Interview with Carmine Marinaccio

Narrator: Carmine Marinaccio

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 builders and other maritime tradition bearers.

Principal Investigators: Nancy Solomon

Transcript Team: National Capital Contracting

Abstract: On May 7, 1987, Nancy Solomon interviewed Carmine Marinaccio, a passionate fisherman and charter boatman. Carmen discusses his early years, detailing his family's move from the Bronx to Long Beach, and his experiences growing up near the water, where he developed a love for fishing and boating. The interview covers his career transition from a charter boatman during the Great Depression to making fishing lures. Carmen shares his perspectives on the challenges small-scale fishermen face, including economic hardships and the impacts of regulatory changes. He also reflects on the technological advancements in fishing equipment and their effects on local fishing practices. Throughout the interview, Carmen provides insights into his personal philosophy and the importance of self-reliance.

Nancy Solomon: In Freeport, New York, on May 7th, 1987. [Recording paused.] This will be confidential.

Carmine Marinnacio: Anything I tell you is alright with me. You can do anything you want with it. [laughter]

NS: [laughter] Well, great.

CM: Because I'm quite outspoken anyway.

NS: [laughter]

CM: [laughter] Usually, it gets me into trouble. But that's all right.

NS: First, why don't you tell me where were you born?

CM: Well, I was born in the Bronx, New York.

NS: How did you come out this way?

CM: My mother had difficulties breathing and one thing another.

NS: Health problems.

CM: It was suggested by my uncle, my mother's brother, that Long Beach would be a great place to live.

NS: Because of the salt air.

CM: Yes. I was having problems myself when I was young. I was anemic and underweight. So, we had to move here.

NS: Were you born in this country?

CM: Oh, yes. Yes.

NS: Where is your –?

CM: My mother and father were born in Italy.

NS: Do you know where in Italy they were born?

CM: My mother was born in a town called – it sounds like basil. I guess it's an Italian word for basil – Basilica. My father was born in a town called (Accadia?).

NS: Do you know if that's the northern or the southern –?

CM: He often mentioned Mount Vesuvius, that the plants grew there because the ground was warm in the wintertime. My grandfather came to this country with my father when my father was eleven years old. I questioned him one time about why he came over here. He said, of course, people there inherited the houses. They were made of stone; they didn't deteriorate. The only thing they could do as far as improvements was maybe furniture and stuff like that. They had very little. They had a few chickens and a couple of goats.

NS: So, they were farmers?

CM: No, they weren't farmers. But everybody had a few chickens and things to get along in addition. To make money, my grandfather went into town from time to time when there was work to be done. He was handy with a saw and a hammer, carpenter work. He made a set of furniture and tables in the kitchen. I think it was a kitchen table and stuff like that. He barely got them done. They were watched all the time by the tax inspectors. They'd come in and they charged them a tax for building his own table. He was so infuriated that he said, "I'm getting out of this place." [laughter] He came here with my father, who was eleven years old.

NS: Do you know when they came over here?

CM: Well, I don't know. It was in the early 1900s. Yes, I really don't know. [laughter] It was probably at the turn of the century, I guess. They located in the Bronx. As the population grew – when we were there when I was a kid, it was quite rural. They were small farms and stuff in the Bronx.

NS: Oh, really? Wow.

CM: Yes. And horse and buggies on the Grand Concourse and all that kind of thing. The climate, I guess, didn't agree with my mother. She was always having trouble. So, we moved to Long Beach. I was nine years old, and the first thing that attracted me was the water.

NS: Did you live in the same house as your grandparents?

CM: No.

NS: No. So, it was just your parents.

CM: Well, close by.

NS: So, your grandparents live close by, too?

CM: They did then. You mean now?

NS: No, then.

CM: Then they lived close. We lived near each other.

NS: So, you got to Long Beach.

CM: Got to Long Beach. Being anemic and underweight and one thing another, I always felt better when I was down on the waterfront. I just took to it naturally from the age of nine, ten, eleven. I started to make a little spending money by catching bait – killies and spearing, a few clams.

NS: What year did you move to Long Beach?

CM: Let's see now. Well, I was born in 1912.

NS: About 1922?

CM: Yes. Around the early ‘20s.

NS: So, this is during Prohibition?

CM: Yes. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

CM: Yes, I bet it was because I was only a kid. I didn't know much about it. But I learned as I grew up what was going on in those days.

NS: How did you learn?

CM: Well, there was a dock on the other side of the bay from the west end of Long Beach. Then later on, there was a schooner that used to come in twice a year and unload rum.

NS: In barrels?

CM: Well, no. They had cases of liquor. I don't know. I guess it came from the Bahamas or someplace. We often watched them unload.

NS: What time? Did they do it in the middle of the night?

CM: No, they didn't care. Because no one really cared about enforcing the law. The Coast Guard would go right by and not even notice them and the police. It was wide open. They didn't do it right in Long Beach. But on the other side of the bay, there was no local jurisdiction. It was in the salt marshes. What we'd call wetlands today. So, there was no local authority on it.
As a matter of fact, as kids, we thought it belonged to the Indians because there were no streets or roads or anything. [laughter] It was pretty lawless as far as we were concerned. But at night, they had a boat, I think the name was the *Pandora,* that ran a course. In this house, they were gambling, drinking, and so on and so forth.

NS: Yes. There were women, probably.

CM: It was a cottage. At night, the *Pandora* would go over to the other side on the Long Beach side with cases of liquor for orders that they had to make to the speakeasies.

NS: When you first moved there, you said that you were drawn to the water. Did you go down there after school?

CM: Oh, well, yeah. At first, it was after school. Then, after a while, we played hooky, and [laughter] I spent a lot of time on the water.

NS: What would you do down there?

CM: Well, in the summertime, we caught bait – I caught bait – killies and spearing and clams [inaudible]. Now, I'm talking about when I was eleven or twelve years old, thirteen. When there was a northeast storm, you'd get high tides, and a lot of rowboats would drift away from their owners, and they would drift up on the marshes. We would take rows and row them down to the bay and take them to the other side, patch them up, nail them together, paint them. In the summer, I would rent them to fishermen. Fishermen would come down, "You know where I can get a boat, kid?" "Oh, I got one here." "How much?" "A buck or a buck and a half."

NS: Did somebody make these boats?

CM: No. These were privately owned boats. But they were not in good condition, and they drifted away from the owners. Often, they weren't worth much and the owner wouldn't even bother to go looking for them. [laughter] I'll never forget one fellow would come down and he said, "Hey kid, you know that's my boat." I said, "Yeah? Do you want it?" So, he looked at me and said, "Boy, you gave it a good coat of paint, didn't you? It had a leak in it, and you fixed that." He said, "I tell you what, keep it." [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

CM: We weren't stealing them. They were adrift and derelict, so to speak. That's why I started.

NS: Did you know any boat builders here?

CM: No, not in this area. As a matter of fact, I guess you could say that was my first charter. Because a couple of times, the people would rent the rowboat. I was only about thirteen years old. They'd say, "You want to come along as our guide?" [laughter] They would throw on another half a buck or a buck.

NS: What did being a guide mean? What did you have to do to be a guide?

CM: Well, as a fishing guide, you'd bait the hooks, or you'd take them where you thought the best fishing was.

NS: How did you learn where the best fishing was?

CM: Oh, well, as kids we were fishing all the time. Fishing and utilizing the freedom of the bay. We got clams and sold them to the local housewives. They weren't much. Clams were around three cents apiece so that you could get one in those days.

NS: Was it hard to learn where the good fishing spots were?

CM: Well, that was quite local. No. Oh, well, some funny incidents happening. There was a man, George (Hall?). I don't know if you ought to use the name or not. [laughter] He's a retired prohibition agent. You know [inaudible] customs agent.

NS: Yeah.

CM: He had a three-hundred-foot net that he had hanging on the line behind the house. He used to lend us the net once in a while and we'd use it in the bait. That was the [inaudible] when we used that. We could hook the clams and eels.

NS: Would you trawl with it, or would you set it?

CM: No. You'd set it with a boat, and then you'd pull it into the shore. It was a haul net that you hauled by hand.

NS: How long would you set it for?

CM: No. You just put it out and pulled it in.

NS: Yes. Just real fast.

CM: You'd just set it out of the boat and then pull the thing in. We would usually ask him if we could use the net. Well, this one time, he wasn't around. So, we were looking around the house, and there was a trapdoor in the house [laughter], and I opened the trapdoor. It wasn't locked. I looked in, and it was piled – there was a crawlspace about four feet high and it was packed this far, the whole bottom of the house with cases of liquor. [laughter]

NS: Oh my god. [laughter] You think maybe when he would arrest somebody, he would keep a case for himself?

CM: Well, I don't know how they worked it. But he apparently was paid off in liquor somehow. Nobody really cared.

NS: How did you learn how to set a net? Is there a particular way that you do –?

CM: No. It's just trial and error. In [inaudible] you listen to other people. There were some professional over – men that dragged in the bay at that time. They didn't need a permit or anything. We'd watch what they did, and we just copied and did the same thing.

NS: For me, I have never done anything with nets. So, can you describe to me the proper way to set a net?

CM: Well, this net was called a haul net. There are different kinds of nets. A purse net, like they put around the school of tuna, and it circles the school of tuna. Then there's a string, what they call a pull string or a drawstring on the bottom that draws it into a purse so that the fish can't get out. But we weren't doing anything like that. Then there's a drag net that has what they call doors on it. The hole opens as you drag it through the water. But the simplest kind of net, one that the Montauk fishermen still use on the beach – you leave one man on the beach, holding one end of the net. The rest of the net is in the boat. You just take it, and you roll it out in a big U- shape back to the shore. Then you pull it together. You just pull it together to the shore. That's the simplest. It doesn't require any power except human power. No motor or engines or any of that.

NS: What about a gillnet?

CM: A gillnet is still something else. A gillnet is often called a driftnet. Today, there's a big problem. The Japanese are using a driftnet or a gillnet, which they also call a disposable net. The netting is very fine, or it's made of a monofilament that's hard to see. The fish swims into it, and he gets tangled in it. He gets his gills caught in it. He'll [inaudible] drown. If it's a bigger fish, like a shark or anything, he can't swim backward. So, he tries to go through it and gets more and more tangled up in it. This is a curse of the fishing industry today. Because the Japanese are using what they call disposable nets. They're five miles long. They set them out mostly in the Pacific. Anything that swims into it is caught. They don't even bother taking the fish out of the net to save the net. They just cut the netting and throw the fish in the hole, and then they tie a new net onto the ropes in the top and the bottom. These, I understand, have been banned from all United States coastlines and possessions for two hundred miles out.

NS: How come?

CM: Well, they're destroying the fishing. They're destroying the tuna fishing in the Pacific. It's so bad now that the only place they can get any amount of tuna to make it pay is in the Indian Ocean. It's a disaster. Another bad feature of the disposable net is that if it gets rough, they set the net out and, say, a tremendous school of tuna – tuna has a specific gravity that's greater than water so that he sinks when he stops. He's got to keep swimming to stay alive. So, when they swim into the net, and if they don't pull the net within a certain time, the weight of the tuna will sink, and they lose it. They're fishing in thousands of feet of water, and there's no chance of recovering it. So, it's really a tremendous waste.

NS: Can you tell me a little bit about how nets were made when you were a child or when you were [inaudible]?

CM: [laughter] Well, you could buy nets. I guess there was, in those days, the Long Island Net and Twine Company – different companies that made nets. But some of them made their own.

NS: Yes. Do you know how those were made?

CM: Well, you just set them up on, like, the women, like a knitting board or wherever they call them. They'd have a –

NS: They would just sew it.

CM: Yes. So, there was a certain knot that you put in it. I didn't do that to any great extent.

NS: Did most experienced fishermen make their own nets?

CM: No. It was mostly for repairing their nets. It was mostly the repair business. They had to know how to make a net. Especially if they're offshore fishing and they get a hole in the net, they've got to be able to repair it in a good manner for usable – put it back in a usable form. Usually, they'd carry an extra net. But if there was a hole like two or three feet across, you could just cut it evenly out and then make a new net to patch it.

NS: What were nets made of when you were [inaudible]?

CM: It's called [inaudible] line. It was cotton. It was mostly cotton, I guess. There was usually a preservative on it, like a tar-like preservative. But in those days of mid-'20s, the first time I went offshore, [laughter] I forgot – it was in somebody else's boat. I was amazed. Just south of the Cholera Banks – about five miles south of Cholera Banks, there was a fleet of steamers that were anchored there. That's where the local people got their rum.

NS: Oh, those steamers. I was thinking of clams. [laughter]

CM: No. These were –

NS: Real steamboats.

CM: Yes. [laughter] They were from all over the world, and they sold whiskey because it was outside the twelve-mile limit. But later, they passed laws and broke the darn thing up. It was a colorful area at times. When they came to Freeport, that was in the early '30s, Prohibition was just about over. There was a boatyard down at Freeport Point. They would be building a Coast Guard boat on one side and a rumrunner on the other. I remember [laughter] I was down there one day and arguing with a builder, and he says, "Put in more power." He said, "How fast will this boat go?" Then he said, "Well, it should do forty miles an hour. How fast will the Coast Guard boat go? Well, make sure we get more power, and we can go faster than the Coast Guard boat." [laughter] It was wide open. But toward the end, it began to get serious because the rum runners were putting on smudge pots for a smokescreen so that they could –

NS: What are smudge pots?

CM: Well, if the Coast Guard boat was chasing them, they would light their smudge pot so that you will have a big cloud of smoke behind so that you could get away.

NS: What is a smudge pot?

CM: A smudge pot. Well, it's just a device for making smoke. [laughter] Yeah, it's that simple.

NS: They would literally have it just for that reason?

CM: Oh, yeah. They would put it on the boat. That's in case the Coast Guard couldn't get good aim on them because they were shooting fifty calibers at them, like a machine gun.

NS: What were some of the –?

CM: Then they started to put quarter-inch steel plating on the rum runners because they were really getting serious by that time toward the end. In the late '20s, it started to get bad because I guess you heard about the hijackers.

NS: Yes.

CM: They were stealing from one another. Then, it wasn't until the Navy lent the Coast Guard the [inaudible] destroyers with the five-inch guns. Then they put a stop to the rum running because the boats couldn't outrun the five-inch guns on the destroyers. I saw most of this from a distance. You know what I mean? I was a kid. I wasn't involved in any of it. But when Prohibition was over, some of the small-time rumrunners from around Freeport here had no occupation because the occupation was taken away from them once Prohibition was repealed.

NS: So, what did they do?

CM: They went charter boat fishing. That's how this charter boat business started on a bigger scale in Freeport. Up until that time, they were just fishing in a bay for flounders or fluke. Little boats. Little old boats. But a lot of them took the boats that they were running the rum with and changed them over to take out charters and go offshore.

NS: What were some of the different groups? Were they Italians? Greek?

CM: There was quite a mixture. I don't know of any that were Italians and rum runners from Freeport.

NS: No. Just in general, who were the fishermen?

CM: I don't think there was any specific group.

NS: Was everyone pretty much doing it?

CM: Well, when you say everyone, you mean everybody boating? You mean fishermen?

NS: Yeah. Who were the fisherman?

CM: Well, there was a group in Freeport that came from Yugoslavia.

NS: Yes. The Scopiniches.

CM: Yes. The Scopiniches and their descendants. A lot of them are still here. Some latecomers for the last ten or fifteen years are John –?

NS: Vidas?

CM: Vidas. Yes, and that type. There were quite a few Yugoslavians around. NS:

Were there any Greeks that you know of?

CM: [laughter] I'll have to leave this out. To tell you the truth, I wasn't interested in what they were. I didn't get along with them at all. As far as I was concerned, because I was just a kid, they didn't want me sticking my nose into their affairs. We often came to disagreements that I won't go into. They were tough characters. Some of them carried guns. They were uneducated. Not that I was correctly educated, but at least I went to high school. [laughter] I couldn't see things their way; they couldn't see things my way. Their attitude was, you just stay away from us and mind your own business.

NS: So, who did you spend your time with when you got into being a fisherman?

CM: My time?

NS: Yeah.

CM: How I started, I was a charter boatman. I wasn't a commercial fisherman. You're going to have enough stuff here for about five or six books.

NS: Okay. [laughter] The more, the better.

CM: [laughter] Yes. It was when the Crash came in 1929 [inaudible] we saved a few bucks that we made on the waterfront.

NS: How old were you?

CM: When the Crash –?

NS: Yes.

CM: Well, I was born in 1912 – '22, '32 – I was about eighteen, I guess.

NS: So, you had just finished high school?

CM: Well, I was a little younger. When I first started, I bought a little – yeah, we just finished high school. I bought a little sailboat with a one-cylinder engine.

NS: How did you save up the money for that?

CM: Well, the boat only cost a hundred and fifty dollars.

NS: That was a lot of money for somebody right out of school.

CM: Well, like I said, we used to catch bait, and we'd make a few dollars a day. Well, the rowboats were the most lucrative because you got a dollar, a dollar, and a half a day. So, during the summer, you could make a few hundred dollars. I wasn't contributing anything at home to my parents. They wanted me to, but I didn't have that much. Well, I think the boat was $125 if I remember correctly. It had a sail, a cabin.

NS: What kind of sailboat was it?

CM: Well, let's see. It was what they called a (double-under?) with a one-cylinder motor.

NS: You have a picture of it?

CM: Yes. I sent this to *Newsday* [inaudible] to somebody who was a stockbroker [inaudible] when the crash came, I guess the boat was worth a lot more than that. A friend of mine – we bought it together, and then I bought him out. Let's see. I want to see. It was cedar and oak. Yeah, it [inaudible]. This is different. It was only nineteen feet, but it was a big nineteen feet. It had a cabin on it. The fellow I sold it to sailed it [inaudible]. I went to Florida when I bought a charter boat in 1933 or ’34. The fellow I sold it to went to Florida and back. [laughter]

NS: I want a list of the things that you’ve written when you’re done.

CM: Yes. Well, I tell you, I've had some bad experiences. I have a way of writing that makes a point. For instance, if I don't like the Coast Guard, I write a story. It's quite pointed on the deficiencies of the Coast Guard, so on and so forth. That's what I've done all along. When a newspaper gets a hold of it or somebody, their tendency is to make it nice for everybody.

NS: Right. [laughter]

CM: Don't hurt the feelings of the Italians, the Jews, the Irish, [laughter] or anything. You know what I mean? [laughter]

NS: Right. They got to whitewash it.

CM: Yes. I can't write that way. I've got to give it my own true feelings, or they don't get it. You know what I mean? So, I've written maybe twenty of these little three or four-page things.

NS: Why did you decide to get a sailboat?

CM: [laughter] Oh, it's a lot cheaper than gasoline. Gasoline in those days was ten, eleven, twelve cents a gallon. We couldn't afford gasoline. If you knocked around the bay, you caught a few clams, caught a few killies, and whatever you could.

NS: So, you use this for your work?

CM: Yes. Well, what happened – one day, I went out fishing and I caught a bunch of snappers because I'd take them home. In the Depression days, we needed all the help we could get. I would take fish home for my mother and father and brothers and one sister. There was a man who came down the dock and he used to watch me every day coming in. He said, "Hey, you catch quite a few fish, don't you?" I said, "Uh-huh." He said, "How much do you want to take us out of fishing?" [Recording paused.] He said, "How about taking us out fishing?" I said, "Sure." He said, "How much you want?" I said, "Well, what'll you give me?" He said, "Ten dollars for the two of us." I said, "Great." That was a lot of money. I took them out fishing quite a time. That's how I started in the charter boat business. I was sixteen at the time. I didn't consider it as a charter. It was just a way to make ten bucks.

NS: What kinds of things do you think made you a good charter boat captain?

CM: Well, learning things the hard way. In other words, you started on the bottom. I started with a rowboat, then I had a boat with one sail and the will, probably, to do it, do something and do it right. [laughter] I guess. I don't know.

NS: How would you learn to do something right?

CM: By trial and error. [laughter] Well, anyway, I just want to go on to what I was talking about. So, other people saw me taking this (Mr. Sonant?) out, and then they became interested and wanted to charter the boat. I gradually raised the price from ten dollars a day to twelve dollars a day to fifteen dollars a day. I was seventeen years old, and I had a group on the boat one day, two couples. One of them said to me, "Do you have a license?" I said, "A license for what?" They said, "Well, if you're taking out charters, you've got to have a license." I said, "No kidding." I said, "I didn't know I had to have a license." I was seventeen years old. Sixteen, seventeen. I said, "Where do you get a license?" He said, "Well, you go down to Custom House in New York Lower Manhattan." So, I said, "Well, I'll do that." So, I went down there the following March, down to the Custom House. I walked in, and I said, "I want a license." The man said, "For what?" I said, "To take out fishing parties." He said, "How old are you?" I said, "Seventeen." He said, "We'll come back when you're eighteen."

NS: Uh-oh.

CM: So, I said, "I won't be eighteen until August." I said, "I got to make a living, and I'll have to take them out without a license until August." The guy sighed, scratched his head, and he wrote something on a piece of paper. He said, "Take this up to the fifth floor to Mr. Wilson." So, I went up, and he asked me a lot of questions about operating a boat. Apparently, I answered the questions right. I knew how to box the compass and the starboard tack, the port tack, and

what's the course to Manasquan Inlet, and stuff like that.

NS: Because you were on a sailboat, did he ask you questions about sailing?

CM: Yeah.

NS: Like who has the right of way?

CM: Yeah, but mostly about operating a boat safely and the rules of the road – do you have a horn or a whistle – stuff like that. So, he said, "Well, you're going to be eighteen in August. Huh?" He says, "Okay. I'll grant you the license." I was only seventeen.

NS: You said that you had to learn all things through trial and error. What were some of the errors that happened? What were some of the mistakes you made?

CM: Well, a white squall. Oh, well, I don't know. You just did things. Concerning what? NS:

I don't know. What kinds of mistakes do fishermen make [laughter] in the beginning?

CM: Well, I don't know. I was always cautious so that I never actually had anybody hurt or a disaster of any kind.

NS: Would people crash into rocks if they were in too shallow water, I guess?

CM: Well, I often went out to help people in motorboats that were in trouble. But it was just – that was the ordinary thing, like anybody else would do. If somebody was in trouble, you gave them a hand. The boat was aground, you gave them a hand and push them off the bottom. But I never had any serious problems of any kind.

NS: Well, what were some of the things that you had to learn in order to do this?

CM: Well, in those days, when I started to go offshore – this is the first larger boat. I bought this from Scopinich Boatyard in 1932. This was much bigger. We could carry more people on that. I bought that in 1932. 1933, I was operating it from Long Beach. I had a sign, "Parties accommodated." But I couldn't make really enough. So, I would take charters from Freeport. I would come down to Freeport to take some of the charters.

NS: What kind of boat was that?

CM: It was originally a sailboat.

NS: Yeah, I can see the mast.

CM: No, that mast had nothing to do with it. It had an overhanging stern and it was cut off and made into a powerboat. The Scopinich had done that and the person didn't pay the bill. So, we came to terms – I bought the boat. Of course, things were tough now. You're talking about the

early Depression days. It was a disaster. I bought the boat. Well, I had a partner, Charlie. I put in six hundred dollars, and he put in four hundred to buy the boat. In those days, you only had a compass. There was no radio or LORAN.

NS: So, how did you navigate?

CM: That was mostly trial and error. It's something that I can't really explain because we used to go blue fishing or even in the early days, we caught a few tunas. We didn't even know what they were. People would say, "Oh, they're no good. They're not like the tuna you catch in California." They called them horse mackerel.

NS: So, would you pretty much navigate by looking at the wind and the sun and the moon?

CM: Yes. Your compass. Well, naturally, if you went out south, you came back north, [laughter] right?

NS: Right.

CM: But if you went out south, and then you went east –

NS: East and anywhere.

CM: – an hour or something like that. After a while, you more or less got accustomed to how to come back. I can't really explain it.

NS: Just intuition.

CM: If you went south and then you went five miles east, you'd know you would have to come back west [inaudible] north, right?

NS: Yeah.

CM: So, that was simple enough. After a while, you just got used to it.

NS: Did you spot various landmarks to tell you when you were –?

CM: Well, some days you could. Some days, it's clear. But especially in the summer, there are not many clear days. Visibility is hardly more than two or three miles, five miles in the summer, especially in August. Well, anyway, we decided to go to Florida because we couldn't make enough. The winter was too long. I could make a living in the summer with a boat. But then you had all this winter to go. So, we thought it would be a good idea to go to Florida.

NS: This is in 1933?

CM: Well, it was ’34. [inaudible] … It's a story in itself. I couldn't possibly tell you much about it. We went to West Palm Beach.

NS: On your sailboat?

CM: No.

NS: On the motorboat.

CM: This was the other boat that was thirty-six feet. I could make a living with that in the summer. You couldn't really live all winter on what you made in the summer. We were anxious because I had a partner.

NS: So, you had to go someplace.

CM: Yes. We thought, "Well, if we go to Florida …"

NS: You can still fish.

CM: Yes. We could fish all winter. So, we pulled into the dock at West Palm Beach. [inaudible] loud and clear. The dockmaster come out. We say, "You got a slip." He said, "Sure. Pull in, pull in." [inaudible] So, that's what we did. We said, "How much is the dock rent?" So, he said, "Well, it's a penny a foot a day." So, the boat is –

NS: That is thirty-six cents.

CM: Thirty-six cents a day. I said, "Well, I guess we can afford that." I said, "Do you want any money in advance?" "No, no. It's alright. You just wait until you sail a couple of charters." So, after a month, six weeks, he comes out with a bill for a couple hundred dollars. I said, "What's this?" He said, "Well, it's thirty-six cents a day. But the minimum that you can rent the dock for is a year." Plus, I think it was a dollar a week for electric, a dollar a week for water, and so on and so forth. [laughter] Then there was a lot of other stuff, too, that I didn't understand. We were supposed to pay a tangible tax. Do you know anything about Florida taxes? Tangible tax, intangible tax, and then they had a fishing permit. In that time, in the first two months, I only sailed one charter. That was the original Mr. (Sonant?) that I had started with in fishing when I was a kid. He took the boat for three or four days. But it wasn't really enough. So, in the meantime, because of the diet – I didn't know what the trouble was at the time, but I had broken out in big boils. They were all over my hands and my elbows, my neck, and so on and so forth. I said, "I just can't take it. I don't know what to do. I'm at a loss." I stayed in the hospital overnight one night, and they were nice enough to take care of it. But it really didn't clear up the problem. I found out later it was a vitamin deficiency. That was really the cause of my problem since I was a kid. But at the time, I didn't know.

NS: Well, a new climate might have affected it.

CM: Yes. Well, cooking on a boat, we used to eat a lot of bacon and eggs and heavy food.

NS: Yeah, a lot of oil.

CM: Yeah. We didn't know any better. Well, anyway, so I said, "Let's get out of here." I said, "It's too early to go back to New York." Of course, we didn't want to go back in the middle of January. So, one night, we just started the motor. We paid our bills insofar as gasoline, food, or anything like that was concerned. But the dock rent and intangible tax, which we didn't understand, we said, "To hell with it." So, we started up the motor one night and we went down to Miami and went up the Miami River.

NS: Did they follow you? [laughter]

CM: Well, we were there. We were there about a month and a week and stopped at a dock at a hotel. As a matter of fact, here's the boat in Florida. This is the Miami River. This is the little boat that the other fellow, who was my partner's brother, that he followed about two weeks behind us. We just pulled into the dock. Charlie was pretty good at these things. He went in the lobby, and he said, "We'd like to tie up here for a few days. Do you mind?" He had a nice smile and all that. "Oh, no. That's okay. Tie up there." So, we were there about a month, I guess, maybe a little more than a month. One day, one of the fishermen came down and stopped on the bridge. See, that's taken from the old Second Street Bridge. You see the height that the camera is looking down?

NS: Yeah.

CM: He hollered down. He said, "Hey, Carm. The sheriff got a warrant out for you." He said, "He knows you're here." So, he said, "I'm warning you." He says, "See if you can get out of here by tomorrow. He's coming down tomorrow with the warrant." So, we quick started the damn thing up, and we went up the river about another two or three miles. There were some old banana trees and stuff overlooking the water from the [inaudible]. We put the boat underneath it, and you couldn't see it. [laughter]

NS: [laughter]

CM: So, we stayed there until – now you got to understand –

NS: How fast could that boat go?

CM: Oh, no. It was a slow boat.

NS: Couple miles an hour?

CM: No. We could go eight to nine knots, which was no great amount of speed. But you have to understand when I tell you the story that I was pretty sick at the time. The boils came back on my arms, and the puss gets into your brain after a while. You don't think clearly. I just wanted to get the hell out of there. So, we waited until the end of February. Then, one dark night, we just came out.

NS: You were docked in the banana trees that whole time?

CM: [laughter] Yes.

NS: [laughter]

CM: That was January or February. I guess it was over a month. Then we just took off. We had no money.

NS: Yes, because you could not do business while the sheriff was after you.

CM: No. I had some money in the Long Beach Trust Company that had gone bankrupt. We got about fifty cents on the dollar. So, my father sent money down in general delivery. That was about sixty or seventy dollars. Then Charlie's mother came down. She wanted to spend a week in Florida. She got a room in the hotel around there. He borrowed seventy dollars from her. So, we made it back to New York. That's a story in itself. You know what I mean? If you go into all those details.

NS: [laughter] It is a pretty amazing story. What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you?

CM: A white squall. I showed you the picture. A white squall hit while I was helping the fellow out. He had bought a slope up on, I think, at Rye, New York, or someplace. He was afraid to come in the inlet. You have to read it.

NS: Oh, please tell me.

CM: Tell you in my own words?

NS: Yeah.

CM: Well, he got through East Rockaway inlet. He had the three fellows with him. He was going to college at the time.

NS: When was this?

CM: Let's see. This had to be around – see, I had the *Duchess*, so it had to be around 1934, maybe '35. He got to the inlet, and there was a tremendous groundswell. He was afraid to come in the inlet.

NS: Was that common?

CM: Yes. The inlets were too shallow at that time. They didn't dredge them. Jones Inlet at the time was a little deeper. So, I'd come down to Jones, and he couldn't get in there either. It was a tremendous boat. He was smart enough not to try it. It would destroy the boat. So, he went back to the west end of Long Beach and anchored the boat about a thousand yards offshore, a quarter mile offshore. He had a dinghy, and he rowed in, and he turned the boat over. But I

didn't know anything about this. I'm sitting on the beach. Because of the bad weather, I took advantage of it, and I stayed on the beach. I knew some of the fellows and a girl. So, all of a sudden, this (Willy Sherry?) he can come, and he's soaking wet. Those days, we used to take an old [inaudible], cut the top out, and put the buttons on it. He comes down, and he says, "Carm, you got to help me." "What's wrong?" He says, "Well, I'm anchored offshore there." He says, "I don't know what I'm going to do. I want to get the boat back into the bay somehow." So, he explained what was going on. Someone took us down to the beachfront. [laughter] I could see the boat anchored offshore. So, I said, "Now, how the hell are we going to get out there?" So, some of the lifeguards came around, and a crowd of people. They wanted to know what was going on. I said, "Well, we want to go out to the boat." I said, "The dinghy is too small. The two of us couldn't possibly get out in that." So, I said, "I'll tell you what, you row the dinghy, I'll push out as far as you can. Then I'll swim out." So he could dive on the –

NS: This is during the storm?

CM: Yes. When you're swimming, you can dive under the waves, and then you come out, and you would be under the boat. So, you can [inaudible].

NS: Yes. I've done that.

CM: Well, the first time, the boat just turned over – went over my head and upset. Then we tried it again, and we finally made it, and we got out there. So, he had sails on the boat. But it was blowing so hard he was afraid that the sails would rip. I said, "How much gas you got?" He said, "About five gallons." "Geez, that isn't enough." [inaudible] on the motor. I said, "I don't know what the hell we can do." It was late afternoon then. The three fellows that were with him were down the cabin. They didn't even want to come up. They were seasick and [inaudible].
One of them said, "Why don't you just beach the boat, and we'll run for it?" Destroy the boat. That's the way he wanted to do. I said, "No. We'll try and save it." So, the first thing, I took charge. I said, "We'll [inaudible] the sails." You could put one or two [inaudible] in it, so you had just a small sail showing. So, I started the motor. I just tell him [to] leave idling so that it would use as little gasoline as possible. So, we pull the anchor and start it out, and then it got dark. Well, now, he didn't have a compass that worked anyway. So, it was just useless. So, it was pitch dark, here we are in the damn ocean.

NS: Yeah. In the middle of a storm. CM:

In the middle of a storm. [laughter] NS:

With no gas, basically.

CM: Practically no gas, just barely moving. But I knew the wind was coming from the southwest. So, with the little sail, I kept it to the right of the wind to stop the wind. So, I figured I would go parallel to the shore.

NS: So, you were doing a close haul?

CM: Yes. I said the best thing that I could do is to sail right into New York Harbor because I don't know what else to do. New York Harbor is a big harbor. When you get up there, you can go into the Hudson.

NS: You will be protected from the wind.

CM: Yeah. You get behind Sandy Hook, at least we'll have some chance of surviving the thing. So, we started out. (Willie?) said, "Carm, I'm exhausted." He said, "I'm going down." He just opened the door, and I could just hear him hit the floor. I guess he fell asleep, and I closed the door. So, now I'm all alone. [laughter]

NS: You had two sails up? [laughter]

CM: No, just the one.

NS: Just the one.

CM: Just the one sail and reef and the motor idling in gear. So, I started going west, it's pitch dark, and there's spray coming over. Every once in a while, a wave would slap into the cockpit. I tell you, I figured that was the end. I'm trying to figure out and wonder if he has any life preservers around so I can get the hell off of this thing. [laughter] So, we ran a couple of hours, it must have been. I lost all sense of time. All of a sudden, the wind stopped. No wind. It was just immediately silent. I said, "What the hell's going on?" Then it hit me. I said, "This is one of those cyclical storms where you're in the eye of it." It would be like a mini hurricane. I said, "Now, what the hell do I do now?" Then, I could hear a roar coming. The wind came from the north all of a sudden.

NS: Oh, no. So, the whole sail –

CM: It hit us so hard it just tore the sail apart.

NS: Oh, no.

CM: It just tore the sail apart. The dinghy we had put up on the deck somehow – I didn't see it go, but at that time, it went too. The wind, I estimate, was probably a hundred miles an hour for about two or three minutes. It gradually came down. A white squall, everything turns white. Instead of making waves, it just makes bubbles, and you think you're floating [inaudible]. [laughter] Well, for about twenty minutes, the wind died down enough so that we could – I was just laying in the cockpit.

NS: Was the boom lift? The boom and the mast were still there?

CM: Yes. The boom was up, and the mast and everything was up. But the sail was gone. NS:

The sail was just totally gone.

CM: The motor was still running, luckily.

NS: What about the jib? Was that still –?

CM: We didn't put the jib up. I didn't use the jib.

NS: Well, what is the reef that you talked about?

CM: Well, when you reef a sale, it has what they call reef points. So, little pieces of rope. You let the sail down, and you tie it around the boom, so you have less sail.

NS: So, it's up halfway.

CM: Yes. Well, anyway, lo and behold, the weather cleared up, and I could see the lights on the boardwalk at Long Beach, and I could see the lights on the boardwalk at Rockaway. There was a black space in between. So, I'm thinking to myself, "That's got to be [inaudible] Inlet, East Rockaway Inlet." So, without saying anything, I headed for the black spot. Sure enough, it came right smack in the middle of the inlet, and it was high tide. [laughter] The waves weren't breaking.

NS: Super. So, it just carried the boat in?

CM: Yeah. The tide just carried the boat in. Well, that was quite a story. NS:

Did they come up after it?

CM: Well, he came up, and he used to like to play a trumpet. We got to the bridge, and we're coming down on a bridge, and we're afraid that I wouldn't even be able to turn the boat or anything. Now, he got the trumpet out, and he blew the trumpet as loud as he could, and they opened the bridge, sure enough. He lived on the waterfront. We had a little old dock. Sure enough, as I turned to make the turn to the dock, the gas ran out, and the motor stopped. [laughter]

NS: Good timing.

CM: So, you learn to respect the elements and that kind of thing.

NS: Did you say that your sailing has really helped you with –?

CM: Yes. Sailing is really great to learn because your movement depends entirely on the wind. So, you've got to understand about the tide, the currents, and so on and so forth.

NS: Do you think that's what helps make you such a good fisherman?

CM: Well, yes. Well, it helped to be a good boatman. Well, there was an outgrowth from this, if I might say. Of course, I moved to Freeport in 19 – well, permanently in 1936. But I lived in

Freeport in ’34, ’35 part-time. But there was an outgrowth from this that helped. In a very, very small way, helped win World War II, I guess, [laughter] if you can call it that. I had gotten a job in the winter temporary because I had lived in Long Beach. I knew people down there. I got a job on – it was called PWA [Public Works Administration] projects.

NS: Oh, yes. WPA [Works Progress Administration].

CM: No. WPA was different.

NS: Public Works.

CM: There was WPA and PWA. [Public Works] Administration, where they built bridges and things like that. They were building the boardwalk. So, I was offered to work for two weeks. They figured they would get your vote for that.

NS: [laughter] Did they?

CM: Well, no. Well, that's secret. Anyway, I worked there for two weeks. Most of the ones that they had hired were the – this was during the Roosevelt Administration. Most of the guys they hired were, well, not bums, but guys that couldn't keep a job. They would drink on the job and smoke. They did as very little work as possible. But I didn't bother with them. They would take one sixteen-foot two-by-four with one man on each end. Where I was taking two and carrying them alone by myself, and so on and so forth. Well, a foreman noticed that, and he told the superintendent. Now, this is 1936. He told the superintendent, I guess. When the other guys were let go, he said, "If you want, we'll keep you on for another couple of months." He said, "We would like to." In the meantime, they found that I knew something about boats; I had a boat and was familiar with the water and stuff like that. Well, I didn't realize at the time what the superintendent was up to. But apparently, he judged a man's character and his willingness, his ability and he weighed it against what job had to be done. I didn't know that at the time. But there is or was a railroad trestle four miles long across Jamaica Bay. They would send dock-building crews down there to drive piles occasionally. It was right on the verge of being – [Recording paused.] [inaudible] could pick it up.

NS: Let me ask you, when you first started fishing, what kind of rod did you have?

CM: Didn't use the rods much. Mostly handlines.

NS: Yeah. How would you do that? I have never done that kind of fishing.

CM: Well, you just tied a sinker on the end of the line and a hook, and you threw it out, or you dropped it from the boat to the bottom. We didn't have rods.

NS: Did you learn how to pull it in slowly so that the fish would [inaudible]? How did that all work?

CM: Well, lure is different. You're talking about getting a fish to follow the bait or the lure or

something like that?

NS: Yes.

CM: Well, when I first started, you just fished with bait. Of course, you'd put a piece of bait that was edible on the line and fish ate the bait with a hook in it.

NS: What kind of bait were you using? Worms?

CM: Worms or clams.

NS: Clams. So, did you learn how to shuck clams?

CM: Is that on?

NS: Yes.

CM: Well, that was no problem because you could just break the clam if you were in a hurry.

NS: You would just smash it with a hammer?

CM: Two of them together. Didn't bother with instruments.

NS: I was talking with someone. You would put the clam on the hook and then would you put the shell in the water?

CM: You mean to attract fish?

NS: Yeah.

CM: Well, we do that today. But at that time, it didn't occur to me to do it.

NS: So, how did you do it back then? You just put the clam on the hook?

CM: Yes. But if you went for fluke, you used the live bait. You used the small fish called killifish.

NS: Yeah. Where would you catch the killifish?

CM: Along the beach, you had a little dragnet. They're still used today for the same purpose. The fine mesh net – would take two to pull it. It would be about maybe twelve feet long. You'd drag it in a foot or two of water.

NS: How long would it take you to catch killifish?

CM: Oh, well, like everything else. We measured them by the quart. On a good day, you could

catch eight to ten quarts. Other days, you may be lucky to get one. It's fishing.

NS: Were there certain tricks that you learned to catch –?

CM: To catch the killies?

NS: Yeah.

CM. No. But if you walk slow along the beach without making noise, you could see them. You knew where to set your net.

NS: So, then you would – I'll put this on the hook and drop it in the water near the killifish or the clam?

CM: Well, when you're fishing for fluke, it drifts. You use a leader on the hook so it's away from the sinker because the flukes are a little scary. You would drift with the tide or the wind, and that would give the killie a little more motion. The more motion there was, up to a certain point, the more the fluke would go after it because it appeared to be alive or trying to get away.

NS: How long would a line be? How long would it be?

CM: Well, a line only has to go to the bottom. Twenty feet long, maybe.

NS: So, you would hold that. Was there a particular way you would throw it, or you just –?

CM: Well, if you're in a boat you just let it down in the line. But if your fish goes to shore, you had to cast it out.

NS: Well, what would you use for casting when you were first beginning?

CM: You just cast it. You'd take the line in your hand [inaudible], and you coiled the line in the other hand, and you would just throw it out. It would uncoil as you threw it out.

NS: What would the line be made of?

CM: Oh, in those days, everything was cotton. The [inaudible] line was cotton.

NS: So, same as the nets?

CM: Yeah.

NS: Would you buy that or would somebody weave that just for fishing?

CM: Being around a waterfront, you often found stuff. Our greatest delight for the kids around there was to find stuff either people left it or it would drift up on a beach, all that kind of – a lot of the things that we used, we just found, stuff that was neglected or abandoned. People that

came from the city didn't know any better. If they broke the line, they didn't even have enough sense to tie it together. So, you might find pieces of line that you'd tie together and made a whole line out of it. People would get their lines caught in rocks or heavy seaweed, and they'd break the line with line hooks because they would be abandoned hooks. Most of the stuff we just found around on the beach.

NS: So, you never had to buy any of that stuff?

CM: Well, very little. [laughter]

NS: [laughter] How long would it last you?

CM: Oh, who the [inaudible]. Well, let me tell you a little story. This is my tackle box. This is what we call a Japanese feather lure. It's made in Japan, that particular one [inaudible] that particular variety.

NS: [inaudible] hook in here?

CM: Well, the hook is put on. You don't keep them with hooks on, otherwise, it'd be a disaster. There'd be hooks all over the place. Now, let me tell you about this. You got the recorder on?

NS: Yes.

CM: These feathers are grown on a certain type of chicken in the Republic of China. The feathers are pulled from the chicken when the chicken is alive. Must be very painful. Now, they're sent to Japan in bulk – companies that order them and buy them. In Japan, they're processed in a way that these little strands – originally, they're stuck together, these fluffy, little things. That process of it, they came apart. Then, they're graded in size and color.

NS: How old is that?

CM: Well, this one is probably twenty years old. I don't use them too much anymore. I'm leading up to something. Now, up until World War II, that was practically the only thing we used. There were a couple of other types of lures. I don't know if I have them. We call them (black tin squid and the cedar squid?). But they had certain disadvantages. But the Japanese feather lure worked remarkably well for trawling. There's no bait on this. This is an artificial thing. You'd drag it through the water, and most of the fish – bluefish, tuna fish, things like that – would bite on them. Now, when World War II came along, we were cut off from our supply –

NS: Of Japanese lures.

CM: – of Japanese lures. So, in desperation, I had some old lures with the feathers off. I used to keep the heads. So, I'd go out to (Woolworth's?), and I'd buy ribbon. I'd buy red, white, blue, pink ribbon. Cut them off in lengths about four or five, six inches long, and then tie it on here. They worked fairly well. Not as good as the Japanese lure. The reason they didn't work too well was that the fabric came apart. It didn't stand up like the feather did. So, when the war was over,

it was really a few years before we could really get the Japanese feather lures enough to supply our demand. So, around that time, there was a polyethylene rope. I used to cut pieces off, make strands, and tie the strands on. But that had problems, too. By that time, I was determined to make a lure as good as the Japanese. [laughter] Because if we have another war, we aren't going to have no lures. But unexpectedly, the polypropylene and polyethylene had problems, too. Because somehow the plankton and there were things in the water, I imagine, that clung to it, and it was hard to get them off. Then we tried the same thing with nylon rope, cut it off and used them. But that was the problem too because it all tangled up and these small life things in the water – they call them whatever they want – they would cling to it too so that we'd get loaded with it. For a while, I was using just an ordinary comb. Every once in a while, I'd pull the line in, and you'd comb it. But it was a pain because you couldn't use them for a whole trip. It was always something. Either they would get tangled or something.

NS: Can you tell me a little bit about some of the more traditional lures? I heard they used to be made out of cork and wood.

CM: Not cork, no. But some inventive individual came along about ten years ago, and he started to make these out of –

NS: The plastic ones.

CM: Yes. It's a plastic of some kind. I imagine it's [inaudible]. NS:

Well, do you have any of the old wooden lures?

CM: The old wooden ones? Well, this was the most common, the Japanese feather. The other lures had problems.

NS: Did you use wooden lures?

CM: Yes. Well, we have wooden lures. But they have problems. Fish bite at them. But unless you're a fisherman, you probably wouldn't know what I was talking about.

NS: Try and tell me, please.

CM: Well, hang on a minute. The lures – I can show you. To bite at the line. It's another problem to keep them on the line. For this type of wood, I make myself the wire. Now this one's done. This is much stiffer. The lead wire goes through it and then the hook is on here loose and it can be pulled away from the lure. When a fish bites on it, the lure and the hook separate on the wire. It's attached. Now, I don't know where they keep the stuff. I don't go fishing much anymore. This is another Japanese-type lure that's made of whalebone.

NS: So, can you tell me about some of the kinds that were made around here?

CM: Yes. Well, I thought I had some in here but I guess I don’t. Maybe they're in another box. If you want to know about lures, I have them in another – see, the problem with a lure like this is

that the hook is on there rigid. You see?

NS: Yes.

CM: There's more leverage between where the lure is attached to the line and the hook. So, it has more of a tendency to twist, especially a very active fish. You can throw it out so that the hook comes out. In other words, you'll have trouble keeping the fish on the line. Just having the fish bite at the line is one problem; getting it to stay on the line is something else again.

NS: Well, what kinds of things did you learn to keep the fish on the line?

CM: Well, we had to make the lure so that the hook was flexible. I have all kinds of junk. [inaudible]

NS: Is this one that you made?

CM: Yeah.

NS: So, this is a metal?

CM: It's [inaudible].

NS: It’s real heavy.

CM: Yes.

NS: How much does something like this weigh? About four pounds?

CM: Oh, no. This is only about ten or twelve ounces, I think.

NS: How would you decide what color to paint it?

CM: Well, that was a problem in the beginning. We found that the red and orange, the brilliant colors, seemed to work best most of the time, and white worked well too.

NS: Is that because they glowed and would attract –?

CM: It's possible, but we're not sure. But possibly red represents blood or bleeding. It might cause a fish to become more interested. Well, most fish won't attack another fish unless they're bleeding to begin with.

NS: Where you would place the hook, was that also something you had to figure out? Or did you always place the hook at the end?

CM: I'd place the hook on the lure. The lure.

NS: The hook on the lure – how would you decide where to place it? Like on the one that you just showed me, it was at the end.

CM: I wonder if I have any made up here.

NS: I am interested in the ones that you make. I need to see –

CM: Yes. Well, I buy the skirt, and then I cast the lead to fit in there. These are the ones. NS:

How come you use lead?

CM: Well, it's heavy, and it's easy to melt. So, you can make it the shape you want. I make molds myself to shape them. Let's see. I think I have it. You can make molds out of – this is what they call a Marine. My mind is [inaudible]. Epoxy. It's a marine epoxy.

NS: You would cast a mold [inaudible]?

CM: Yes. Well, it's a little trouble. A friend of mine was in the propeller business. So, he made one with me out of bronze.

NS: So, you would have to know a fair bit about metals to be able to melt it and then cast it?

CM: Well, what you need mostly is the initiative to want to do it. Because if you want to do something, you'll find a way to do it.

NS: What got you started into making these?

CM: Well, I'm a very restless individual. I guess that you've noticed by now. I have a very restless personality. I just can't leave good enough alone. That goes into still another story if you want to hear. Now, you see what happens – the Y goes through the center of this thing. This one. There's something the matter with that one. See? Then you attach the hook onto here. You pull it up and the hook is just dangling out. You want to see what it looks like?

NS: Yeah. Do you make your own hooks, or do you buy them?

CM: Oh, no. I buy the hook. I'm getting away from this thing. For a while, I thought when I retired that I would make lures to help me continue making enough money to live on. See, that's still another story. The hook is attached there. Now, when a fish bites –

NS: Yeah. The hook will move.

CM: – he'll pull away from this thing.

NS: So, you would put your sinker on at the end?

CM: There's no sinker.

NS: No?

CM: No. This is the sinker. But you're pulling this through the water. The fish bites at this. Well, let me put it this way –

NS: Well, what would stop the hook from moving off the line?

CM: It's twisted on. You want me to make you one?

NS: I would just like to see how it is done.

CM: All right.

NS: You do not have to show me now. We can talk some more. You can show me afterward. Basically, you experimented with different kinds of colors.

CM: Oh, yeah.

NS: You found that lead was the best because you could mold it and shape it the way you want it.

CM: Yeah. It's the cheapest too.

NS: How long would it take you to cast [inaudible]?

CM: You got to make fifty to a hundred at a time or it doesn't pay. Because by the time you get to the pot hot and you melt the lead, it hardly pays. When I first started, I was selling them retail. But that's a pain in the neck because people come to the house and they would talk and they didn't know that I had to use my time to –

NS: Yeah, this is your business.

CM: You put the hook on.

NS: So, you would put a little knot in it at the end?

CM: Well, no. This is quite an art to be able to do this. Let me show you. This one, I have a swivel on it because it makes it more limber. I want to show you something. When you ask a guy if he's a fisherman, ask him to put on a hook. You can tell his whole life by what he does.

NS: Well, what's the right way to do it?

CM: Well, this is it. I'm going to show you. I'm going to show you. NS:

I see it's real tight there.

CM: Yes. Okay. Let me show you. NS:

Thank you.

CM: That's the proper way to put it on. Feel the end where I cut it off? Oh, you don't feel anything. If you could feel the end, then I didn't do it right. Can you feel the end of the wire?

NS: No.

CM: That is what I mean. Then you know it's done right. This is pulled up. NS:

That's real clean.

CM: Yeah. Well, after doing thousands upon thousands and thousands, I can do it quick and I can do it right.

NS: Yeah. You don't even think about it.

CM: Yes. I still sell some to the stores. I have a few hundred left. When they're gone, that'll be the end of it.

NS: So, basically, did you find yours worked the best? Did you get fed up with buying them at the store?

CM: Well, after I got to making lures, it's like everything else, I try to keep making them better and better and better. A lot of companies have copied my lures. Now, you see, the hook is pretty well hidden.

NS: How big a business was this when you were doing it?

CM: Huh?

NS: How big a business was it?

CM: Oh, no. It was just hand-to-hand. I didn't want it to get big. When I first started, I got a letter from – what is that rating company on Broadway in New York? Standard and Poor's. The one that rates companies?

NS: Yeah, I think it's Standard and Poor's.

CM: Well, I don't know who the hell it was anyway. Well, it scared me. [inaudible]

NS: Moody's Industrial.

CM: Huh?

NS: Moody's, I think, does the –

CM: Moody's. Well, it was one of them. But you can get this book from them if you're in business and check the rating and the credit rating of all companies. Because I started to buy stuff from big companies. It more or less scared me because I didn't want to go into business in a big way. But anyway, what I was saying –

NS: So, how many would you make?

CM: See, you pull this down. When the fish bites, he pulls it away from this. See? NS:

Yeah.

CM: So, it keeps it from breaking off. If this was rigid, it would have more tendency to break it off.

NS: That's pretty neat.

CM: Now, I don't make them [inaudible].

NS: I was just curious how many you used to make when you were really in it.

CM: Well, I was fishing, too. So, I was making them for myself. I would say it could be made into a pretty good business for anybody that wants to follow it.

NS: You pretty much were selling to your friends and stores around here?

CM: Yeah. I still have three hundred wood [ones] left.

NS: Left, wow. You must have been making a lot. [laughter]

CM: Well, it doesn't really amount to much because the store wants to make a hundred percent on it. If I sell a lure for three dollars, they sell it for six. They don't have to buy the material even.

NS: Yeah. Well, they're trying to pay rent. [laughter]

CM: Yes. I can't blame them. So, the trouble is it's seasonal. I often thought about what I would do if I had to do it to make a living. In that case, you would have to travel at least one month out of the year and hit Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Maine, Massachusetts –

NS: Yes. Sometimes where they fish in the winter.

CM: Because you figure if you're selling a lure for three dollars, what are you making on it? You're only making a buck and a half. So, to make a living, you would have to sell twelve to

twenty thousand of these damn things. You know what I mean? So, you can't just sell that much locally. It's a physical impossibility.

NS: Where did you cast the lead? Did you do that right here?

CM: Yes. Well, I have a thing in the shed there, where – plumber's melting pot – plumbers used to use when they use more lead for fittings. Today, they use all vinyl fittings and stuff. They don't use much lead anymore. So, I have one of those pots. I ran out of gas last summer, so I just melt it on the kitchen stove.

NS: What kind of lead –? Where would you get the lead from? You would just go down to a hardware store?

CM: Well, no. You'd go to a place where they'd scrap cars' metal. They sell the metal. I don't know where they get. You could get what they called virgin lead, or you could get the used lead. The virgin lead was a few cents more, but usually, it's pure. The newspapers use type metal, which is eighty percent lead. But that stuff is harder. It's harder to use because it sticks in the mold. That stuff is pretty cheap. But they go more to electronic printing these days. They don't use that much lead anymore.

NS: Is that why you started making your own because you like [inaudible]?

CM: My own what?

NS: Your own lures. Is that why?

CM: No. When I was fishing, I wasn't satisfied with what was available from the stores. I figured, "Hell, after fishing for fifty years, I should know as much or more than the guy that's in the factory." He's more interested in paying his wages, his helpers, and making a profit than he is for me catching fish.

NS: Do you anybody else who ever made their own lures?

CM: No. A couple of guys tried. I don't think they had much success. They're mostly small companies. There's a new one in West Palm Beach, Florida.

NS: What about around here?

CM: No. There's nothing like that here. I think I'm the only one around here. [laughter] I didn't make that many.

NS: Did you ever make anything else that you would use for fishing?

CM: Well, let me tell you something before I go any further. This has nothing to do with fishing. But thirty-five years ago, I went into the city to renew my license. So, coming back on the train, there's a guy sitting next to me and he's reading *The Wall Street Journal*. The journal

was fifteen cents at the time. So, when he got up, he left *The Wall Street Journal*. I said to myself, "Those guys, however, the hell they make it, make it pretty easy. He spends fifteen cents for a newspaper and then just leaves it on the seat." So, I picked it up. I took it home, and I read it. It made absolutely no sense.

NS: [laughter]

CM: So, this went on. So, every once in a while, I'd buy *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, and little by little, I started to understand what the words meant. Now, you got to understand, I had a fairly poor education and never came into contact, except very rarely with people that were connected with financing or anything like that. Maybe you went to the bank and talked to the teller, and that's about the only person I ever knew. [Recording paused.] – and think of all the beatings I took at sea and the risks, the abuse, and everything else compared to –

NS: A stockbroker? [laughter]

CM: Well, compared to what a person can accumulate through securities. The difference is unbelievable. I made probably four or five times more than what I was making on the boat, when I finally got into it in a way that I could understand. So, I don't know if that's the kind of thing you want to hear.

NS: Sure.

CM: Because it's very important. You're getting this information for the people that might want to start out in life and in business or become involved in fishing.

NS: Or to learn from somebody who has been through it all.

CM: Sometimes they've just been through the mill. Yes, it's just as important to use your muscles and your brawn as it is to use your brain. You've got to use both. Using one without the other is useless.

NS: Yes. It also sounds like you learned a lot about skills or just things like how to melt metal and being able to tell when it is ripe for putting in the mold before it is boiling away and ruining your materials. That's hard. Did somebody teach you how to do that?

CM: No.

NS: You just went and did it?

CM: I think growing up in the Depression days, you had very little option. You relied on yourself. You became self-reliant. No one went out of their way to help you very much unless you had a friend that could show you something, show you how to do things on a very personal kind of basis. But the main thing, when I look back, is the determination to learn and do it. Not just to learn about it, but to learn and do something with the knowledge.

NS: Was there a fisherman that you particularly admired, that you said, "I want to be like him?"

CM: No.

NS: Did you ever meet anybody like that?

CM: No. Probably not. No. There were a lot of hard feelings in those days. When I first started with the Freeport Boatmen's Associations, there were half a dozen guys that were small- time rumrunners. They were crude, to say the least. I didn't get along with them. You just did the best you could.

NS: But there wasn't one person who said, "Hey, I know you are serious about this, and I am going to teach you what I know."

CM: No.

NS: So, you just learned it all by being out there and doing it?

CM: You also got to understand that when I started in the business, there was no tuna fishing business or trolling business or anything. It's something that developed when I started in the business. There was no reference, no books, or nobody that had been in the business long enough to learn anything about it. We built it and learned as we went along because it was a case of trial and error. When we were fluke fishing, we knew we had to let the lines out from one-fifty to three hundred feet when you pulled the boat through the water. Because the bluefish is like a cat. It'll sneak up slowly behind a mouse, and it would pounce on it. That's the way bluefish is very sneaky.

NS: So, when it would pounce, you would have to reel it in fairly fast?

CM: Well, no. I mean, get them to bite. But then, when we started tuna fishing, we didn't know anything at all about tuna. But we found out that many times when you were pulling in the lure, maybe you figured I'll change the lure and put another color on. When the lure got from thirty to fifty feet behind the boat, the tuna would grab it. All of a sudden, then we realized that if you want to go tuna fishing, you had to keep the lines up close to the boat. They came into the wake. In my mind, tunas are like children playing in the street. They're playing ball and a truck goes by and disruption for a minute. They all get out of the way to let the truck go by, and then they're mad for a few seconds, and they might throw a stone at it or a baseball at it, and one of them might hang on for a second as they go by – playful – and that's the way to tuna is. As the boat goes by, they all get out of the way. When you see a school of tuna, they get out of the way, and they all come up behind the boat in the wake of the boat.

NS: What is the hardest kind of fish to catch?

CM: Well, when you are getting tuna. You see the one up in the store up there? The guy that caught that, that's 425 pounds, I think so.

NS: Where?

CM: On your left.

NS: Oh, that one? Yeah, the black and white one.

CM: Yeah. The guy had a fish store, and he caught that one. 425 pounds. That's about the [inaudible].

NS: Can you tell me about an experience when catching a fish that you really remember clearly?

CM: Oh, well, there are so many. That particular party, they had gone out with me. We hooked a tuna, a big tuna, probably six or seven hundred pounds. We eventually lost it. We hooked it at fifteen minutes to three in the afternoon. We generally left the mudhole at 3:00. I don't know. Let's see. Three, four, five, six, seven, eight. After hours – I don't know. It could have been four or five hours, we still had the fish on the line. The man wouldn't let me touch the line. He said, "Cap, I don't care if I lose it. But I want to catch this myself." So, always want to please the passengers – after all, they were paying for it – I let him do it. But it was pitch dark, and I'm using a flashlight.

NS: What time of year was this?

CM: This was in September.

NS: Was this a long time ago?

CM: Well, yeah. I'm talking about the 1950s. So, we fought the fish for something like five hours. Eventually lost it. What happens, the hook gradually tears the jaw. Then, if you slack up on it, the hook falls out, and the fish got away. So, I felt bad. He felt bad. Everybody felt bad. Now, referring back to that picture. About two weeks later, he called up and said, "Cap, we want to go tuna fishing again." So, I said, "What do you want to do? Go out there and lose another one?" He said, "Well, this time, we'll do everything you say." I said, "On that basis, okay." So, when we went to the mudhole, luckily, we weren't there a half an hour, and we hooked this one. This was probably a smaller fish – 425 pounds. The enormous power of fish is unbelievable. The thing is, to get the fish in before he realizes what's happened or before we can get a second wind. So, besides the man on the reel, I had another man holding the rod so it wouldn't hit the deck. I had another man holding his hand over the first man's hand so that the two of them could crank it together with a 175-pound test line and the drag so tight that it was almost impossible for a fish to pull it out without breaking something. So, as soon as we got the strike, you start up the boat and you run in the same direction that the fish is going for maybe five or six or eight minutes. In this case, I think it was eleven minutes, as fast as you could go. Then, when the fish slows down, before he knows –

NS: What's happening.

CM: – what to do or what's happening, you stop the boat, and you tell everybody, "Both of you

crank as fast as you go."

NS: Crank. Yeah.

CM: Besides me – I've got a pair of gloves on, and I'm pulling on the line, too. [laughter] Not very sportsman-like, but it's a way to catch a fish. So, soon as we got down to the boat, we start to get some and throw them on the boat. There he is. That was that particular story.

NS: What was the hardest fish you ever had to catch?

CM: That's the one.

NS: That was the –?

CM: Well, hardest?

NS: Yeah.

CM: Well, I don't know. It's hard to say. I didn't catch so many big fish. I had a five-hundred-pound white shark.

NS: Wow. What was that like? How do you catch a shark? [laughter]

CM: It was the same type of thing. Same way.

NS: Once it would hook on, you would reverse and go in the same direction as the fish?

CM: Well, no. A shark is different. See, a white shark or a mako jumps out of water. When they do, they stun themselves. So, we just let him run, and he jumped out of water three or four times. Then, it was just a case of fighting him and reeling him in. We got 502 pounds – we got in in less than half an hour, which wasn't too bad. That was only eight miles from shore. People think they're safe from sharks. [laughter]

NS: Was it always men who would go out with you on the boat?

CM: Sometimes, you'd have women.

NS: Would a bunch of your friends usually go out with you?

CM: Well, once in a while. When you're doing it as a business, I made some trips for pleasure but not too many. When you got to do it every day for a living, you want to get away from the water on your day off.

NS: What would be the most frustrating thing that would happen when you were running your business?

CM: The business? The actual fishing?

NS: Yes.

CM: In fishing, man, you're going to wind up [inaudible]. Let's see now. That thing again. I'll read you.

NS: No, tell me. Don’t read it to me.

CM: No. I'll read it because I can't remember it the way I wrote it.

NS: This is in one of the articles you wrote?

CM: Well, this was never published.

NS: When did you write it?

CM: Well, I don't know.

NS: Well, do you remember when this incident you are about to tell me happened?

CM: It's not an incident. It's not an incident. This had nothing to do with *Jaws* because I wrote before *Jaws*. [laughter] Never released it.

NS: I never saw that movie. I said I liked the water too much. I don't want to be scared of it.

CM: Yeah. “Tempestuous Air.” You want me to read this?

NS: Sure.

CM: "The wind in May ripples across the saltmarshes, carrying smells of freshness in the air. Wind has that underlying quality of bringing to you, putting you on notice. As the cold of winter recedes, the warmth of the growing sun has turned the old into new. It is the air impregnating your energy. There is no natural force on Earth that has shaped my life so subtly as has the wind. It is that elusive, unseen power that must be outwitted in every move, especially at sea. It can transform a giggling ripple into raging madness. Like a weary poker player who must weigh his every move and be quick to call a bluff. Sometimes offshore when the wet penetrating [inaudible] has you threshed almost to the breaking point, he will, like an executioner with second thoughts, trap a puff from up high ever so gently laden with land smells of pine and clover and electrifying vision of rolling hills and peaceful veils, saving notice to hold on for he will soon shift his direction from land. A reprieve. Without wind, cities would smother, woodlands become toasted. It is the wind that pushes the sea into the Caribbean. Caribbean stun in the flow of the Gulf Stream. Without wind, stagnation would engulf the Earth. It causes sand on lonely beaches. It is the wind on which the winds of the sheer water glide over the troughs and crests of the sea. It is the wind I fear most. At night, a rattle at the window, a shudder of rain, I cower and shrink thankful of the wall that separates us."

NS: That is beautiful. You wrote that?

CM: [laughter] Yeah.

NS: It is beautiful.

CM: This is one that was never published.

NS: When you would go out with people on your boat, what would be the most frustrating parts?

CM: [laughter]

NS: Don't be scared to tell because I know there is lots of frustrations.

CM: Well, the most frustrating, I think, was booze, drinking. Drinking is very, very hard to cope with. For the simple reason, when you're a charter boat captain, you want the people to be happy. You want them to come back. You want them to catch fish. You want to do right by them. When they drink, they lose money and lose all sense of decency. They just lose all sense of anything that's good in them sometimes – cursing, swearing, fighting, and all that kind of thing. I think that is the most frustrating. You're a charter boat business because it's the type of thing that you like to do. When you see it all going up in smoke, you've got a group of people that are drinking and not enjoying the sea, the fishing, and everything else, you lose your commitment within yourself to be nice and so on, which I hope I never did. But I did, I guess, at times because [inaudible]. [laughter]

NS: All those stories you hear about how fishermen are such big drinkers. Are any of those true?

CM: Well, yes. Most of them were. Well, I might have gone to a bar and had a beer once in a while, but I never went with them.

NS: So, they would do that in the bar but not on the boat?

CM: Oh, no. Most of them didn't drink on the boat because you could lose your license. If you got in trouble and the Coast Guard would come down and smelled liquor on you, you'd probably wind up with a suspended license. It'd be like a person like a bus driver or an engineer operating the train. You just can't do that kind of thing.

NS: Is there much – what do I want to say? – storytelling in the bar or on the boat?

CM: Well, they all brag about the big fish they caught. [laughter]

NS: Yeah?

CM: I don't hang out in bars. But usually, they got a story about, "You know what happened last Thursday?" or something like that. "Listen to this."

NS: Do you ever see any sea monsters out there?

CM: Well, we see whales occasionally. There's a shark that's called a basking shark. One came up beside me one time. It was as long as the boat with forty-five people. He'd just come up alongside and like it was looking at me. Well, I've had quite a few experiences with whales and sharks.

NS: How would you handle that?

CM: Well, he just went away by himself. There wasn't anything I could do. If he decided to ram the boat, what can you do? But apparently, they must have a certain amount of intelligence, too. For a thing to grow up to where you have ten or twenty tons and grow forty, forty-five feet long, they must know something.

NS: Were there any legends about some sea creatures out there?

CM: No, not that I know of.

NS: Like Moby Dick or any of that?

CM: Oh, well, some of them were comical. When we used to fish in the mud hole, the water was clear some days, and you could see the fish under the boat. When you went chumming, your chum would [inaudible] pieces of butterfish. There was one fish; he must have broken a line because there was a white linen line that was streaking behind him. I guess he was three or four hundred pounds. Everybody tried to catch that son of a gun. But I guess he learned the hard way. [laughter] No one ever caught him. He broke a line once, and that was enough. We used to call him old [inaudible].

NS: [laughter] That must have been pretty strange to look at.

CM: Yeah.

NS: I lived in Vermont for a while and there was – they called him Champ, who was this big creature somewhere out there in the lake. Every summer, a couple of people would say, "Oh, yeah, we saw him over here." Was there any kind of creature like that around these parts?

CM: No, just that one tuna.

NS: Yeah, who had the line.

CM: He was around for, I guess, three weeks or so.

NS: Did you ever learn any songs?

CM: Songs? No.

NS: I was curious. Ever see any mermaids out there?

CM: No mermaids. [laughter]

NS: Or hear any stories about somebody seeing mermaids?

CM: No. Nothing like that. You have to be pretty practical [laughter].

NS: Well, you hear these stories about how fishermen are always seeing things. I'm just curious if they were true or not.

CM: No. I doubt whether there was anything like that seen out here.

NS: What kinds of rods did you use when you first began? I know you talked a little about just dropping the lines. When did you start using rods?

CM: Probably in, I don't know, 1932, '33, when I got to charter the boat. I got a boat big enough to carry passengers in a charter. You're more or less forced into using a rod and reel because they use the rod and reel. I would often fish because I knew more about it than them and I could advise them to let the line out further or pull it in or change your bait or something like that. If I was fishing, I had a better feel of any problems that might come up.

NS: Did you prefer just dropping the line than using the rod and the reel?

CM: Once you got to using the rod and reel, it was really better. Because it wasn't practical to use a handline especially if you've got passengers on the boat because you have the loose lines. With a reel, it's all wound up on a reel neatly.

NS: What kind of rods did you first use?

CM: Well, we used to have the split bamboo. They were glued together.

NS: Did somebody make that around here?

CM: There was a man who started – and I forget the name. I don't know if he made them around here or whether he made them in a shop. He had some kind of a shop where he was making woodwork or something. He decided to try and make rods. He made a pretty good split bamboo rod. Then, from then on, all kinds of things happened. There used to be – people used [inaudible].

NS: Yeah. You know Frank DeGaetano and Eastern Reel.

CM: Yeah.

NS: He has got a bunch of fencing foils.

CM: Yes. Well, if you could get an old fencing foil that was a little beat up, you could shape it and have somebody make a rod out of it for you. They were very good. But they would rust, so somebody's got the idea of wrapping the whole thing with a silk line and then coating it with varnish. That would help. But today, you got these –

NS: These graphite blanks with glass on them.

CM: Yes. Well, these things – they're durable, they're cheap. This is a very early rod. I guess this was made thirty years ago by Lotts Brothers. They were in Baldwin.

NS: What is that made of?

CM: Well, fiberglass. Fiberglass resin. It's fiberglass impregnated with – I mean, it's really an epoxy impregnated with fiberglass pieces. This is an old, old rod. It must be [inaudible].

NS: Do you know of people who ever decorated or did you ever decorate any of the handles?

CM: Well, yeah.

NS: Put any carvings or anything? CM:

I never went as much for the rods. NS:

You liked the line fishing?

CM: Well, it was out of my field. I used them. I was more one to use the stuff than to worry about making it. I had enough problems sailing a charter boat without boats or going into making –

NS: All the equipment. I'm trying to think if there are some other things we haven't covered. I know it is getting late.

CM: When the war broke out, the Coast Guard came down and took practically the whole fishing fleet.

NS: Drafted everyone.

CM: Well, most of the captains were really too old to draft. I was probably one of the youngest. Even I, at thirty, was too old for what they wanted. But the dockmaster down there – Marty (Fisher?) – he was telling the Coast Guard – they got him to enlist, and he was advising them what boats to take and the crews and so on so forth. I said, "Marty, that boat is my whole life. I don't want to give it to the Coast Guard. I'll do anything, but I don't want to give it to the Coast Guard." The night he inquired down in the main office in New York Office [inaudible], and he

said, "Look, join the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Volunteer your boat and your services for free." He says, "That way, you'll already be in the Coast Guard on a part-time basis, and they won't take your boat because you're already in." So, that's what I did.

NS: Smart idea.

CM: Yeah. So, the first few months of the war was a disaster as far as we were concerned. I was given a uniform, a chief boatswain's mate, and sent down to the Coast Guard station. My first assignment – "Now, go offshore at 4:00 or 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon and submarine patrol from Jones Inlet to Fire Island Inlet." So, I got four men in the crew, myself as five. These guys are all store clerks and insurance salesmen [who] knew absolutely nothing about running a boat. Here, I'm on submarine patrol? You know what I mean? What am I going to do if I see a submarine? It was useless. They got seasick. I had to run the boat all night myself. When I get back in the morning, I told the lieutenant down there, I said, "Look, this is impossible." I said, "I didn't get any sleep at all. I had to do everything myself." I said, "What the hell am I going to do if I saw a submarine?" [laughter] I don't know where to start.

NS: Fire a missile? [laughter]

CM: Yeah. Oh, anyway, he said, "Well, do the best you can for now." So, I made three trips. The second trip, I didn't go as far. The third trip, I just stayed off the inlet. He told me, "No boats are allowed to go out or come in that inlet without our permission." All I had was a forty-five-caliber handgun with five rounds of ammunition. [laughter] I said, "What am I supposed to do [if]somebody wants to go in or out and they don't stop?" He said, "Well, then you shoot them." [laughter] We're not trained soldiers. But shortly after that, they had the planes in service. One plane would take the place of twenty-five boats. So, from then on, my patrol was only in the bay. I had twenty-four hours once a week. I'd show up at the Coast Guard station. They'd send us to a place like a boatyard where they're building boats [for] security. Nobody allowed in or out of the place. Patrol inside the inlet, they warned anybody that's coming toward the inlet that they're not allowed to go out. You couldn't go out of the inlet. Nobody. Because, at the time, we didn't know what to expect, they said we could have bombing raids. So, you weren't allowed to have lights lit. You had to have your shades all down and have as little light on as possible. If there was a light out on the bay, we had to go out and check and see who it was.
Come to put the light out. If you didn't put the light out, destroy it. Well, I had quite a few experiences. Even though I was without pay and all, actually we were in a combat zone. Quite a few things happened because the Germans let the saboteurs off the submarines. Some of them were caught off of Fire Island. [Recording paused.] This, that I'm holding – is it on?

NS: Yes.

CM: This that I'm holding in my right hand is called a Huntington Drone Spoon. It's used very extensively by king fishermen in Florida, commercial fishing. They use it all the time. We use them up here, too. It's hard to use them on a charter boat because the reaction is so terrific on it that if you use more than one, it would have a tendency to tangle up all your lines. So, you got to avoid using more than one at a time. That kind of makes your passengers a little mad. So, we had a captain that fished. He moved to Florida and he got a job as a salesman with a lure

company. He told them he had a design somewhat similar to the Huntington Drone that he would like to try. So, they made a press to stamp out the spoon. Spoon, by the way, is the greatest artificial bait known on Earth. There isn't anything better than that.

NS: What is that? [laughter]

CM: This is an artificial bait. It's made of stainless steel and it's polished.

NS: When they first made them, they just took a regular spoon and carved it? Is that how it got the name?

CM: Oh, no. It's called a spoon. I don't know how it got the name because it's shaped somewhat like a spoon. But it's made in the press. The stainless steel has to be shaped in a certain way, and the hook put on, and so on and so forth. Well, anyway, he designed this particular spoon that looks somewhat like a Huntington Drone. So, he gave me two of them, and when he came back north, he said, "Carm, try these out. See how you like them." I'd use them, and they were terrific. They were the first artificial lures that I ever used in my life. So, I tried to get in touch with him, but I could never seem to find him. Well, years later, when I went back to Florida, I went to the company that made them. I said, "(Blair Wood?) used to work here, and he designed the spoon." I said, "He gave me two, and they are really terrific lures." The man said, the owner of the company, "We don't make them anymore." So, I said, "Well, that's odd."
I said, "I never had anything better. They've worked so great. I went hundreds of miles out of my way to come over here and buy your spoons." So, he said, "Listen, when you're in business, you're in business to make money." He said, "When they go fishing in Florida, sports fishermen, they buy two, three, four dollars' worth of bait. At the end of the day, they throw the bait away. But they buy a spoon for two bucks. The spoon is got to last forever." He says, "How in the world can I make any money out of them?" So, I said, "Gee, I sympathize with you. But is there any possibility of me getting any? Have you got a couple of old ones around?" So, he said, "If you go down the cellar, there's an old box; it's all dusty, and it's full of rejects." He said, "Pick out what you want for a buck apiece." [laughter]

NS: He still charged you, and he was going to throw them away? [laughter]

CM: Yes. He said, "Well, I got them there. But I don't expect to sell them. Take what you want."

NS: Well, what did he mean when he said that the spoons have to last forever? How long would this last?

CM: Well, I've got this thing like ten years. If they bought a new spoon every day, like they bought fresh bait every day, it'd be worthwhile. Because then he's selling hundreds of thousands of spoons. But because it's made of metal and stainless steel, a person uses it a couple of times or uses it at the end of the day, he puts it back in his fish box.

NS: So, it is not worth [inaudible] to make lures, is basically –?

CM: Yeah. He said, "I can't sell enough of them." He said, "Because when they buy a spoon, they expect it to last forever." He said, "You just can't sell enough of them." So, he gave it up. But I got about ten from them. So, I could probably hand them down to my children and my children's children if they appreciate it. So, you got problems. I would say that in the event of a war, or something where they wanted a lure to put on life rafts for aviators or shipwrecked sailors or something like that, it would be a terrific lure. Because even though in trawling, it's terrific. But even if a raft that's being propelled by the force of the wind at a couple of miles an hour, with the added motion of using your arm to give it more motion, would be a terrific lure for them to use. Being stainless steel, it would last as long as they were on a raft. So, it does have practical applications if anyone wanted to make use of it. But like everything else, I suppose, if there's a war, they'd do it the quickest, easiest way – probably a lot of junk.

NS: Getting back to the lures, how many fishermen do you know who made their own lures?

CM: I don't know of any.

NS: Besides your friend?

CM: Well, he didn't make them. He was a salesman, and he designed it.

NS: Well, that's what I mean; he designed it.

CM: To tell you the truth, I don't know any. Some of them I know made a lure now and then. but not to any extent or with any great success.

NS: Why do you think fishermen are not making their own lures, like you?

CM: Well, I had a practical reason for doing it. Because during World War II, we couldn't get the Japanese feather. So, I started experimenting by using ribbons and tying them on the old lure heads. As time went on, it was just to make a better mousetrap and make a better lure. Something that could compete with the Japanese. Eventually, some of the companies in the United States copied some of the things that I made. Before the [inaudible] came out –

NS: When did these plastic things come out?

CM: Well, I don't know. It must be ten years ago. But at least fifteen or twenty years ago and more, I was starting to make lures by using tubing. I'd kiss the head and put the tubing on.

NS: That's smart. I would have never thought of that. [laughter]

CM: It's a terrific lure. But besides making a good lure, you got to be able to sell it.

NS: It's not as pretty. [laughter]

CM: People are used to seeing a skirt or feathers that hang down. When they see a piece of tubing, they say, "Gee, I wonder if that's any good. That's a cheap-looking thing." But actually,

this is a better lure. This is a better one than the others. I've made hundreds of them. I still got hundreds of them. I can't sell them. I got to a point where a good friend, fisherman, I gave them a couple of them. [laughter] I guess I'm not a salesman because I asked him, "How did you make out with that lure?" "Oh, yes. We're doing good with them. They catch fish all right." I'm thinking to myself, "So, it's so good. Why don't you buy some more?" But probably, the cost of this is equal to the skirts. But to a person that just looks at it, it's just a piece of tubing stuck on a hunk of lead. In their mind, it can't be very expensive. But actually, it takes me longer, much longer to make this lure than to make one of those. If you just put the lure in the head – let me see if I have some – [Recording paused.] In the lure – this is a smaller one than this one. The whole thing is made in one piece. The bottom where the hook is on and this part where the wire was on is all in one piece and impregnated in the lead. So, there's no possible way for it to come apart. It takes me as long to make this thing by hand as it does to make the rest of the lure.

NS: That's very difficult.

CM: Yes. But you can't explain that to people. [laughter] NS:

They think a machine does it. [laughter]

CM: They're made by the millions. *Zoom, zoom, zoom.* In addition to making the lure, you got to be able to sell it. Here's one. I actually folded it over the top, and the whole thing is impregnated in the lead. So, there's no possible way that that could come apart or pull out from the lead. Of course, fish are three hundred pounds.

NS: I want to get a picture of those little things. I want to just put it side by side.

CM: That's the way. I might have a heavier one. Actually, that particular lure is a little heavier. That one I know there is for a wider lure.

NS: It's okay.

CM: Like I say, if one of my sons was interested in doing something like this. But people just want to put in their seven and a half hours or eight hours and get their paycheck at the [inaudible]. [laughter] They don't want to figure anything out. If you go into any kind of a business, you've got to figure that if you breakeven the first year, you're doing good. You got to find materials, tools, and all this stuff.

NS: You're lucky you have the talent to do this kind of work. Most people do not.

CM: Well, it's a case of wanting to do it. Lately, I do not want to anymore. Is the tape on?

NS: Yeah.

CM: You asked about the Hudson Canyon. When I started fishing, the bluefin school of tuna were fairly close to shore. They're a type of fish that will go fairly close to shore like ten, twenty, thirty, forty miles. There were a few things that happened. When I was fighting the

pollution, I sent charts to Washington, explaining how the schools of tuna were diverted by the dumping of the acid. Some smart alec scientists gave all the charts and information to the California Tuna Fish Association. The next thing I know, the next year, there were twenty clippers here that caught an average of a thousand tons each. So, the first year, they cleaned out 21,000 tons of bluefin tuna. The bluefin tuna doesn't spawn until it's 125 pounds. So, the fish has got to be six years old before it's born. So, if they wipe out the fish that ranged from fifty to 125 pounds, which were the ones they wanted the most, they wipe out that year's fish; you're going to have a long, long time before the fish recovers. See?

NS: The depletion is really affecting people.

CM: So, besides the pollution, acid dumping and everything else, they wiped out a certain size fish, which made it bad for the local tuna fishing. But in the meantime, some of the boats started with the faster boats. We've got boats now that can cruise thirty knots, which was unheard of fifty years ago. The equipment – you got radar and sonar and LORAN. Now, there's a new system they call the Apollo, I think, that works off the satellites. There are boats that cost a quarter of a million dollars. These are private boats. We found – because I went out with [inaudible], the governor's brother's boat fifteen years ago. We went out to the Hudson Canyon, which is ninety to a hundred nautical miles offshore. It's a canyon – tremendous depth of water that extends for about fifteen miles. It's a crevice in the Earth. It was caused by the glaciers. Thousands of years ago when the glacier came down from Canada and cut the Palisades, where it cut the rock in the Hudson River. When it got down to lower Manhattan, where there was a lot of bedrock, the glacier stopped. Then as it started to warm up a little bit, I guess the glacier suddenly started to go again. At that time, the shoreline was about ninety miles offshore. So, as the glacier moved, it kicked up a trough. It kicked up Long Island and Highland, New Jersey. As it moved out, it cut a deep slice in the surface of the Earth a hundred miles out. As it got warmer, the ice melted all over the Earth. The ocean surface rose so that now the shoreline is a hundred miles further inland than it was in those days. Because of this –

NS: Glacier activity.

CM: Yes. Because of this indentation in the Earth, this canyon, we call it the Hudson Canyon, as the currents moved, the Arctic current and the Gulf Stream – the Gulf Stream is going north, the Arctic current is going south. The two of them mix. They mix up in this canyon where the water drops and comes up and makes that easy and everything. The water from the Hudson River is full of nutrients. The plankton grow. From there, where the plankton grow, the sand eels grow. Then the big fish eats little fish. So, it's a tremendous feeding ground for the bigger fish, for the tuna. When the bluefin tuna fishing slowed down – of course, it still exists, but there isn't enough tuna for the whole fleet. So, they started fishing in the Hudson Canyon. We found that besides bluefin tuna, there were yellowfin tuna, long-fin tuna, and bigeye tuna – three different other kinds of tuna besides – and swordfish. So, actually, in the last ten years or so, a new industry has been building up. Now, fishing [is a] tremendous business offshore.

NS: Wow. But I would think that only people who knew this area would know about the Hudson Canyon.

CM: Now, we're known all over the world.

NS: But for a while, was it just like the local secret?

CM: Well, for a while, we didn't keep it a secret because of the tremendous distance. It's about fifteen miles.

NS: Just nobody knew.

CM: You just couldn't go out there. When I was running to go to Carrie's brother's boat, we had two big diesel engines that could carry six-fifty gallons of fuel. I make about three trips out there. Three or four trips. That was when it was just starting. But as time goes on, and there's more people interested and the equipment gets better, there's more and more boats going out there, and their fishing technique is getting better too. They're becoming more familiar with the place they fish, the kind of bait they use. Besides trawling, they're starting to [inaudible] out there, too. So, things are continually changing. That's not the end of it because I've been in this thing since I was eight or nine years old. I could see the changes in all these years. I would venture to say that besides the Hudson Canyon, in time, they would fish the edge of the Gulf Stream, which is only another thirty-five or forty miles. When you fish at the edge of the Gulf Stream, you're opening up a whole new thing. Because then there'll be what they call billfish. There'll be more mullan to catch, more dolphin. We do get some now.

NS: Those poor dolphins. [laughter]

CM: No. Not that kind of dolphin. [laughter] The dolphin I'm talking about is a fish.

NS: Not the mammals?

CM: No, not the mammal.

[Recording paused.]

NS: I need to record this.

CM: In that story, I'm saying, "Look, I'll take on the whole United States government if necessary. I'm right. I'm right." Now, it's written eloquently. However, if you will notice, there's a deep sarcasm in it, right? I'm telling a lot of people, especially the public. Now, *Newsday* wouldn't print it that way.

NS: Really?

CM: Well, here's a guy [who] comes down, and he tells one of the Freeport captains that he's a yellow-bellied bastard to [inaudible] in words that I say. Now, you know a newspaper isn't going to say that. They don't want to get anybody upset, especially the people that live in Connecticut. You know what I mean?

NS: Yeah.

CM: But if anybody changed a word in that, it wouldn't be mine anymore. So, I would rather that nobody saw or printed it, rather than change it. Because in there is embodied my whole philosophy of life. If you can't see it the way I do, you don't have to see it at all. There's nobody going to change me. Because I'm what they call a hard-headed wop.

NS: I don't know. This story is pretty tame, I have a feeling. It's more about the sea and how you get through these storms and the hard work.

CM: Yeah. But I start off, and I'm not contented with the way things are on the end. There are obstacles which I didn't understand. There are people working in banks, brokerage houses, or even teachers, for that matter; they're sitting on those fat rear ends and don't know what it is to go out and make a buck. That's what I'm saying. I don't understand how to cope with it. That's why I went into the fishing business. The problems that develop and what you have to contend with to make a living. I call the IRS guy a knucklehead because they're just people working at a job, doing what they're told to do. They're not using their own imagination, initiative.

NS: Or work.

CM: Or anything else. They have nothing to do with the costs of civilization. All they do is do what they're told, "Go out and get this son of a bitch Marinnacio. He didn't pay his social security taxes." Guy comes down and threatens my wife to take the chair she's sitting on. Who the hell do they think they are? Now, it's written in a very nice way. Don't get me wrong. But I mean every second of it. As a matter of fact, I need to follow-up on this thing. When I did go up to Sam, I told him, "Look, you ought to go out and get a job digging potatoes and learn what it is to sweat and make a living." So, he took a big, red ink pen, and he wrote across my tax return, "Audit." You're going to Brooklyn. [laughter] For a lousy $153. I said, "Well, I'll go as far as they will." I said, "To hell with you. I ain't paying." This went on and on. But actually, I want them to see how far they would go. I did eventually pay it, but I just wanted to see how far they'd take a little guy and what they would do to me.

NS: Can you tell me a little bit more about why you became a fisherman?

CM: Well, it's right there in the beginning.

NS: Well, tell me in your own words.

CM: How I became a fisherman?

NS: Not how. Why?

CM: Why? Well, partly, when we moved to Long Beach because of my health – I was very frail as a child and being in the open air – especially we'd row across the bay and pick fresh clams and oysters and would eat them. I didn't know at the time, but they're packed with vitamins. It was nourishing, and it was good. I liked things that were good for me. I gradually worked into the

fishing. Then as time went on, and the Depression, it was impossible to do anything else. People were riding around in [inaudible] Cadillacs. Even in those days, they had their home in Florida and Maine. It was just a blank wall. It was absolutely unbelievable to me how you possibly could do anything like that. I got to sympathize with many of the Blacks in this country. Because they don't understand the system, the same as I didn't understand it. The only difference was that I made it a point to overcome it, to understand that somehow. Being on my boat, as I got more and more into fishing, it was away from the problems on land, the problems I didn't understand, and I made a living at it. Had three kids. We were never in debt. It was tough. But then there came a time when I realized I was getting older, and I couldn't take it anymore. I had to turn to something else. So, finally, I worked for (Carrie?) for a while, for five years. Then, Billy had the job for, I think, three years. Then, I started making lures.

NS: But there has always been that link to the ocean. I was wondering if that was there.

CM: Is your recorder on?

NS: Yes.

CM: Marinaccio means a rugged mariner. The exact translation, I'm not sure of. But it means crude, rough.

NS: Fisherman.

CM: Or a mariner.

NS: Do you know if your family in Italy, were they fishermen or somewhere along the line?

CM: No, they weren't, that I know of. But there's some history about the family of one that was a captain or something that was related to the sea. But this is going back too far. I don't know.

NS: Far back as you know about is all that matters.

CM: I know there was one related to the sea. But that's all.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 6/27/2024