

Interview with Bill Reed

Narrator: Bill Reed

Interviewer: Nancy Solomon

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Location: Hampton Bays, NY

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 Investigator: Nancy Solomon

Transcript Team: National Capital Contracting

Abstract: On February 3, 2015, Nancy Solomon interviewed William "Bill" Reed for Long Island Traditions. Bill comes from Hampton Bays and is the fourteenth of sixteen children in his family. From a young age, he was influenced by his older brothers, who were baymen, and he developed a keen interest in the water and fishing. He pursued college for a brief period before fully immersing himself in a career as a fisherman. The interview explores Reed's early life, highlighting his childhood fascination with clamming and boat building, specifically his experience constructing a 43-foot wooden dragger named the *Elizabeth Jay*. Reed recounts his journey in the fishing industry, beginning with his early work experiences and the mentorship he received from seasoned fishermen like Jimmy Miller and Stian Stiansen. He discusses the challenges and learning experiences of running a boat at nineteen, the intricacies of various fishing techniques, and the significant weather patterns that impact fishing activities. Reed emphasizes the importance of understanding weather conditions, sharing how he educates his daughter about high-pressure systems and the implications of different cloud formations. Reed's narrative includes vivid memories of navigating through adverse weather conditions, the camaraderie among fishermen, and the life lessons imparted by older fishermen. Finally, he reflects on the generational differences in the fishing community, noting how older fishermen were more willing to share knowledge and support younger ones. The interview also delves into Reed's personal experiences with fishing equipment, such as sewing nets and dealing with the physical demands of the job.

Nancy Solomon: Okay. This is Nancy Solomon of Long Island Traditions. Today is February 3rd, 2015. I'm talking with William Reed, also known as Billy Reed of Hampton Bays. We're going to first start talking about how you got into fishing and what some of your earliest experiences were.

William Reed: Well, as a young boy, I'm the fourteenth of sixteen children. My older brothers were bay men. I remember I was too young to go clamming, but in the mornings, I would watch them leave the dock. So, it impressed upon me at a young age, the water and making a living out of the sea. I can recall, in first grade, the teacher asking the children what they wanted to be when they grow older. One boy said he wanted to be a fireman. I said I wanted to be a clammer. So, [laughter] I didn't quite make it to clamming only, but two summers. But as a young boy, again, we built (Elizabeth Jay?) in my backyard. That's a forty-three-foot wooden dragger. So, that was like four years of my life growing up after school and Saturdays and Sundays, constructing a boat. I can remember so much of that. I can remember. It's just amazing. So much of that. So, let's say your formative years, that was back in the day when national fishermen had great articles in it about net building and boat construction, and winch design. So, as a young boy, it suited me. Then life progressed, and I went to college for two years. The fun meter was not too high on sitting in class. [laughter] So, another older fisherman came along, and he wanted to run the Elizabeth Jay. Then I worked with Jimmy Miller, who has since left this earth. I worked with him from May until the first Wednesday in October of 1989. I can remember that because the first Monday in October, Peconic Bay opened up. During the opening of Peconic Bay, we used to be able to fish in there. He tore the net up pretty bad. But that was a time when you didn't really want to be on a little boat for the winter. Now we're coming in October, and things get rough and ugly. So, he was a seasoned fisherman. He had his fun of working on a little boat in the summer. So, he went off to work in a bigger boat in the winter, which is wise. So, as a young boy, that was my chance there. So, I started running the boat when I was nineteen years old. Nineteen-year-old boy running the boat, I remember I was nervous. I stayed at Peconic Bay for a while. [inaudible] never knows at one time, I tangled my gear in his decoration site. I didn't know left and right. But I remember that. We harvested horseshoe crabs and fluke and things there. We took it slow. We worked hard and one day built into the next. We got married at a young age and had children at a young age. We had a good journey.

NS: When were you born?

WR: I was born on August 4th, 1969.

NS: Okay. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

WR: I grew up in Westville. I was born in Bayshore, the fourteenth of sixteen children. That was back in the great days when your parents fed you. When you were gone, and you came home, and you were gone, and then you ate dinner, and you were gone until you got tired. So, we were able to be Tom Sawyers and Huff Finns. [laughter] Like for Christmas one year, I remember the three younger boys got a bicycle. The three of us got a bicycle to share, and it was a used bicycle from Clarence Slager. But basically, we built our own bicycles and we built our own things. Mechanical skills you learned as a young boy, replacing bearings in a bicycle. We

learned so much on a bicycle. It's unbelievable. But it wasn't far from the water. It was like one mile to the water. We'd ride our bikes down there and go snapper fishing, and crabbing, and all the things that we're healthy to do. It was a good time. Besides catching snakes and frogs and turtles [laughter].

NS: Who was the first mentor for you as a fisherman?

WR: Well, Bob Harter always treated me good like a son. I would call him up frequently. But I must say that, and (Stein Sayanson?), who's no longer with us. It was interesting. When I first started fishing, I was like nineteen and twenty, then twenty-one, whatever. But the older fishermen, the fishermen that were fifty and older would gladly help me. They would gladly tell me, "Oh, this is where I had fish yesterday," or "This is what I'm doing." But the younger fishermen that were younger than that, they see you as a threat. It's funny the perspective is, as you mature in life, oftentimes your perspectives change, individual and you can see it. The younger guy, he's just trying to grab a piece of the pie for himself. The younger, "Ah, I got to get it before he will." The older fisherman, he sees that the picture different. He sees a young man trying, working hard. They want to see the young man succeed. They see generation to generation. They want to bring along the next generation. Sam Scarborough, I remember as a young fisherman asking to bring Sam Scarborough my chart and saying, "Sam, can I fish here, here?" Sam's like, "Yes, here." But a lot of the older fishermen, I have lots of memories.

NS: Pick one.

WR: Well, I can remember when I mentioned before Jimmy Miller ripped up that net in Peconic Bay, right? So, I knew how to sew, but not well. Because I used to sew in my basement in high school. I used to take a piece of netting and hang it up. So, Jimmy Miller ripped up the net, and he quit. So, now I got the net off the dock in [inaudible] canal. It's hard to explain a tear, but the tear went from the mouth of the net back to the caught end, from the front to the back in like a tongue shape. Like a tongue. You'd rip out. So, now that I have all sorts of experience, I know that you start sewing from the caught end first. You start sewing what ripped last first, and then you put the tear back together. So, the tongue was ripped out. So, I spent all day sewing across, sewing across, sewing across, sewing across, sewing across, sewing across. I was like making my own net. Then another old fisherman, (Dougal?) came along and he's like, "Oh," laughing. Then he took time to show me, "Look, this is how you put a net back together." Then he would go fishing. I'd spend all day sewing. Then at the end of his day, he'd stop by again, see how I was making out, and give me some more pointers. Not even three days, I had it back together. It would probably take me a full day now thinking back to sew it. But it had to take me three or four days to sew the net back together. But Dougal, it was nice of him to stop by and teach me what I needed to know and then leave me alone, check in again, and leave me alone. So, I was blessed to have a lot of men teach me.

NS: Did you ever cross paths with old Ochers?

WR: It's funny we grew up in the same town. But no. I know his name well and whatever, but no.

NS: Can you think of another fisherman that taught you things that you still remember today?

WR: Yes. Sandy Mason, we've always had a good relationship with Sandy.

NS: What were some of the things that he taught you?

WR: Well, I think Sandy taught me to go slower.

NS: In what way?

WR: To be safer, sometimes faster or slower. I remember one time we had a big storm. It might've been one of those Halloween storms. This goes way back. I think it was the perfect storm, the one that Sebastian underwrote about, right? Well, that just flattened our beach out, right? So, I remember the whole parking lot was covered in sand. Every net was buried in sand. So, I remember digging a net out with Sandy, digging a net out. There was a broken pallet with nails sticking up, right? So, I'm just digging. I take this thing. I just chuck it. So, Sandy, without saying nothing, goes over and turns the nails over. [laughter] A little silly. It sounds silly, but because in our business, I've almost gotten killed all by just numerous times from hurrying and rushing, and not taking things slow and cautious, and being fearless. Some of the stupidity that youth brings with you. I think he taught me that strange lesson of sometimes, just slow down a minute and evaluate it and then go. When I was a younger fisherman, if I wasn't at my boat, say at like 4:00 a.m. and out the inlet, way before, at four, I forget it. The whole day was shot. Forget it. If I wasn't like the jackrabbit off the line, it was like, "Huh, I ain't bother. The days were wasted shot. Forget it." [laughter] It's so funny, Sandy, he would just show up at 6:00 a.m. There's plenty of time left in the day after 4:00 p.m. But if I wasn't like rocking it all out of a start, so it's a strange thing to say that he taught me to go slower.

NS: Were there other things that he taught you?

WR: I think sometimes life lessons about being patient. I mean, sometimes these fishermen become your close circle. Then you share, not necessarily things to do with fishing, but things to do with life, and they become your confidant. They can become your encourager and give you good advice and vice versa. Then as I get gray hair in my beard, at times, he listens to me what I have to say over time.

NS: Can you think of a particular story he might have shared with you?

WR: Oh, sad story?

NS: As a lesson. Yes.

WR: Well, one of the classic [inaudible].

NS: Let me pause this because I am guessing that is important. It has been buzzing. Okay. WR:

Okay. Well, Sandy, he's very observant of the surroundings, what's going on around him.

I'm very observant too, but he sees things differently. He proved it because not only once, but a couple of times while he was squinting, he landed giant bluefin tuna. He's like, "I see it on my scope. I see it on my scope, a little bloop. Then I haul back and put bait on the line." Here he is bringing in a giant tuna. Here, I am totally oblivious to it, but he's showing you on the watch for the screen halfway through the water column or watch higher up in the water column for this type of blip on your thing. It's funny when you look out of the water, you just see water, but underneath the water is a whole chain of life going on. Things that you can't see with your eye, but you have to use other senses. Sandy's kind of like, "You got to suck it all in."

NS: Who taught you about understanding weather?

WR: Well, I was an okay student at school. We read, especially when I was a younger fisherman. I went to college for two years. So, I was in that studious mode. So, when I started fishing, I was still in the serious studious mode. There's a lot of good writing on weather and things. Cornell Cooper extension at the time used to offer videos to us, all sorts of videos. I'd go there and eat them all up. They had things on the weather. Even just the other day, it was the snow. I'm telling my daughter, "Hannah, look up in the sky. You see the high-pressure system coming in. You see the high clouds coming in." I'm explaining to her this, or you see a sun dog in the sky. I'm like, "Listen, in twelve hours, you're going to have rain because the sun dog is here in the sky." I still have all the Cornell books that *Audubon Weather*, *Audubon Birds*, *Audubon Sky*, *Audubon Mushrooms*. So, we want to be continually learning and watching nature around us in tune. As a commercial fisherman who makes his living from the water, we need to be in tune with so much of what's going on outside. People just get in their car, it's windy. I need to know what direction is the wind coming from. Is it northerly? Is it going to be southeasterly? All these things have big effects.

NS: Well, tell me about how you understand those kinds of winds. What kind of wind brings you good weather? What kind of wind brings you bad weather?

WR: Well, any wind that's strong brings bad weather. Winds go counterclockwise around a low. So, if you could imagine Long Island where we live, a low-pressure system would be, say, a hundred miles south of Long Island would be easterly winds. So, the easterly wind is a big fetcher ocean. You have winds coming from Nantucket, say two hundred miles of ocean. So, the easterly wind is always the worst for where we live. Easterly wind means there's a low-pressure system, low-pressure system storms. So, any easterly wind is going to be bad for us to an extent. Squid fishing in the summer is amazing. We can't figure it out. Then when the wind blows out of the east, the squid just comes off the bottom, or they come active. We just stop catching. For squid fishing, southwesterly is great. They just love the squid, just settle down on the bottom, they go slow to sleep, and we scoop them up on a southwesterly wind. Northerly wind sometimes is a bad wind, sometimes is over squiddy. Squids are very finicky, which makes it fun. You don't know. It's a challenge. But sea scalloping doesn't really matter as much unless it gets really, really rough. Then the bottom gets too silty, and they're filter feeders, so then they're like choking on all the silts. So, they just kind of take the day off, and we don't catch as well. Of course, if a swell gets really big, then the swell, a lot of animals just shut down. Flukes, they'll just go to sleep. They'll just bury in the bottom. They'll take the day off. So, we'll just go right over the top of them. They just sleep in the bottom. They bury under, and they just rest in

a real rough swell. But any wind that gets over thirty knots is just ugly. It's just ugly. It's like, I don't want to be there, whether it's north, south.

NS: What does it feel like when you are out there in that kind of wind?

WR: I'll tell you what, first it's cool. It's like, "Oh, yes, I'm a fisherman," [laughter] and you're taking a bait, and you can't stand up. You got to watch every step. Now it gets to be challenging. At first, it's like your testosterone level goes up, like, "Oh, yes." You have to watch your foot placement on the ground, and you have to watch your hands because you want to hold on as you go. For a while, it's all right. This is what we do. Sometimes a boxer gets punched in the face. If you're a boxer, you're going to get hit. If you're a fisherman, you're going to get in bad weather. But after like six, seven hours, eight, ten, twelve hours of it, it just gets terrible. Like, you can't even sit on the bench. You're just sliding back and forth. You can't sit in your chair. It just gets to be so uncomfortable. Last year I was coming back from New Jersey, I couldn't even lay in my bunk. I got my arm hooked around my bunk around the mattress and my bunk to keep me from falling out this way. You're getting launched off the bed, boom, back down again. After a while, it just gets like, come on. You're just like, "Lord, can't I just pull the string and make time advance so I can get in?" But we endure it because we're providing for our families, and it's what we do.

NS: Do you fish alone?

WR: I used to fish alone. I no longer aspire to that. Because fishing alone is really set of good challenges, such as you really had to watch everything you do, every motion, because you only have so much fuel in your tank. So, that was a fun challenge. I fished alone for, I don't know, ten years. But I won't do it again. A good man pays for himself.

NS: A new bird is coming. [laughter] When you fished alone, did you have some close calls?

WR: Yes, we did. Thankfully, the Lord preserved my life. I think a lot of times. These are all when I was younger. Thankfully, I haven't had close calls lately. The closest call I had to working by myself was, I was yellow tail fishing off of (Rich's?), like twenty fathoms, like fifteen miles off from Rich's. The wind was blowing southeasterly, which put the wind on my side. So, I had to come northwesterly to get home. It was too rough to pick on the deck of the boat. I had Elizabeth Jay at the time. I look back, it was all so beautiful. I had my wife, and I don't know if I had three or four children at the time, and you're just working. We weren't making that much money, but I was making enough money to provide for my family. It really was beautiful. Well, nevertheless, we were taking a beating for the ride home. Since it was too rough for me to pick, what happened was all the fish went to the leeward side, not the windward side. It goes against the wind because that's how the boat rocks, right? So, that boat had a good chair. I was able to turn myself sideways and pin myself in. So, you're just getting this big rocking motion the whole time, going home. You go down one way, you go back the other way. It's like being on a swing ride for two hours. So, I get up to Shinnecock Inlet, I'm only like maybe half a mile off of Shinnecock, and now you get tidal influence on the waves. So, one of those nice gentle swing rides I was telling you about, the boat went over on its side. So, the boat now goes over on its side and I'm sitting there on the boat's on its side. Then another wave came

and we went back upright again. So, we went back upright again. Then during that incident, this engine was cooled by seawater. The sea cork had come out of the water, and I sucked air. So, then the impeller became air bound. When it went back down, it had a vacuum to it. I remember I had to get towed in because the engine was overheating after that. That particular time, Chris Harder was out in the North Sea. He was like, "What are you talking about? The weather was fine." That boat was much bigger, and he had the wind on a stern, and he had a fine trip. But for me, that probably was the closest working by myself. But we got that close call when one time we bring the bag of fish in the boat. My brother lifted it up to pop the pucker, and we went up in the sea, which means the bag then went out the stern of the boat. So, I was after the bag. So, I just grabbed onto the cold end with my fingers, and the bag swings way out with me on it. Then the bag swings back in. My brother's picking up to let it down. I was like, "Oh, that was fun." You're too stupid to think it was dangerous. But I think that the third and really closest call I had was I'm kind of smiling thinking about it because it was just so stupid. But [laughter] I had gotten this knotless netting from Japan, this Kinoshita netting. It's like no knots, really slick and efficient. I had waited for like six months to get this twine. So, I made a net in my front yard. So, eagerly built this whole entire net from scratch. We put it on the boat. I'm so excited. My knotless netting net, oh man, this thing's going to come up on the fish like a stealthy thing that I don't even know we're here. So, the first day we go out, we get like a thirty-bushel tow of butterfish, and no one else has any butterfish. I'm just thinking, oh man, this net is just so awesome. So, I was so excited for my new net. So, it was in the fall. The next day, I think it was a Saturday. They were calling for a hurricane to pass by, but the hurricane was going to be like two hundred miles offshore. So, I was smart enough. I knew the weather. I knew that a big swell was going to be coming, and I knew that the ocean was going to be getting rough. But with my new net, we're going to get out there muddy. So, I tell my brother to show up in the morning. So, we get there in the morning, the ocean's flat, huh? "Right time, let's get out there. Let's go. We're going to get those butterfish again." So, we caught them off round Dunes, which is like West Hampton. I go back to this nothing. So, then maybe the fish went west of it. So, I go like, [laughter] we go to Rich's Inlet, nothing. Then we get down to Smith's point, and there's nothing. Well, by now, it's like 12:00 p.m. I already know, oh no, this isn't good because the swell is huge now from the hurricane. We're not going to feel the wind from it, but the swell is huge. So, I was like, "Oh man." So, I didn't really want to scare my brother too much, but I knew the inland was going to be really bad. So, I knew that we had to wait for the tide to start coming in. Because with the outgoing tide, it just cuts the bottom of the wave out. It makes the wave twice as big. So, [laughter] this goes back a long time ago, I don't know, like ninety-five maybe. I remember jogging back really slow because I had time to kill. I opened up all the scuppers on the boat so that in case a wave breaks on the boat, the water will rock wash off fast. So, my brother Tom knew something was up as we got close to Shinnecock, and he goes and puts his life jacket on. I'm like, "Tom, what do you need a life jacket for? Are you chicken?" He was older, which means oftentimes wiser. So, I actually timed the current wrong. The tide was still going out when I made my approach. It was a nice summer day. Actually, the Coast Guard rubber inflatable was right alongside me, like a hundred feet off of my side, as I was entering the inlet. They were right there. They were just waiting for something bad to happen. But one particular wave was so awesome. It was awesome. It was because I survived it. But we just about pitch polled. Inches from pitch polling was when a wave comes, and if your bow goes under and the wave breaks, you just go stern over the bow. But the wave hit our stern so hard. It felt like someone came up from my back, and I keep you a shove, and the water broke on the

deck. The boat went right into the floor pit, which is in front of the boat. Went into the wheelhouse. I would say it filled up the floor pit. We had a couple of feet of water down there just from this huge wave. Then we made it in, and the fear was nowhere. I remember the guys in the thing, "Oh, Bill, that was so awesome." I was feeling tough, like, oh yes, and they want to divide me a beer, and I'm like, "No, I don't drink." It just shows youth and fearlessness, and immaturity. I still do prudence, but not enough. In hindsight, why didn't I just wait two hours to come in? Why don't I steam to talk Grandma Monta point for five hours and I wouldn't have nothing to worry about? Now I think totally different. Then I was like, "Oh, we'll get in. We'll be fine. That was a close one. Then of course, we lost the providence. The providence in Shinnecock and land. But I wasn't there that day. I was on the North Sea. But that was a nice calm day. It wasn't calm, obviously, but it was a smooth summer day, and you let your guard down. Because every time we come inland, we should be looking in the back of us for any sort of sea coming. You just get so acclimated and so used to the seas that even on a nice day, a strange sea, what happens comes and just grabs you. You're going too fast, and you got a lot of weight on the deck of the boat and just like, rolls right over. Two men nearly died, but my father built the providence. He's like, "In case the boat ever flips over, I made this window so you can get out," and that's how Vinny got out through the window my father made. But there's danger. I once chopped my finger off and all those good things.

NS: What was the scariest story you heard about another fisherman?

WR: Well, I think injuries on the boat scare me a lot now. We know plenty of deaths on boats, from net reels and from winches and from wires and from shafts spinning, the propeller shaft spinning. A guy goes down there with his sweatshirt with the two things hanging on his sweatshirt that gets caught. So, those things kind of scare me the most. I didn't want to fall overboard.

NS: Is there one experience that you learned from that happened to somebody else?

WR: Well, even when I was younger, when I chopped the end of my ring finger off, even that was stupid. I had my hand.

NS: I am not talking about something that happened to you, something that happened to somebody else, that you learned from.

WR: In many ways, we learned from all these sad things. Rolling through my head are so many incidents. I almost hate to mention them, but everyone who comes on my boat, I tell them, watch it whenever we're lifting a load. Do not stay anywhere near the line. If the line snaps, where's that force going? Where's the recoil going off that wire? That's one of the things that scare me. I tell the men if you're going to go down in the fish hole, if you're going to go down the engine, you're going to go on top of the wheels. You're going to go anywhere where I don't see you. Tell me anywhere where I can't see you, tell me because I'm responsible for your well-being at all times. Because we know stories of guys that went out to take a leak and never came back. I tell the guys, no off the stern of the boat. You go right on the deck. Go right on the deck. I don't want you near the rail because guys go to the rail, and they slip over. Urine is ninety-eight percent water. Anyway, we got deck hoses. It's rinsed off. That's the safest spot to

go. I don't care. You go right there. Silly things like that. You just don't want anything to happen to anyone carelessly.

NS: Are there things that you learned? You talked about weather and things you learned in college and in school. Are there things that you learned about the weather that most people do not know?

WR: Well, not really. I mean, men have been sailing the seas forever. But I'll tell you this, the weather changes fast and the ocean gets rough fast. It doesn't take long for the ocean to get ugly and vice versa. It doesn't take too long for the ocean to get nice again. But the ocean gets rough fast. I would just caution people about that.

NS: Can you tell when the ocean's going to change? How do you?

WR: All right, listen. The year is 2015, and I must say weather forecasts are much more accurate than they were twenty-five years ago, however long ago. But you got to watch the clouds. The clouds tell you so much. The shape of the cloud. The cumulus, the cirrus, the stratus clouds, and how thick they are. It tells you oftentimes when about the wind's going to come. If the sky's clear, it doesn't really tell you a whole lot. Besides, it might be a high- pressure system sitting on you and that's good. But if it's winds hard out of the north, it could be clear skies. So, we watch the clouds a lot for weather. But we don't really use the weather (Noah?) weather radio as much. We use other land-based weather systems, and we compiled them all. We suck in all the data, and we process it in our little brains.

NS: You mentioned that you knew that was going to be coming when you were making your way back to the inlet. Are there other things that you noticed changing when bad weather is coming?

WR: Well, it's like the Christmas globe, that little snow globe. We catch better when it's calm and things are all settled down. Bad weather comes, everything gets shaken up. There's a hole. It's just like that. The ocean's just like that. Everything's out of place. Fish that should be tied to the beach or off the beach, and just, it's just like a whole hodgepodge. You'll catch fish that you don't normally see. Southern fish up here. You catch shrimp and all those things. But interesting.

NS: I have also heard stories about birds. What are some of the things you notice about birds when a storm is coming?

WR: You definitely see birds that don't – hurricanes, too, bring up a lot of southern birds. They get caught in the hurricane. Even my friends in Nova Scotia said they had laughing gulls in the parking lots in Nova Scotia. Laughing Gull is a southern gull with a black head. We used to never have them around here. They're not really in Shinnecock, but they're in Islip. It is funny they haven't made it here, but hurricanes bring up with them birds. They just get stuck in them, and that happens frequently. We're starting to see pelicans. Pelicans, too, won't get sucked up because they're not normally here. But just like we see snowy owls they don't really come by storms. But it's got to be a really big storm that formed really in the tropics, and they get stuck in

the storm. You just get stuck. The wind just blows around.

NS: Do you recall some of the things that you saw before Sandy hit?

WR: It is usually after the storm goes through that we see things. Beforehand, no, not really.

NS: What did you see after?

WR: After Matt? I didn't really see anything. I saw very little nature after Sandy. Sandy cost us a lot of money in lost revenue. I was doing a well operation at the time. We were fishing well pots in the ocean with those conical pots. It was probably four weeks until we caught a well, and not only that, all my gear was tangled terribly. What's tough is you're employing men, and you're trying to make a paycheck for these men. They have families. Fishing was really tough after Sandy. We just didn't make any money. The snow globe, which I mentioned, was so out of whack. We didn't catch scallops. We lost the scallops for like six weeks. No scallops, no sea scallops. The wells were gone, and you go fishing. You're not making any money. It's like, ugh. When storms get that bad, it messes it up for a while in the ocean and those species. But we survive. We go on. It's okay.

NS: When you heard about Sandy, what were some of the things that you started to do in preparation?

WR: Yes. Well, I knew that the beach was going to be flattened. So, we got all our gear, and we put it in a proper spot. I had the North Sea in a good spot, but the providence was not in a good spot. We were in the worst spot possible, which is it slipped right by Shinnecock Inlet with no barrier from the wind, nothing. So, we just tied lines and lines and lines and lines. It was like a spider web. There's nothing you can really do. But wait, the storm out to see if you survive it or not. We survived it. But I can remember going to the end of Shinnecock Road in the morning, get binoculars out, and seeing the boat over there. I was like, "Whew," because that would've been a really bad hit. That would've been tough.

NS: Can you describe how you tied the providence up?

WR: Oh, interestingly, right by the inlet, there's those big boulders, the rock jetty. So, we even went around the rock jetties with ropes. We would tie ropes around that. The boulders were like, "These ain't going anywhere. Oof." Another problem with ropes is chafing in the storm. The boat moves, and the boat surges. So, you have a lot of rope chafing, the rope rubbing against things. So, then you got to put a fire hose over it for chafing. But even the fire hose chafes out. So, you can't tie too many ropes to one cleat because there's too much force in one cleat. So, you got to go around the Gallo's legs and you got to make sure everything you tie to it super strong. You see, you got to like really spread the load as much as possible on multiple points around the boat. Then instead of tying a rope to a piling, like where's the give? So, then we put tires. For that storm, we put tires over the piling, and then we would tie to the car tire. The truck tire has a little bit of give to it. Because things are moving, they have to have given. If it's too tight, then the rope's just going to snap. Then we had to tie the tires because the tide was so high. We had to lash the tires down to the whaler underneath to make sure the tire didn't

come off the whole piling. So, it was quite a production.

NS: Had you done anything like that before?

WR: We have.

NS: Who taught you to do this?

WR: Yes. How had you learned these things? You'd be amazed by the things that we know in order to perform our job. You just learn over experience. You're doing something for twenty-five or twenty-six years. You just learn what works, what doesn't work. Most of what I learned was from making mistakes, doing things wrong. That's how I learned most of my stuff. But people share their ideas and stuff. But some ports are nice for storms. Like, well, what makes Shinnecock so bad where we tie up is the inlet now is very good and very safe inlet, which is good, but it's a deep inlet. The one thing bad about that, the energy now comes into the bay. The energy that swells comes in, and things surge around more. It isn't like tying up in (Sable?) when all you got is wind or Great South Bay, or tying up in Montauk even when you don't have a swell coming in Montauk Harbor, or New London or like New Bedford. They got gates on the harbor. But we survived. [laughter] That was a good adventure.

NS: Were any boats lost during Sandy?

WR: None of the commercial boats were. No. The boats fared worse than the boats on land. It was funny, like, because of liability reasons, no one wanted my boat in their marina or in their slip. They're afraid that the boat's too big and it's going to snap holes, and they're afraid of, so I had to weather it. Right where I tied up, like I said, is a bad spot, but I was trying to get the boat out of there in a bad way. Maybe in hindsight, I should have gone to Shinnecock Canal, the north side of Shinnecock Canal, and there I just would've had to deal with the wind. Wind isn't bad. You blow a hundred miles an hour, and your boat is fine. But it was the surge of the boat going. You have 150,000 pounds going forward, and then 150,000 pounds go back. That's where the force really lies. But it wasn't bad. These are the things that we do. This is what nature throws at us. There's like the snow we have outside today, this is how it is. We live here, you are going to get snowstorms, we're going to get storms on the ocean. We're going to get big storms. It's all part of it. This is what just goes into the cookie batter, and this is just part of it. When the weather's good, we work hard. When it's freezing cold, like this morning, we chicken out a little bit. We're just like, it's just not safe. When I was younger, I probably would've gone today. Here's an example. It was negative four this morning, and I'm like, "No, it's just ice in the deck of the boat. One little slip on the floor falling about the stern," older and wiser definitely applies to my life.

NS: How many people work with you on your boat?

WR: We usually go three-handed because we are scalloping, and there's a lot of scallops to shove, and the work is tremendous. But it's not bad, it's just that my wife packs me all cold food. I'm like, "Don't give me anything hot because I don't have no time to heat anything up." Peanut butter jellies in the basket. You just go in, and you shove it in your mouth. You go back to work

because the harder we work, the faster we work, the more intelligent we work, the more money we make. We're not out there for help. We're out there to harvest as many animals as we can in a shorter period of time possible.

NS: The people who work with you, are they older, younger, same age?

WR: They're younger. They're like thirty-two and twenty-five.

NS: Do you find yourself teaching them things that you were taught?

WR: Absolutely. I try to teach as much as I can because the more everybody knows, the more intelligent your crew is, the better it is for the boat. You're the only guy who knows how to sew on a net. You rip it up, you're the only guy putting it back together. So, the things that Dougal taught me earlier, like you start from the caught end. We just ripped up the last trip on Thursday of last week. We ripped up pretty bad. I had to take the net out of the boat. But here we are back to what Dougal said, putting it back together like you're supposed to. Of course, I like to be a teacher and to teach that. They got to know.

NS: What have you taught them about getting caught in a storm that just comes up?

WR: Well, it is tough. Like there was a storm earlier in the year and I didn't go on that trip. I stayed home. It's hard when you're now the captain of a boat, right? You want to perform. You want to perform, and you want to catch fish. You want to bring the boat back with a good catch of fish, right? So, it was only this fall. It was when Jason and Danielle blew, had their windows, and had to get all new electronics. Did you hear that one?

NS: No.

WR: So, Chris Windsor, he is a great guy. He didn't listen to the weather in the morning and they were just calling for a gale. They were calling for a gale of wind in the afternoon. Well, a gale turned into a storm, but Chris didn't do the last-minute check. It is tough. So, it was cranking like fifty, sixty knots of wind. It was more northerly than anything but unbelievable. He got the day in, one of the guys was like, "We got to get out of here. It's not safe like you heard me mention earlier. We lost all our margin of safety here." He only made like four and a half knots for the steam home. It was just so rough out. But the men shucked the whole way home. They got everything done. We came to the boat, the boat cracked up against the dock so hard because you just can't stop it now. Much wind. I had to tie the boat with tow wires. That was a good memory. [laughter]

NS: So, knowing when not to go.

WR: Yes. Had I been there that day, I would've gotten out of there. I would've left after one toe. But when you're a younger skipper, it's hard to make a judgment for someone else when you know you're not there. But when it gets that windy, you got to get out of it. You got to go. That was pretty bad. They all survived. They all got day's pay. [laughter]

NS: Was there one day, like, I am just thinking about the storm that forced you back to New York and instead in New Jersey? Can you talk a little bit about that and what happened?

WR: Well, it was not really a big deal, but New Jersey opens up the first Sunday of September and the first Sunday in November and January. Well, it was September, and now this is just this past September. Weather forecasts have been accurate on it. They've been really good. The weather forecast. They were calling for really bad weather Monday night. It was the first Monday this past September. So, Sunday night was flat comp. So, it was a three-thousand-pound limit. One of the guys didn't want to go. I was like, "How can we go? I'll go." Because we're still making money. We're making money. Why? Because we work, and whatever. But I knew exactly what was going to happen. They were calling for easterly winds, like thirty knots. But it's summertime. It's summer. So, we caught the fish and, I don't know, quick. We had three thousand pounds and four short toes or something like that. The focus is like untouched all summer. You can't even harvest them. So, there's just millions of them out there. It's like boom, boom, boom. We got three thousand pounds, like nothing. So, then we start our steam to New Jersey and the wind starts blowing out of the east, which isn't bad. It's on your stern. So, then we get to New Jersey, and I forget, 12:00 p.m., about somewhere around then, we pack out. That all went smooth. We went to 7-Eleven, got some coffee, went to some restaurant, and caught a hamburger. Then as I'm leaving Manasquan Inlet [laughter] right away, I know this is going to be ugly. Because normally, it's a twelve-hour ride, but this is going to be like a fourteen-hour ride. I remember I puked at the back door and the guy was sleeping downstairs and thank the waves were just crashing over the top of the wheelhouse. Because I didn't want him to see that I puke because that's not so manly. It's just ugly. You're just getting hammered and hammered, and stupid doors are banging, and it's just ugly and noisy and just like getting beaten. Summertime was so nice all summer, I was girling it. So, thankfully, there was so much water washing over the border that washed my puke away. So, he never got to see it. But I told him anyway. That's another time you just want to get back there. What are you going to do? You just have to endure. But we made \$9,000 that trip. We got \$3 a pound and the expenses might have been two grand and you pay the guy. So, my business took him five grand that time for two days. That's a really nice hit. We need those chunks of money to come in because each net's like ten thousand fuels. All the numbers are big. We need those shots. It was great. I'd do it all again. I would do the same exact thing again. I would take the beating, the punishment. I'm not throwing the towel in. So, in winter, it goes to 5,000 pounds. So, I got a report that one guy had his five thousand and four tows south of Montauk, like forty-five fathoms. So, again, this is the wintertime. You have short periods of good weather. Good weather's better than bad weather. I went out there with a new rig, a rig that I hadn't been out of. My troll doors were new. Basically, the troll doors were new and it's a newer style door to be more efficient and burn less fuel and blah, blah, blah. I had a government observer with me, or the at-sea monitor and the government likes to send in monitors and watch us all the time. So, we weren't catching. We were catching terrible. I knew I had to be out of there by 7:00 p.m., because by 7:00 a.m., by whatever day it was, Tuesday or Wednesday. By Wednesday 7:00 a.m., they're calling for a gale of wind. So, that was my cutoff time at 7:00 a.m. so that I'd be underway so that I'd only be like three, four hours off of New Jersey. You could take a spanking for a little while. You'd get in, and then the wind was going to crank and get really cold out of the northwest. So, then I had planned to go up to Sandy Hook and come down along the South Shore, Long Island. It's going to be like fifteen degrees, and really hard northwest. But I'd have protection from the land. It

would be okay. This is how it goes. But we didn't catch. The first tow was three bushels. Then I had two fish, then I had like a bushel, a bushel. I made five tows. We just weren't catching. So, it got to be nightfall. I got seven thousand pounds. I got ten bushels instead of seventy bushels on the boat. I'm like, "What am I supposed to do now? I ain't steam in New Jersey. There's no reasoning in that." So, I just said, I'll just come back to New York. The weather really wasn't bad at that time. The weather was decent. So, I was like, "What am I going to do?" So, we just steamed back to New York. I notified New Jersey law enforcement via fax and telephone that due to deteriorating weather conditions and poor catch rate, I'm coming back to my home port. I said, dude, get hammered out there. What am I supposed to fish until morning and have 1,400 pounds? Now I'm out there in a gale of wind. It's going to be freezing cold. The gale of wind in the winter is different than a gale of wind in the summer. It's different. The ocean's colder. Seeing the waves is hard. You get ice. It's just ugly. Summer gale is a little nautical. It's nautical. It's not ugly. So, you just got to do what's reasonable and prudent. Come on. So, New Jersey law enforcement, they call it New York law enforcement. They're like, "Get this guy," when this has been, other people have come into New York waters, too, under varying circumstances. But there is no set rules. This is what you got to do. There's no protocol. If you have a broken trip or feel bad weather, there's no, this is what you're to do. There's no rule to it. So, I followed what I thought was you're supposed to follow. So, it was unfortunate. It was unfortunate. In hindsight, I wish I'd just thrown them all back dead, then everyone had to deal with all the junk. But that was that. Another good story. Ten years from now, that'll be a good story. For now, it's aggravation. [laughter] I call the tree rings of life, remember that? Remember that time that happened?

NS: Was there one trip where you knew this is what you wanted to do for a living?

WR: Well, that's a good question. Well, I know this. When I was a young man, I was working with Jimmy Miller. I was so naive to the world and the sins and the evils of the world and whatnot. We were going to get four-handed on the Elizabeth Jay to go shuck scallops. One of the guys getting on the boat fell between the boat and the dock, and he comes up laughing. I didn't even know these guys just stumbled out of the bar. They just stumble out of the bar onto the boat, and they're like, "Bill, we need you to take the boat out," and I'm like nineteen. Yes, I feel proud. "Oh, he wants me to steer the boat out." Meanwhile, they're just trying to sleep over the sleep off their hangover. They didn't even listen to the weather. So, on the little Elizabeth Jay, we get stuck in thirty-five. We wake up in the morning, and it's like a gale of wind. It was too rough to get back into Shinnecock. But now Jimmy Miller skipper had woken up and realized, ah, this is bad. So, we steamed the fire island, which was, I don't know how many hours to get to the fire island. Then we came in that way. But on that trip, I got seasick. I remember Wesley, the old man, Wesley, was cooking up some scrambled eggs, and he knew I was sick. So, he's like going in my face, "Ooh, you want some eggs, Bill? Do you want some eggs?" Getting me browned up. I was like, "Ugh," throwing up. I said to myself, if I get seasick again, I'm going back to college. Well, I never got seasick again until the Jersey trips came back from then because they get so rough. [laughter] But I never got seasick again. The adventure is great. I love my job. My job fits me perfectly. You get an adventure. You get out there. It's always different. The weather's different. The fish are different. This breaks, that breaks, you got things to fix, and how fast can you get things going back on the ball? I get the reward from my efforts. It ain't like someone else you do a good job, and they get their raise. I'm blessed

from my efforts. I enjoy my job. I like it a lot. Is it on pause? NS:

No. I am just trying to remember what I was about to ask.. WR:

You asked me the last question.

NS: I know what I did not ask you. Have you lost any friends in fishing?

WR: Well, not fishing, not at sea. Well, Stein. Stein was a good man. It was sad to see him go in Shinnecock and lit. Stein had a lot of respect from the young guys. We used to joke with Stein that he had his own nursery in the fish hall. We're like, "Stein, you're growing fish down there. How the heck did you catch that much? [laughter] Stein was a really fun guy. He was really old school. Born in 1928 and grew up in the Depression. He knew the value of the dollar. He wouldn't throw anything out. He would make nets out. People would throw a net out, and he'd go in the dumpster and make a net out of it. He'd take fish pallets and make a set of trap doors. He was a nice man. I remember him specifically telling me I was down by 26180 Lane, 7:30. I was two bushels an hour, yellow tails. You know, that's where you want to be. He was a fun guy, Stein. He wasn't allowed to drive his car, but he could drive his boat [laughter] at the end.

NS: Providence flipped.

WR: Yes. Well, Sam Scarborough died at sea. Sam had a heart attack, but we respect these men. But Sam had a boat at Ruth Ann. It was a small forty-two-foot Bruno. I remember the day because I didn't go fishing that day. I took my family to the Teddy Roosevelt State up there in Oyster Bay or whatever it was.

NS: Sagamore Hill.

WR: Sagamore Hill. One of my friends, Mike Dean, well, they were porgie fishing. It was like November, and they went west to Shinnecock, and they caught porgies. Well, Sam did have a heart condition, and he had, I remember he had Coumadin. I remember him bleeding and just working on his boat and putting things on it. Because that's where I learned what Coumadin was. He goes, "I'm suffering Coumadin. It's a thin heart, and you bleed a lot." But he caught a lot of fish that day, and he had a heart attack and fell back into his fish hole and hit his head, and he died. Then my friend Mike Dean, the boat drifted up into the shore, and Mike waited out there and then got his body off the boat. But Mike never gets much credit because for the next, I don't know, week or two weeks, he didn't go fishing, and he helped Ruth Ann, Sam's wife, go through all Sam's fishing gear and nets. It's an old fisherman widow going to deal with the stuff, and Mike went through. That was nice. Then Captain Richie, [inaudible]. Are you looking for people who died at sea or just older fishermen who passed on?

NS: I am most interested in the lessons that you have learned from your own experiences and from other people's experiences. Okay. We are recording again.

WR: [laughter] I'm trying to think.

NS: What kind of tools do you find to be the most helpful?

WR: Well, the hardest thing we do actually is get up and go to work. Maybe it's the hardest thing for everybody, but to consistently roll out of bed is the hardest thing. You're just so tired, and you want to stay there. When you work by yourself, and you weren't accountable to anybody, it made it that much harder. Now that men are waiting for you, you get moving. But the older generation had such a good work ethic. They just had such a good work ethic, and you just learn so much from these guys, from what they did and didn't tell you. I think that Richie Lof said – he passed on to just a workhorse of a man with good integrity and good honor.

NS: Was there something that he specifically taught you or an experience that he shared with you?

WR: Not really. Not so much, Richie. I really wasn't that close with him as I was with Stein. I think Stein was a little more interesting as a character because Stein never had children of his own. He eagerly shepherded younger fishermen. Richie was a little bit different. He had children. Each person's different. But we glean something from everybody. From each person, we'd take things, but Stein would actively tell us things and show us things, which was unbelievable.

NS: What is one of the things that you remember him telling or showing you?

WR: Where to fish. [laughter] Where fishing was the best was really, Stein was really good for. He didn't keep secret a hotspot. Something we're after to make money. Well, one time, I remember I bought a new net, and it was like \$2,500, which was a lot of dollars. It was probably like, I don't know, 1991 or two or something, and on the second day, I parked it on a hang. I was like, "Ah, I left my net on hang." It was 206 and 756. I remember twenty-something years later. So, anyway, that was the end of my new net. Well, it comes to pass, like, I don't know how much time passed, two years. Stein comes to the dock with a net on his boat. He's like, "I got your net." [laughter] Stein hit the same hang, but he got off it. So, I remember I let Stein keep all the floats. I let him cut off all the floats and he gave me the net back. That was just nice. The maritime law is different than land law. You lost it. It's yours. It's finders keepers in the ocean. But in the community, you don't do that. In a community of friends. But it was nice to get my net back.

NS: When you talk about parking a net, what is that? I do not know. [laughter]

WR: Well, nets are supposed to be in motion, and we hung up on a bad hang and the net didn't move anymore. It got secured to the bottom on a hangout. I don't know. The hang is still there to this day. I don't know what it is, if it's just an anchor or if it's part of an old ship. But it's enough where you get it's massive enough. That's the end of it. But Stein got it off, so that was good.

NS: Wow, that is really amazing.

WR: Yes. That was good.

NS: Okay. I think we can stop.

WR: Okay.

NS: Thank you for this interview.

[end of transcript]