NS: Was it hard to learn what kinds of fish were around here and where?

DK: No, it's not hard to learn, but it's hard to be good at it because you're dealing with nature.

There's a lot of elements. It's not like any other industry where you can put it down in a book, and it comes back the same year. You have Mother Nature. It might be a week off, and a storm or something might ruin the whole season. [inaudible]

NS: What kinds of things do you have to know about in order to be a good fisherman?

DK: You have to know about the weather. You have to know about nets. You have to know about mechanics. You have to know about marketing. You have to be a jack of all trades to be successful.

NS: What was the hardest to learn?

DK: Hardest? Electronics, I guess. Fixing electronics. It's pretty sophisticated now. We still have to take it to a shop to get fixed because they change so much. Every year, they come out with new and better stuff. You got to be an electronic engineer to fix the thing.

NS: You said that you learned to make your own nets. Can you tell me what was the first time and what some of the hard things were about that?

DK: Well, the first boat I worked on, like when you caught a wreck, when you tore the net up, you start filling needles for the guy did know how to do it, then you'd watch him or hold something for him and pretty soon he'd tell you, "Well, here, you try this." Then you practice, and next thing you know, you were doing it so he could do something more complicated and just kept working down the line.

NS: Was it hard to learn?

DK: It wasn't for me. Some people never learn.

NS: How come it wasn't hard for you?

DK: Some people got the knack. I don't know. I took an interest, so I learned ...

NS: What were the nets made of when you first started?

DK: A lot of them were made of linen and cotton. A lot of them were made with what they called manila. Most of the rope is just made of that, too. You had to hang it up, and you had to [inaudible] it so it didn't rot and always had to dry out. Then they came out with what they called a (nyack?), which is nylon, which is the first net that was pretty strong for its size.

NS: But the cotton and linen rip more easily?

DK: Definitely. Mostly because it was after a while with rot you'd have to replace it.

NS: How often did you have to replace those nets?



DK: Quite a bit in those days. We didn't have the electronics and the sophisticated gear that we have now to keep us away from the wrecks. We didn't know where they're at. Most of the old timers lost nets finding what we now know – when I first started, some of the boats didn't have what they call the LORAN now, which is Long Range Navigation. They just used ranges on the beach. They line up a smokestack from a power plant or a radio antenna with a hill or a certain house. Had books with pages drawn in with a house in the back of another house. That's how they knew where they're at. They get one over here and one over there, and they'd make an X so they could find a wreck. So, once they got outside of the land, they were pretty handicapped in where they fished, and they'd go by the bottom – what they caught.

NS: So, how many nets would you have to make or buy that year when they were using cotton and linen?

DK: I guess about three is all we went through. By then, they were pretty good at – they had LORAN. This was like 1958. It was eighteen years after the war.

NS: So, back then, you had to know how to fix your nets.

DK: Oh, yeah. It was part of – you didn't make a full share if you didn't know how to fix the nets. That was part of your – when I started, I only got half a share, which is half of what experienced fishermen got, so that gives you the incentive to learn so you can make the extra money.

NS: What kind of nets do you use now?

DK: We use poly nets and nylon nets.

NS: When it ribs, do you fix it with cotton?

DK: No, we put the same material back in. Try to keep it the same because they're pretty technical. If you change it in any way, it doesn't work right. It screws it up.

NS: You still got to know how to sew and do the same thing.

DK: Oh, yeah. You don't have to, but you can hire somebody, an old timer, to mend it up. But that's taking away your profit. So, it pays to know.

NS: What other kinds of things did you have to make or fix?

DK: On the boat?

NS: Yeah.

DK: Well, I worked on different boats. I worked on scallop boats where we used a dredge, basically, a net made out of a steel frame with iron rings, three-inch rings. We used to catch scouts. Sometimes, we used four-inch rings. Then heavy chain on the bottom to catch the

scallops. I worked on clam boats that had hydraulic dredge for catching what they call skimmers up here. It's a food clam. They make chowder out of it. In wintertime, they used it for catching codfish.

NS: Were there things from when you were a kid when you were clamming that you could bring to those skills that you had learned?

DK: Yes, well, I was in the Boy Scouts. I learned how to tie knots here.

NS: What other kinds of things did you have to know how to do? Do you still have to know –?

DK: Basically, working on engines. I'm doing nuts and bolts. [inaudible]

NS: Did you ever work on a wood boat?

DK: The boat I have now is a wood boat.

NS: Oh, really? Do you know who made it?

DK: Not really. Somebody down in Brooklyn, I think.

NS: What kind of boat is it?

DK: It's called a wooden trawler. It's forty-two foot. It has a fourteen-foot beam. It was made after the war for dragging.

NS: What kinds of work do you have to do on that to keep it in shape?

DK: Well, once a year, you have to haul it out, scrape the barnacles off the bottom, the grass and whatever, put what we call copper paint, which is anti [inaudible] paint, which keeps the grass and anything that grows on the bottom [inaudible] like barnacles and mussels.

NS: Do you have to Bondo?

DK: Well, this boat has a little Bondo on it, yeah, for rotten spots to replace. Chip the rod out, put Bondo, and sand it down.

NS: Do you have to sand down the planks and the ribs?

DK: Yes. If you want a good-looking paint job, you do that.

NS: Do you do that every year?

DK: Yes. They do it every year, basically. That's how you keep it up. You let it go a year, and then the next year, you got three times the work.

NS: How old is it? Do you know?

DK: The boat?

NS: Yeah.

DK: It was built like '46, '47.

NS: Oh, that is a really old one.

DK: Forty years old, I'd say. Still doing its job.

NS: How many years do you think it will last?

DK: Well, people asking if you can replace the wood; it's one board at a time. Depends on whether –

NS: It's been maintained well.

DK: Mostly depends on the engine. That's what's worth the most. They can replace it if they think it's worth it, or they can just buy another boat. The engine's worth more than the hull.

NS: Do you like wooden boats better than fiberglass boats?

DK: It's hard to say. Fiberglass boats are nice because they don't leak. But then they first started making fiberglass boats. They had trouble with them cracking in the weather. They couldn't get the hardener right. So, every year, the boats started getting harder and harder, and the paint would chip, the last coat chip. It had a lot of problems. They put different cores, steel and iron, and wood. It was a different flexibility that would cause cracks in the boats. Now they got them pretty good. Fiberglass boat's better in a way than wood. Sometimes, it isn't. It's harder to patch.

NS: Does it handle differently?

DK: I'd say it does. A wooden boat eventually gets [inaudible], so it's got a different handle on it. Fiberglass never gets heavier. It's like a lighter boat. They make them lighter, too. Now, most wooden boats are two to three inches thick. Fiberglass is only a half-inch thick.

NS: Is there a different way that you would handle the boat in a storm?

DK: Not really. Try not to be in any storms. Anybody who gets caught in a storm will sink. It's foolish.

NS: Have you ever been caught in a storm?

DK: Oh, yes. A lot of times.

NS: What was the scariest time that you were ever in a storm?

DK: The scariest time? I was caught on a scallop boat alone, and it blowed sixty-five miles an hour for like twelve hours.

NS: What happened?

DK: I just had a rough ride home. Had to go right into the wind. The wind was northwest, and we had to go northwest. The boat was almost standing straight up in the air in a wave, and ten-foot of white water come over the bow besides.

NS: Did you have fish on the boat, too?

DK: We were scalloping. Had scallops on the boat. Like ten thousand pounds of scallops. It was rough.

NS: How did you obviously survive it? I mean, that kind of thing could kill someone.

DK: It was a good boat. It was a hundred-and-ten-foot boat.

NS: Are there certain things you have to know how to do when that arises?

DK: Well, in that case, you just make sure the boat doesn't turn side-to, or it'll broach – flip over. You keep the bow into it and try to make headway. Some of the boats couldn't even make headway. They went backward. You've got to keep the bow into the –

NS: How do you do that?

DK: You got to steer. Steer all the time.

NS: What was the funniest thing that ever happened to you when you were out there?

DK: Funniest thing?

NS: Yeah.

DK: I can't really remember.

NS: How come? You got a sense of humor.

DK: I guess being bit by a lobster.

NS: How did that happen?

DK: Well, we used to put rubber bands on them. I wasn't watching what I was doing. I stuck

my finger in the lobster paw instead of on top.

NS: Does that ever happen to anybody else?

DK: Yeah, it happens all the time. You're working with them so fast.

NS: [laughter] How long would you stay out on the boat, typically?

DK: Well, working out of here, we only stay out half a day.

NS: What time?

DK: Scallop boat, they're staying out ten days now, fifteen days.

NS: At a time?

DK: At a time.

NS: So, do you leave in the morning?

DK: We leave like three o'clock in the morning, come back at six at night.

NS: Oh, it is a long day.

DK: Yes. Well, one guy sleeps, and the other guy steers. So, it's not really that long.

NS: Who is your partner? Somebody you know?

DK: Yeah. His name's James [inaudible]. He owns the boat.

NS: Did he hire you? Did you hire him?

DK: Well, he hired me to run a boat. I run the boat a lot by myself. He just wants to go fishing now. So, I got somebody to go with me. For a year, I run a boat by myself.

NS: Do you stay out as long as you do now?

DK: Yeah, same time.

NS: What do you do to keep yourself awake? Those are long days.

DK: When you're by yourself, you work most of the time. So, time goes fast. You talk to other boats, talk to yourself, whatever.

NS: When you talk to the other boats, what do you talk about?

DK: See how they did. Talk about something that happened another day. Same thing girls talk about.

NS: I do not know. I've never been out on a boat. [laughter]

DK: I'm talking about what you say at home. You call up a girlfriend and say –

NS: “What's up?”

DK: “Who did this? What happened? What'd I miss?”

NS: Is that what you guys talk about?

DK: Sure.

NS: Is there somebody, in particular, you usually talk about?

DK: No, whatever happened. Other boats, what they had, or something that somebody screwed up on.

NS: What kinds of things do people screw up on?

DK: Catch wrecks. Blow up engines. Sink boats.

NS: Are these new people usually?

DK: No, it happens to all of us. We all have our day, as it's said. Every dog has his day. Every fisherman has his day.

NS: When you were first starting, and you weren't sure what was going to be a good day fishing or a bad day fishing, how would you tell?

DK: How would I tell what?

NS: How could you tell when a good or a bad day fishing was going to be?

DK: You can't until the last tow. One tow can make your day.

NS: Are there certain kinds of winds –?

DK: If you haven't been out for four or five days, you don't really know where to go. You have an idea where to go. So, you might have to try three spots before you find something worthwhile. Then, the next day, you can go right out and get right on it. Like I said, first day out –

NS: Did the good fishing spots change a lot?

DK: Oh, yes. All the time. All the time.

NS: What are some clues to tell or guessing where they went?

DK: Well, basically, we have what we call a fish scope, which, most of the time, we don't go by it, but we should go by it. It's just run along. If you don't see any fish, you shouldn't set your net. There's a lot involved. It takes an hour, an hour and a half, to really set your net –

NS: Find a good area?

DK: – tow it, and pull it back. So, it takes you an hour and a half to really find out what's on the bottom.

NS: Well, since you said that you usually don't use this fish scope, what do you use?

DK: We set the net out and tow it. That takes an hour and a half. I'm just curious. That girl's got an Emory shirt. My nephew went to Emory – Atlanta, Georgia.

NS: Yeah. I had a friend who went there.

DK: Hmm?

NS: I had a friend who went there.

DK: Emory?

NS: Yeah. When a new guy comes into this business, are there certain things that always go wrong in the beginning?

DK: Oh, yes. Everybody puts up the net or catches wrecks or gets in the way.

NS: How long did it take you before you felt like you really knew what you were doing?

DK: I'd say three years before I started running boats. I could have run them before, but I didn't know. There were a lot of good men in those days. It wasn't that easy. When I started on the boat, I had to take the worst boat that nobody wanted.

NS: Is that how everyone starts?

DK: No, not everybody. That's how I started.

NS: Did you ever meet any sharks or whales?

DK: Oh, yeah, both – sharks, whales, tunas, swordfish. Lost nets on whales. They get your net. Everything but a giant octopus. I haven't seen that. Seen giant squid.

NS: You ever see any Russian tankers out there?

DK: Russian trawlers? Yes. I've seen hundreds of Russian trawlers. Looked like a city. Looked like New York City – Russian trawlers.

NS: How come? I mean, your trawlers sound a lot smaller. How come Russian trawlers are so big?

DK: Well, they need it to come over from Russia to here. We have a saying they're feeding the country. They mostly touch fish Americans don't eat. They're feeding the country. We're just like businessmen. We're capitalists.

NS: Do you ever keep any of the fishy catch and take them home?

DK: Oh, yeah, all the time.

NS: What kinds of things do you like to eat?

DK: Just about everything I catch. Lobster, scallops, crabs, fluke, seabass. Whatever's in the season, I usually take. I have a lot of friends that I give fish to, too.

NS: What kinds of things do you like to make with them?

DK: Make?

NS: Yeah, or does your wife like to make?

DK: I don't usually make any. I usually just cook them plain. Mostly broil or boil. I don't fry stuff too much. Maybe sauté, but not fry.

NS: How do you feel about these restaurants that fry everything?

DK: Well, that's what American people like. But to me, something fried tastes like the grease it's fried in.

NS: You don't taste the fish.

DK: Flounder tastes like sea bass. Sea bass tastes like – it all tastes the same. I'd rather have it broiled.

NS: Do you sell to these guys?

DK: Yes, we sell them. We sell flounder filet. I think [inaudible] takes care of that.

NS: How many different kinds of nets do you have?



DK: My boat, I got four.

NS: What kind?

DK: I got a flounder net and a fluke net. A seine net.

NS: Are these all drag nets?

DK: Yes, they're all drag nets. I got a whiting net.

NS: You don't have gillnets?

DK: No, I could have them, but I don't –

NS: Or the seine nets.

DK: No, I could have them, but I don't [inaudible].

NS: How come?

DK: I got enough work to do with what I got. I have whiting nets, and I have a high-rise for squid. You got a combination net for squid, porgies, and [inaudible].

NS: How are the nets different?

DK: Different-sized mesh twine. Some are made for hugging the bottom real hard. Some are made for lifting up high in the water – school fish.

NS: What is the flounder net like?

DK: It's made for digging real hard. A lot of chain. Straight half-inch chains. I got a seventy-foot-a-half-inch chain, which weighs about 250 pounds.

NS: That's a lot of weight.

DK: In the whiting net, I got maybe a 125-pound chain.

NS: Does a whiting net have a small mesh?

DK: Small mesh.

NS: Small mesh?

DK: Small mesh. A little different design.

NS: What about the fluke?

DK: The fluke and the flounder, you fish the same. Use a big mesh five-inch net. So, you don't get any of the small ones because New York has a law on shorts. Fish have to be fourteen inches.

[Recording paused.]

NS: [laughter] Do you think one of your children will go into fishing?

DK: I don't think so.

NS: How come?

DS: Just don't.

NS: They don't like the water?

DK: I don't have any children.

NS: How come you like being a fisherman? It is not just because you know how to do it. It is usually something more.

DK: It's an independent job. You're your own boss. Don't have the eight to five where you're getting a routine. I actually get more time off. Like last year, I think I worked 150 days in the ocean. We don't really count dock days.

NS: Do you think that is why most people get into this?

DK: The whole thing is money, I guess. Or what you can do the best. That's the American game. What's in your blood? The main thing is making money. To keep up with everybody else, you stay with it.

NS: Where did you say you would learn the most from about the boats and fish?

DK: Where?

NS: Yeah.

DK: You can learn enough around here, I guess.

NS: Did you ever go to school for this?

DK: No. I never went to school. Not for fishing. I went to school in the Army for mechanical work. That was for helicopters. Nothing to do with fishing ...

NS: I always hear some stories that you can tell what kind of day it's going fishing by looking at the moon.

DK: It's possible; you can tell it's going to rain or something.

NS: Can you tell me how that works?

DK: Usually, it has a ring around it. It looks like a ring – clouds or something. You got a lot by sundown and sunup. It's old-time tails [inaudible] go by NOAA; they're pretty up-to-date. When you go by the barometer, barometric pressure, that lets you know when you're getting a low pressure or high pressure, which has a lot to do with wind.

NS: So, you don't think that the moon –? You don't look at the moon to –?

DK: You know you're going to get high tides when you're having a moon or no moon, which is the opposite of a full moon. It's got mostly to do with the tides, and sometimes you get wind with it. Different times on the moon, you can figure you're going to get wind.

NS: Do you think there is a difference between ocean fishermen and the guys who go in the bays?

DK: Definitely.

NS: How so?

DK: You have to know a lot more to go on the ocean. More miles, got to worry more about the weather.

NS: You have to be less scared to be an ocean fisherman?

DK: I don't know. I'd say most of the guys that work in the bay don't work in the ocean because they get seasick. It's got a lot to do with it, and they don't like to work any hours in the bay. In the bay, they don't let you work these hours. You go clam, and it's sunup to sundown. Different ball game. More money involved to go into business in the ocean.

NS: People who work along here, are most of them from – their ancestors from England? Do you know?

DK: Not that I know of. A lot of them are Italians. A lot of them are Swedes. A lot of them Irishmen. I guess, every nationality. Just like certain ports are strictly Portuguese or Norwegian.

NS: Are there any around here?

DK: What's that?

NS: That are only one group?

DK: Not in Freeport. Not in Long Island that I know of.

NS: What about in New Jersey? Were there certain –?

DK: In the old days where I come from, Atlantic City was mostly Norwegians when we went fishing. The only Americans that got in it were the ones that lived nearby and just started working in the boats. But there were certain boats that, if you weren't related or from the old country, you couldn't get a job. It protected –

NS: Is Long Island more open?

DK: More open, definitely. More mixed people.

NS: Would they help each other?

DK: Here?

NS: Yeah.

DK: Yes. Everybody works together. Seemed to be as far as I can see. It's more battle that goes on the street selling fish than out in the ocean catching. You got to work together because there's not that many boats. You don't tell everything.

NS: Were there certain groups that only did ocean fishing and certain groups that only did bay fishing?

DK: No, not really. Not really. I think what separates them is just guys get sick, can't go on the ocean. Guys don't have to. Some guys are good at the bay, so they don't have to go. But I've seen times when things were tough in the bay, and they got a job on a boat and went out in the ocean. Everything changes. There are good years and bad years. If you got a couple of good years, you can figure some couple of bad years coming. So, sometimes you have to change.

NS: Like farming.

DK: Yes, same thing.

NS: I think farmers and fishermen have to know a lot of the same things.

DK: Definitely.

NS: Ever thought about going into farming?

DK: Fishing's farming. Really, we farm in the ocean. A farmer has a tractor; we have a boat. He farms the land; we farm the ocean. The only thing is we don't have to plan ours. Nature takes care of ours. Things get bad. If he has a bad season, he's done; where we can go to another

port that has a good season and make up for it. That's what I like. But he's got the [inaudible] –

NS: Gives you more freedom.

DK: – owning the land.

NS: What do you think of –? I do not know if there is a name for all these tourists. I used to live in Vermont. We used to call tourists “flatlanders.”

DK: Flatlanders?

NS: Yes, because we were up in the mountains. They would come. Is there a name for the people who come down here?

DK: Customers. [laughter] [inaudible] We sell a lot of fish on the street. More people, the better. Most of them will if they're not buying fish, they're eating in restaurants, and as long as they're buying seafood, some fishermen's making money. Turn the crop over. You like seafood?

NS: Oh, I love it. Oh, yeah.

DK: You like lobster?

NS: I love everything. I am starving right now. Every time I walk down the street, it's like I want to eat. Is there one place around here that mostly local people go?

DK: Probably right here.

NS: Erhart's? I was here once.

DK: Got good steam clams.

NS: I think that's [inaudible]. I think I can turn this thing off.

DK: All right.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 6/6/2024