

## Interview with Cory Weyant

**Narrator:** Cory Weyant

**Interviewer:** Nancy Solomon

**Date:** May, 27, 1987

**Location:** Freeport, NY

**Project Name:** Long Island Traditions

**Project Description:** Folklorist Nancy Solomon has documented the maritime culture of Long Island through these interviews spanning the years 1987 – 2016. The collection includes baymen, fishermen, boat builders and other maritime tradition bearers.

**Principal Investigators:** Nancy Solomon

**Transcript Team:** National Capital Contracting

**Abstract:** On May 27, 1987, Nancy Solomon interviewed Cory Weyant as part of the Long Island Traditions Oral History Collection. Cory is a full-time commercial fisher from Freeport, New York, who traps eels, killies, crabs, and other finfish. His family lived in the area for over 60 years, and he remembers family boat trips and time spent sailing with his father. Cory discusses the decreased fish population and ties it to the pollution from speedboats and yachts. He notes changes to his neighborhood as well, particularly the development of the "Nautical Mile." He describes his first jobs related to fishing, like his work on a dragger boat, *St. Peter*, when he was 17 years old. Eventually, Cory ran a fish market where he learned about smoked fish. While he treated it like a hobby at first, he was soon selling smoked fish at the fish market. He also talks about learning how to build a raft and fix boats and how he made a gunning boat out of plywood and fiberglass in shop class at the age of 12. He left the fish market to work in the bay as a commercial fisherman and shares details about his brine recipe and smoking techniques.

Cory Weyant: Yes, basically. I was born in Oceanside. I lived here for thirty years. I'm thirty years old. I lived in that house for seventeen to twenty years. I guess I've basically lived on the canal all my life.

Nancy Solomon: How about your dad? Where was he born?

CW: Oceanside, I believe. My father's a captain. He runs boat between Florida and New York. He brings yachts transit spots as well. As a matter of fact, we passed him down in [inaudible]. He always worked on the boat. I guess I got into it when I was a kid. I just kept doing it. I worked at bait stations and this and that. That's what I enjoy doing.

NS: Do you remember the first time you went out with him? What that was like?

CW: What? Fishing?

NS: Yes.

CW: As a little kid, they threw me in the river to teach me how to swim. [laughter] My Uncle George, "Hey, [go learn?] how to swim?" Boom. There you go, right in the water. [He?] used to take us out. We used to catch a lot more fish than we do now.

NS: Pollution, mostly?

CW: I guess, who knows? You got so many boats running around a hundred miles an hour. Like you said, remember in the marsh this I was showing you?

NS: Yes.

CW: How that cut used to be little, it just disappeared. In about twenty years, with all the boats running out of here, I don't know, maybe I'll be out of business. There might not be nothing left to catch or we're going to die as [inaudible].

NS: Pretty much all these sportsmen are taking a lot of things.

CW: Well, no, it's [all of it?]. Everybody pumping this in there and that in there. Then it's going to only take so much. It's the same with the ocean, they're pumping all kinds of crap and the garbage barge has been running around for how long? I think [laughter] like a year and they don't know where to put it. "Where we're going to put it?" "Bring it back where we got it from." They've been riding up and down the coast with it.

NS: What kind of fishing did you used to do with your dad? Mostly bay fishing?

CW: Yes. When I was a kid, [around four?]. My first time I worked on the dragger, I worked right here on the *St. Peter*, across the street. I worked there when I was seventeen, eighteen, nineteen until I was about twenty-one. Then I ran a fish market where I got into the smoked fish with that.

NS: Which fish market did you work for?

CW: I ran a little fish market in Point Lookout, Jones Inlet Fish Market.

NS: Somebody own it?

CW: Yes, Bruce Larson. That's that big packing dock, wherever the packing dock will stop. When I first worked there, that packing dock was a little dumpy dock. A couple of boats within the fish market was little, tiny market. Now the markets gigantic. [laughter] They've got five people working. When I worked there, had one counter, I'd see a little old lady come in. I had an old scale. They'd come in and buy fishes, little, tiny market. Then now it's ten years down the line and things are all fiberglass, gigantic [laughter] counters. I just sell them the smoked fish. I go, "How are you doing? [inaudible]."

NS: Can I throw this someplace?

CW: Yes, pick a [winner?].

NS: [laughter] Wasn't sure if [it was?] going to be used for anything or not.

CW: Yes, sure. We saved the guts for my pals. Hear them? They're yelling at me. [laughter] "Where's the grub? Where's the grub?"

NS: [laughter]

CW: Fresh eel guts.

NS: Your dad pretty much teach you most...

CW: No.

NS: Who taught you what you now know?

CW: If you lived on Woodcleft Canal all your life, you basically learn yourself. You know what I'm saying?

NS: Yes. There's usually like one or two people that...

CW: You learned from this. Like I said, I worked on this dragger here. That man taught me a lot. I worked on the party boats. The guy – who has the Capt. Lou now. Michael Danon?

NS: Yes.

CW: He has five Capt. Lou's now. I used to fish with the original Capt. Lou, with the old man. [laughter] Michael was just the – we were mates, he was just going out for the ride. Then Michael became the mate when we got off the boat. Now, look, he owns all five of them. So, just [inaudible] in the canal. I worked for [chopped fish?] station down at the end. I worked here from when I was 12 until when I was 17. So, I was always around fish. That's basically it. I mean, I could go into Manhattan, try to get a job there –

NS: [laughter]

CW: I wouldn't know where to start. "Resume, what's that? [laughter] I worked on this dragger. I worked on that party boat. We're fishing [in the bay?] and smoked fish."

NS: Did you ever want to work inside?

CW: What, are you kidding?

NS: I'm just asking.

CW: I ran a fish market for three years and that was that. Get out of here. [laughter] That was crazy. Nine to five, five to six days a week, no good. So, right now, well, look, we got up at 6:00 a.m. I'm going to do this, watch smokehouse go, finish that, go in there. Work on traps to do something. I'm not going to go crazy. I'll go down and see who needs what. I'll go down if you guys need eels by the weekend. I'll get [orders?] going around. Just keep the smoke going. What else are you're going to do? What else is there to do?

NS: Do you know pretty much all the people along here?

CW: Oh, yes, everybody on this block. Like I said, I lived here most – when I used to live here when I was a kid there wasn't as many traffic. Now, since they changed the name of the block 10 years ago, "Nautical Mile," everything on the block is nautical all of a sudden. [laughter] The block's been here [for a dog's age?] but now everything is nautical. They sell more and more of these fiberglass boats. Where're they going to put them all? Everything is nautical. I used to live on a [inaudible] when I was a kid. Go up and down, this and that. There's my father right there.

Male Speaker: I'll catch you later.

CW: All right, dad. I'll be around.

NS: Was your grandfather born around here?

CW: Yes. One great-dad lived on Long Beach Avenue. He used to run an oil tanker. He used to run a big oil barge and stuff. "Snuffy," they used to call him "Snuffy."

NS: How come?

CW: I don't know.

NS: What is your nickname?

CW: My nickname, "Horsefoot."

NS: Why?

CW: The name of my boat.

NS: I know.

CW: Well, that's what they call me. *Horsefoot* on my [inaudible].

NS: Did you name it *Horsefoot*?

CW: Yes.

NS: How come?

CW: Because horsefeet is something that I need to go eeling.

NS: So, that stands for a horseshoe crabs?

CW: Right. That's another name for horseshoe crab, horsefoot.

NS: Horsefoot.

CW: My grandfather used to go there when I was kid. I didn't know him too much. He died when I was young. We used to go over there and he'd make you make a fist and he'd stick the quarters in it. Then he'd have his beer with this egg in it, raw egg in a beer. He lived to eighty-seven. I guess he was doing the right thing.

NS: [laughter] Maybe he would have lived longer. [laughter]

CW: Maybe, who the hell knows? Nobody [knows?].

NS: How far back does your family go around these parts?

CW: Fifty years. My father –

NS: Who is the first one to come to the States?

CW: Oh, Christ, I don't know. My father's side of the family lived in Oceanside. They had the biggest farm in Oceanside when I was a kid. It's still over there, walking [inaudible] big piece of property. I met my great-grandmother, [Palma?]

NS: She was there? Wow.

CW: She lived there. She's not round no more.

NS: Obviously.

CW: My great-grandmother, she lived til 97. So, I guess it had to start somewhere around there.

NS: Was she born here? Do you know?

CW: No.

NS: She was born in Germany?

CW: Yes. They came over. They were farmers.

NS: That late?

CW: Huh?

NS: That late?

CW: Oh, they're farmers.

NS: Probably about 1880. A hundred years ago?

CW: I don't think it would go that far. Maybe like the 20s, like that maybe.

NS: They're still farming?

CW: No, they're not farming any more.

NS: No, they were farming then?

CW: Yes. My father said when he was a kid, they used to have chicken coops. They were farming back then. In the 50s even, they're still farming. Then he got into fishing and all that, my father. His dad was always on the water too. His dad [inaudible].

NS: Did they used to catch eels or is that...

CW: I don't know. [laughter] I never really asked him. But he used to go commercial fishing, rod and reel. My father used to work for [Landheart?] here across the street. That's where my father used to do a lot of rod and reel commercials, sport fishing and stuff for sharks and tunas and stuff like that.

NS: What is your dad's name?

CW: Huh?

NS: What's your dad's name?

CW: Bill Weyant. He's got his captain's license. Like I said, he drives boats. I go with him once in a while, maybe I made twenty trips. He's done over 300 trips up and down the coast here to Florida with people's yachts, all these fancy yachts here. They don't know how to drive them to Florida. [laughter] They want it -

NS: They don't know how to drive them period, probably.

CW: Yes. Well, no, they know how to drive it when they get it. But the guys who own the yachts, they don't have time to drive it all the way down the coast. It takes seven to ten days. It's nice. I love it. I love making trips [laughter] on a guy's yacht for ten days. Sure, and you get paid for it too. [laughter]

NS: Do you like doing this instead of working on the dragger?

CW: No, I like working on dragger in the winter. I like doing this also. But this will slow down. It's my busy time right now. This will slow down. Eeling will slow down. I'll take all my traps out. It picks up again in September. It slows down for the summer. It gets too hot, too much [carriage?], and they'll pop. So, then I'll go dragging. I'm going to [be running] that little black one across the street. The [inaudible], I'll run that for the summer or as long as I feel like it. Yes, I like dragging too. It's nice, get away from the –

NS: There seems to be a kind of difference though, a bay man and the...

CW: Well, see I can do both because I know about both. Tony, he works on the drag. I mean, if they don't go fishing, he makes no money. I work with them all winter, right? If you can't fish in this weather, you got to be able to do a little bit of everything just to keep it going. You go green crabbing, you go eeling, smoke. A little bit of everything helps. You can go do a little fluking in the summer, [wighting fishing?] in the winter, smoking. As long as it all comes out in the wash. [laughter] That's life, isn't it?

NS: [laughter] Pretty picture, right? [laughter]

CW: Yes, sure. Fresh eel guts.

NS: You hear about some of the things that can happen if you are on the bay or in the ocean. What were some of the things –

CW: What do you mean? A hazard?

NS: If you've been – do something to make you laugh or makes you scared?

CW: There's always something that's going to make you scared the first time. When you almost sinking [or?] you get thrown overboard. I mean, that makes you think.

NS: Did that happen to you?

CW: Sure. I've been thrown out of the boat two, three times. I tell you, the one time I almost sunk my boat, I went right out and brought a Stearns coat and three flares.

NS: [laughter]

CW: In the winter when I go out, I wear like a life jacket. It's a full jacket. It has light foam in it. I keep three flares right there.

NS: Do you remember one time when you didn't think you were going to make it?

CW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Start yelling out the Lord's name and paddling backwards, but you get home. [laughter] A lot of mothers, but then again, I don't have much trouble. I've been duck hunting since I was about sixteen. I go out all the time in the winter. I go out on a little boat. Back in 1975, I saved two Nassau County cops. It was out on, right out here. It made the front page of [inaudible]. [laughter] You get a lot of knuckleheads who come out inexperienced. They go out. They don't know.

NS: When you first started getting into the boats, did anybody help you or did they kind of let you fend for yourself?

CW: Fend for your own. Me and my buddy [Ross?]. My friend named Mike Jones, the fish [mark?] up the block. I know him since I'm two, right? So, he lived over here. There were no houses. So, we used to make rafts like Styrofoam rafts, and just row across to the island just to see what was over there with an old oar.

NS: [laughter]

CW: Then we used to find like a dinghy with a hole in it, and we'd patch it up with – we used his mother's fiberglass curtains one time to patch up a boat.

NS: [laughter]

CW: We used to row all over the bay because we didn't have a motor. So, we rowed here, we rowed there, and then finally you get a little boat with a motor, move around a little more. Finally, you can get a decent boat once you start to work.

NS: You said you made a [gunning?] boat back there?

CW: Yes. I made that when I was eighteen. That's twelve years old. I rebuilt every part on it three times already.

NS: [laughter]

CW: Blew the bottom out at the front, we hit a lot of...

NS: What's it made of?

CW: Plywood. Plywood, fiber –



NS: Marine plywood or regular...

CW: No, regular exterior plywood.

NS: [laughter]

CW: I just slapped a lot of fiberglass over it and paint. Paint make them what they ain't. Matter of fact, my big boat's got to come out of the water. I've got to paint the bottom of that thing. Needs it bad, just ain't got the dough. Got to get up in the railway.

NS: Somebody show you how to make it, with the ribs and the planking?

CW: Not really. I don't know. I had a pretty good conception of what a boat was supposed to look like. The shop teacher showed us how to make...

NS: The shop teacher? [laughter]

CW: Well, he didn't show us how to make a boat. He was freaking out. We came in, "Oh, this is what a boat is going to look like." We just made like big templates of cardboard and laid it down on plywood and cut it. Then slapped it together and put the ribs in it. I'm not no expert carpenter, but it floats like heaven and runs real good. [laughter]

NS: Shop teacher's, like, God, I couldn't do that. [laughter]

CW: No, he showed us how to make all the joints, for the ribs and stuff like that. That was my project for years. Still got it. It still floats. Christ, and that's twelve years ago. I guess it's a pretty good boat.

NS: How about that gunning boat that you used? Did you make that?

CW: That's it.

NS: No. No, the one we went out in.

CW: Oh, the Garvey. No, I didn't make that. That was Shaefer built. A guy named George Shaefer, [I think that's what?] his name is. He lives in Oceanside somewhere. That is a boat. The man knows what he's doing. The boat cost about \$3,500 before fiberglass is put on it. It's about a \$5,000 boat. I had a big black Garvey before that. I got it off of some guy that was down on his luck; I got it for \$1500. So, it's good boat. You go through one to two motors this season. There's my old *Betsy* over there, that thing blew up.

NS: Do you ever get stuck when you go duck hunting?

CW: Stuck constantly. You're always stuck, you just got to be prepared. Motors breakdown, wind comes out of the north, you got to the anchor up. I've walked home before. You got [to Meadowbrook?] always running. If you can get to the Parkway, you can always get home.

NS: [laughter]

CW: I mean, the tides going out, the winds going over here, use your common sense and just go with it. Don't buck it, go with it. Unless you're heading out the inlet. Just always make a point of landing. Get that quarter out of your pocket and make a phone call, come home and get the boat later. No problem. I've come home in reverse with the boat we were just in before. That thing breaks. I ain't no outboard mechanic. I come home in reverse. I come home with the eel spear, push a big pole I got in the boat. Some people stop and help you but the majority go right by you. But then again, I stop and pull half of them knuckleheads off the marsh. Ever saw them yachts that go by on moon tide. I love it. Moon tide when all the water is all over the meadows. I don't know what [inaudible]. Over here, over there.

NS: Then they hit ground. [laughter]

CW: "Oh, you're stuck. Oh, geez." I don't know. That looks like it's going to cost you at least a \$100.

NS: [laughter]

CW: The hell, you can afford a yacht like that, you can give me \$100. Got a little chunk in there?

NS: [laughter] When did you start duck hunting?

CW: Well, my dad took me out when I was about 14. He just took me. He was never really into it. He just took me out and showed me how to shoot a gun, there's a duck. So, I got interested. Like I said, when we first started fooling with dinghies was when I was 15, when I can get my license – as soon as I get my license, forget it. I was never home.

NS: [laughter]

CW: We lived there. My mom's, "Where're you going? Rainy –" The worst the weather, the better it is. You know the saying, "Good weather for ducks," when it's raining?

NS: [laughter]

CW: That is no joke. I go out to [Ramson's?] Pond out here. That island that's across [inaudible]?

NS: Yes?

CW: That's one of my favorite little hotspots because it's got a nice little pond in the back. I set up a little blind. I take a little boat over there with my decoys and set them all up.

NS: Do you make your own decoys?

CW: A few of them, a few of them. A matter of fact, you know Carmine Marinnacio?

NS: Yes.

CW: His son, Bobby calls me.

NS: Yes.

CW: Bobby is going to [whistles]. But he sits there and calls. A matter of fact, if you ever walk into his house, God, the fucking cats, man. [inaudible].

NS: Maybe that's why he lives over there [inaudible].

CW: Lives by himself, [inaudible] [understand it?]. They usually don't take too long once you get the hang of it. If you took a regular knife and went like that and went like that. That's why I do it all with a razor knife, one step at a time.

NS: I haven't heard this song in ages. [laughter] Had you been smoking eels before you did it as a business?

CW: Like I said, I just fooled around with it. Down at my uncle's marina, *Frank's Marina*. I just used to fool with it, get a couple and fool around with it. Like when I ran a fish market, I just tried it a little more and seen that I could sell them. Then I got into trapping them and make more and more traps. As a matter of fact, every year I try to make more. With all my traps, I fish about seventy right now. Next year I hope to have ninety. The year after or maybe by the time I'm forty, I'll have two thousand all over the bay. Who knows?

NS: If you do not die from exhaustion. [laughter]

CW: Whatever. So, it takes an extra hour.

NS: [laughter] Maybe an extra week.

CW: An extra day. Do half today, half tomorrow. Look, now I'm done til Friday. I'll let them fish two days. I always let them fish over the weekend. Never pull on Saturday or Sunday. Because if you're going to pull in traps in front somebody's...

NS: There're so many boats. Yes.

CW: I just go like this, just go over today, and go "Okay, here you go," and hand it to him because if they see you... [laughter]

NS: It's okay. I probably got everything else on my face too.

CW: If they see you pulling it, it's just like it's history. That's what happened with that one this morning. I guarantee that's not even there because so many people drift through there. It's my own fault, stupidity actually. I could've went right around the corner and cut, and nobody would've touched it.

NS: It looks easy when you do it. But is it hard to first learn how to handle these things?

CW: Yeah, I guess. But once you got it down [partly?] Like anything else, it takes a little practice. That's all.

NS: Did somebody show, like, how to hook in and how to flip them?

CW: I figured out, all, like I said, when I first used to doing it, I used to use just a regular knife and it'd take me year and a day just to do what it took me only – what? – twenty minutes?

NS: Yes.

CW: It would take me...

NS: You kept cutting up the eel, I guess, with a sharp knife.

CW: Yes.

NS: You got to use a blunt one.

CW: You go like this, you go – now with a razor knife, you go, whoosh, right down it and throw it the pile. I can do a 100 pounds in the time it used to take me to do twenty.

NS: [laughter]

CW: Right there is about 45 pounds of eel.

NS: Did somebody teach you that or did you just kind of look at somebody else and...

CW: No, just a matter of trial and error. With the eels, before I got it down pat, I used to burn them up or leave the smokehouse too long, come back, and find a massive mess of burnt eels on the floor before I learned to put a safety rack in there so I didn't lose them. You learn from your mistakes like anything else.

NS: What other kinds of things did you have to learn in order to do this right.

CW: You read a couple of books on smoking.

NS: [laughter]

CW: What to use. I know you got to use fruitwoods. I used to talk to a guy named Dick Abbott, which is one of the old timers. He used to run [the *Granite?*]. This guy was around for ages. Old Dick, he lived in Baldwin. He used to run a fishing boat. I used to go down there, and he used to use an old garbage can to smoke, you know what I mean?

NS: Yes.

CW: He used to use a garbage can. So, use this, use that. Then, I just got to know by – after a while of just doing it, you learn by the color, the texture. If it looks right, if it's dry. Does it split open? Does it smell right? Stuff like that.

NS: Why the fruitwood?

CW: Because fruitwood is a hardwood. It throws out the nice scent. It makes them smell good. Yes, I [inaudible] all I can do. No problem.

NS: Do you go chop the fruitwood somewhere or...

CW: I have a friend that's in the tree business.

NS: Yes?

CW: A couple of friends that are in the tree business. They just come over here. This little apple and cherry right here. So, apple, cherry, peach, hickory, mulberry...

NS: Is that all stuff from on the island?

CW: Yes. There's a lot of hardwoods around here. Hickory's a little hard to get. But I do all kinds of things. I do turkeys and ducks and venison and pork. Basically, try to stick to the fish. But when people ask you to do a turkey for them or something...

NS: Mostly friends?

CW: Yes. Keep it down to a minimum. You don't want to get crazy. If I get the other one online, it'd be like [inaudible] over here.

NS: [laughter]

CW: [inaudible] play online.

NS: You were talking about in the summertime the jacking for eels?

CW: Yes.

NS: What is that? [laughter]

CW: Well, they do a lot of jacking now. We used to go with old Coleman lanterns and you'd push around. People still do it that way. They go around and they catch blue claw crabs or stick an eel with an old spear. You pushed around. When we're kids, that's how we used to do it. But now we use generators with a little motor. You motor around with a light. You see the eel and you stick them with a spear. Like that big spear and head for the horseshoe crabs.

NS: Yes. You take one of those long spears?

CW: Right. We use, like, an ice pick spear, so it doesn't mess the eel.

NS: How big are those?

CW: What's that?

NS: The ice pick spear?

CW: Regular ice picks then you put the spear handle and you make it as long as you want. Like 12 foot like that. You just go along. A lot of guys catch clams now, eels and all kind of stuff.

NS: How come they call it jacking?

CW: I guess [based on how?] we use the lights.

NS: Jack-o'-lantern.

CW: Yes, Jack-o'-lantern. I don't know. Maybe that is the reason originally, if you look it up. [laughter] I don't know. It's always been jacking. We go out jacking. That's that.

NS: When did you start building your own traps?

CW: Your own what?

NS: Your own traps.

CW: About five years ago.

NS: Is that what you call them, traps?

CW: Yes, eel traps or eel pot. Yeah, I guess about five years ago. I just decided that I had enough of the fish market and said I can go out and make my own living in the bay. You know?

NS: Yes.

CW: It's a lot easy. It's so much less aggravating. I don't got to get up and go to work at 6:00 in the morning. I catch the tide when I got to catch the tide. If I need money, I go fishing. [inaudible]. Got to keep these eels in the brine now. See, the salt gets all the water off.

NS: Your brine, did you come up with that recipe yourself?

CW: Yes. Brown sugar and salt. I use about three pounds of salt to two pounds of brown sugar to ten gallons of water with ice. It's good cold. In the summertime, I put a block of ice right in. As long as it's nice and hot; it chills them down. Then they'll soak in that. It's the salt which has to cure them, and dry it out. I want to go [in the garage?] and work on traps or whatever.

NS: Okay. I need to know everything there is to know about eel

CW: Because if you ask me a question and you ask me again, it's...

NS: I know it gets annoying. [laughter]

CW: You might not get the same answer the first time. [laughter]. [You know how that goes?]

NS: It's like every folklist's nightmare. Basically, all the brines, the technique for smoking all these is pretty similar?

CW: Yeah, well, you got to have [it salted?]. The salt is always there. Now, people don't like things that are salty tasting, so I use brown sugar in it. It fights the taste. So, it gives it a little bit more color. Then the taste, it isn't as salty. Salt will always be there. But the brown sugar sort of like counteracts it, you know?

NS: Yes. If you are making it for yourself, would you leave out the brown sugar? Is that something that you...

CW: No. I always left it in. I don't know, it's something I fooled around with, and it seems to work out the best.

NS: What does the salt do?

CW: It cures the meat. It's how they used to cook the fish with a lot of salt with salt brine fish before they had refrigeration. Because this stuff will stay at a relatively cool temperature for a long time.

NS: Do you know when in this area when people first started smoking fish? Has it been going on for a long time?

CW: No, I'm actually it. There's been guys before my time. But there's nobody around that just got brought up to bring, "Hey, I'm going to raise a smokehouse or whatever." It's just not done.

NS: So, how did you decide to do this? You talked about money. Are there other reasons?

CW: No, I just did it because I enjoyed it. How can you not enjoy just watching the smoke come out the stack and do my fishing, that's it. Like you asked me today, when I came in with the eels and I was all done, you said, "What are you going to do next?" "I'm going to go over and sit on that third barstool and watch the smoke come out of that stack.

NS: [laughter]

CW: That was no joke. That's exactly what I was going to do. When it gets like this, I don't like to smoke until the sun goes down. If the temperature in the smokehouse is 100 degrees and the door's open, that's no good. It's too hot. So, I just got into it because we were buying it in the fish market I used to run. I said, "Wow, I could do that." That's why I talked to a couple of old timers about it, this guy, that guy.

NS: Who did you talk to?

CW: Dick Abbott, he's not around no more. Elwood Verity and a couple of just different guys. A lot of them did it in their garbage cans. There's another guy that smokes. He's still there, Bruce [inaudible], he's still there on [Motts Street?] in Oceanside. His father used to build it. He's still there. I know him. I don't know. I just got on the kicking. People seem to like my stuff anyhow.

NS: Good reason to keep doing it.

CW: Yes. If they keep buying it, I'll keep doing it.

NS: Do you think you would stop if they...

CW: If people didn't buy this stuff, why bother doing it?

NS: Yes.

CW: But they come to my door and knock on my door. I like when I get the old German people, "Ya, you got some eels?" [laughter]. "Ya, ya." "Come on over, how many pounds you want?"

NS: One of the things I noticed before I even met you was all the stuff in front of your house.

CW: The doors?

NS: The lighthouse.

CW: Yes. Well, the lighthouse, that's been here since I'm a little kid and it used to be in this yard. I lived in that house for 18 years. So, it used to be here. We used to fool around with it when I was a kid and play with it. I guess they had it lit up one time. So, when I moved in this house, it was still here. I painted it up a little. I put a light on top of it. It looks appropriate. We got the rocks, the lights, and a set of troll doors up in front. Nautical, nautical. All of a sudden, this block went nautical. [laughter] I've been living here all my life, now everything's nautical.

NS: Where did you get the doors from?

NS: Where did you get the doors from?

CW: I got them from the dragger. I got them all from my dragger. That's my old set. That's my new set, right there. Look how I take care of it.

NS: [laughter]

CW: I got to pick them up and paint them with oil. Like an oil over there, dry them out and paint them with oil?



NS: Are you going to use them for decoration too? Or are you going to use them?

CW: Those cost 500 bucks, so I'm going to use them. Just haven't had the time. As a matter of fact, as soon these go in the smokehouse then I got to start filet mignon and these bluefish.

NS: Yes.

CW: Yes. [inaudible]

NS: What does C-ash mean? [laughter]

CW: When you want to make a check, make it out to C-ash, cash.

NS: Oh, okay. I thought this is a nautical term I should...

CW: Yes, nautical term, cash. That's a very nautical term. What's the boat's name? C-ash. NS: You said that you used to have a bay house?

CW: I had a couple of them.

NS: Yes?

CW: But they're only on loan.

NS: Yes.

CW: We can use them for a year or two. We had one we built it up pretty good. Then the guy that held the lease, he told me he was going to tear it down. So, we had to tear it down. That's the one I got pictures up on the wall there with all the fellas in my house. I showed you them, didn't I?

NS: Yes. How did you get to use their house?

CW: Just a matter of somebody you know, just talking to them. Like with Lenny, he had a house too. When I was a kid, that's when we first got to go on them. Lenny used to come out of Baldwin, and I used to come out of Freeport. I'd go with my dinghy, and he'd go out with his. We'd race the rowboat. We'd go down and our mothers would say, "Oh, where're you guys going?" "We're going down to bay house," and they wouldn't see us for a week at a time.

NS: [laughter]

CW: It was like our own little world. We were only 15 years old. That's not too long ago. I'm only 30, so 15 years ago. What are we talking here? 15 years ago is '75, 1970, '65, fooling around the bay, Christ. Imagine what it was like in the 40s. That's when [bass?] used to flurry, in the 40s and in the 30s.

NS: What would happen when you would go out?

CW: Neglected, neglected. The new politicians come out and they're polluting the marsh. But they've been there before all this pollution shit's come out. Want to talk about polluting the marsh, talk about all these yachts with their excessive weights and their freaking cap. It's all political bullshit. They're polluting the marsh. They've been there for years. If one of these guys broke down in the middle of the winter, where they're going to go dig themselves a hole?

NS: Yes.

CW: You can go in there. There's always a wood burning stove. There's always food in the cabinet. I like it. I go out in the winter, we go hunting. It's the best time of the year. There's nobody around. It's my favorite time of the year. I got pictures I could show you. Hunts, down

—

NS: Will you go out with friends or...

CW: I got a whole photo album I could show you. Tons of books. We used to have beach parties down the beach, 200, 300 kids when I was in the fraternity.

NS: Would your father go with you or was it more your friends?

CW: More friends. My father used to take me to an old bay house that was near the one that we had when I was a kid. Another man had it. That's when it was a lot. When I was about ten years old, there was triple, maybe quadruple of what there is now. Then, just one by one by one. As they got neglected, they tore them down.

NS: Are they still pretty much within the same family?

CW: Yes. That's the only way that they're still there. Like the one bay house is my friend [Moldune?]. The one next to him is his grandfather's, so that's why they still have them.

NS: Were they usually people who lived in this area?

CW: Yes.

NS: Would you know everyone when you would go out there?

CW: Yes, you'd get to know them after a while. You know who's who and what house is what. You don't mess with this guy's house and stay away from that. They used to get vandalized so much. It's ridiculous. Not too bad nowadays now. We're old enough, we're out on the bay, so everybody keeps an eye on everybody else's stuff.

NS: What kinds of things when you were growing up would you do out there?

CW: Hunt.

NS: Duck hunting?

CW: Duck hunting out here is my favorite. In the winter is the best time of year because there's no boats on the water. We get the wood burning cherry red and sit around it. Just get up the next morning and go out hunting. I love hunting.

NS: Would you eat the duck?

CW: Yes, sure. I smoke them, I eat them, I do all kinds of little things to it.

NS: Even when you were that young.

CW: Well, you didn't know no better then. [This is dinner?]

NS: Did somebody show you how to...

CW: Prepare it?

NS: Yes.

CW: Oh, sure. Wink's father is [Leon Carman?]. He was the good one for the duck recipes back then. Wink, he'll come up with a couple of recipes here to make your head spin. He comes out with that kind of stuff, old Winkle.

NS: What kinds of things did you used to make?

CW: Basically, everybody has their own ways of doctoring things up. Stuffed a duck with some apples or something. We burned them up. We did all kinds of things.

NS: When you would go out there if it wasn't duck hunting season, what other kinds things did you do out there?

CW: We've gone to houses, just a place to relax. I was just down one before. I went down and stopped, and my friends were there. [Don't worry?] I'm going to take you out there. They're down there, making barbecue, some shish kebab, just relaxing on a docking location off the front dock. If you want, you dive into the water. Summertime's great. If there's nobody around, it's all right. But when you got so many knuckleheads charging around the bay at 50 miles an hour, that's no fun anymore.

NS: Did you ever – I know that when I was in camp late at night, we would tell stories about different things...

CW: Yes, that's common practice.

NS: What kinds of stories did you tell?

CW: You just keep talking about the time. You're hunting here and the birds are pouring in. In the wintertime, it's good for that. When everybody is down, they're getting drunk and we're playing cards til 3:00 a.m., stuff like that. Then you get bullshitting about, "Oh, yes. I killed this and you killed that and then you guys missed." There's always one guy you pick on, you sit there and, "Oh, you couldn't hit the bull in the ass with a fricking shovel," and all that shit.

NS: Was that the same person you would do this with?

CW: Well, basically, whoever's due get it. Whoever's due.

NS: Democratic. [laughter]

CW: Actually, whoever didn't do too good shooting that day like [Marian's] brother, Fred, when it was his first time. Nobody had their gun loaded, and we're setting up the decoys and a flock of geese goes overhead. Everybody's going, "Fred, shoot them, shoot them." They were going right over his head. "Shoot them." He didn't have his gun loaded.

NS: [laughter]

CW: Right over his head. So, we let him have it for weeks.

NS: Did that ever happen to you?

CW: We've all had our best little experience out there with some knucklehead. I was hunting out of my favorite blind and I'm [inaudible] my pint of brandi by myself. I like going by myself a lot. All of a sudden, here's this guy walking around outside of my blind, birds are veering off. I'm like, "Oh, man, why didn't you come in here and sit down instead of walking around like [inaudible] out there with his orange suit on." I'm like, "Oh, man." So, I finally get him sit down and he starts talking with me, "Blah, blah, blah." There, I'm not paying attention. I look up and there's a flock of geese right in front of us because we weren't paying attention. I'm like, "Oh, man. Look at this. This guy over here." I pick up the wrong gun instead of Betsy. I got this gun called Betsy.

NS: How do you name your guns? [laughter]

CW: How do you name your guns?

NS: Yes.

CW: Well.

NS: I didn't know you named a gun. [laughter]

CW: Well, Davy Crockett had – his gun was named Betsy. That was his old Kentucky long rifle. Well, I'll show you a gun that makes the Kentucky long rifle look like a short one.

NS: [laughter]

CW: I could put it under my arm and stand up, that's how long this gun is.

NS: [laughter]

CW: That's my cannons. That's my anti-aircraft gun.

NS: Did you get it from somebody?

CW: No, I bought it. It's an old gun, but I bought it a long time ago. That's my Betsy. That's what I call it. When my friends are all done shooting, I said, "Are you guys done yet?" They go, "Well, we can't even touch them." I go, "Watch this," boom. It reaches a lot further than this.

NS: How about the decoys? I know you said that you made a couple.

CW: Yes. I don't carve a lot, but you know that guy that was opening the clams the other day by [Bob Maranatchel?].

NS: Yes, I know.

CW: He carves, but yes.

NS: But you learned to carve?

CW: I'm not efficient at it. I fool around with it. Basically, I got enough projects to work on besides carving decoys. Wintertime, I got to build my eel traps and stuff. As a matter of fact, I got six in there that ain't finished yet. I haven't had a chance.

NS: While we're on the subject of eel traps, you've said that you've tried a couple of different ways of making them.

CW: Sure. You got to try all types of different designs. Everybody has their own theory about what's better and what's this, what's that? I don't know. I tried a few different designs.

NS: What were some of the ones you tried?

CW: Well, you got a double funnel pot. You got a triple funnel pot, which I learned to make from Elwood Verity. He showed me. He was one of the best and the oldest baymen around here. He catches the hell out of eels. So, I think the man knew what he was doing. I basically used his design and that works about the best. Everybody has their own thing. Use a double funnel pot, use a triple funnel pot.

NS: What is the advantage of the triple funnel?

CW: Triple funnel, the way you look at it is if one funnel got clogged up, say by a spider crab, it wouldn't stop fishing, where a double funnel pot would. So, triple funnel pot would keep fishing, that would be the advantage of that. It's like another entrance for them to come in. Then they all come in and have a little party.

NS: Now, the ones you were using the day we went out were mostly double funnel, weren't they?

CW: No, the bigger ones were the triple funnels. The first picture you took there, that was a triple. The last shots you were taking at the end of the day, those were my old [morphodite?] pots. Those were my first experimental [jobs?]

NS: [laughter] Those are double funnels?

CW: Double funnels. I don't even like them.

NS: How come?

CW: They don't fish as good. You got certain ones that fish beautiful. Then you got ones that don't fish at all.

NS: You've been in this long enough. Do you think you know why?

CW: Yes, I'm not going to be a doctor or a lawyer. [laughter]

NS: No, why they work better than the others?

CW: I thought you meant why I was going to still stay in the business.

NS: No. [laughter]

CW: Why they work better than the others?

NS: Yes.

CW: Because it's more accessible. It's like anything else. If you have a building with three doors on it, you can get in it a lot easier than the one with one door, right?

NS: Easier.

CW: It's a little more accessible. It's like a condo in an apartment building. What are you going to want to move into? [laughter]

NS: What are they made out of?

CW: We use pine frames. Then we use sixteen-gauge half by one wire and stainless-steel hog rings to put them together and plastic on the ends and oak lath on the top, galvanized bolts, and galvanized nails. A lot of work. You can sit there and it'd take me – The way I do it, it takes a while. I can build them pretty good, but still you can pop out maybe three a day. But that's what when somebody steals them from you. I put my brand right on top of it. When somebody steals it on you, it sort of bothers you because you know how hard you worked on the building.

NS: What were some of the reasons you use different kinds of woods?

CW: For which?

NS: For the eel pots. Like you said, you use oak and pine.

CW: The pine is cheap and that's good for the frame. What do you call it, the oak holds together more and it doesn't warp [inaudible] stick to the top. Do you know this gentleman?

NS: Do you think that the design you've come up with now is pretty much the one you'll stay with?

CW: Yes. [Feel like?] the elite. This one's working, you know what I mean? We started with the Model A Ford, and we're up to the Corvette.

NS: [laughter]

CW: I started with the Model A, you slap it together. We add this and that. Then we went to the Model T. Then we moved up to a Buick and now we're on a Corvette. So, I think we'll stick with that. The trap I got now is top of the heap. It had [inaudible] yet.

NS: Do you think you'll ever buy any more of those pots that you bought? [laughter]

CW: No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. [laughter] I won't buy no more of them. Matter of fact, I've been setting a few of them on orange buoys lately.

NS: [laughter]

CW: I'm just hoping maybe someone will steal them. They won't though. They won't. I can put them out there on the cinderblock like that two-pot line we lost.

NS: Yes, you thought you lost.

CW: I found one of them. They cut the one off. But the what do you call them? I put them all out the orange floats. They'll probably never touch them, right, Miguel?

Male Speaker: Yes.

CW: Right in front of your face, they'll probably never touch them. I used a couple of high-rise float.

MS: I catch you further than that.

NS: Now, he used horseshoe crab for bait.

CW: Yes, female horseshoe crab.

NS: Why the female?

CW: Because they got the eggs in them.

NS: Eels only go for ones with the eggs?

CW: Yes, basically. We use that and skimmer clams. You know what a skimmer is?

NS: Yes, the ones that get out in the ocean.

CW: Right.

NS: The once that they were shucking down at...

CW: Right. Danny's. Danny catches them for bait. Some guys catch them for food. Doxsee Clam, where I was trying to tell you about the other day with [Bob Whaley?] and them. They catch them for food. And that's where you're Doxsee clam chowder and Howard Johnson's Clam Strips and all that.

NS: Yes.

CW: That's where you get them. Miguel, well, what you got a [bed?] of floats hanging around?

MS: Yeah, who?

CW: You got any floats hanging around? Is that what you're saying?

MS: What kind of floats?

CW: Little bitty ones for the green crab traps I use. You know, like set line [inaudible].

NS: Did it take you a while to figure out what kinds of baits to use or...?

CW: No. My father used to do it. My father used to do it.

NS: Is that what all the old trappers used?

CW: Yes, basically.

NS: Ever tried anything else to see.

CW: Sure. Buy something new every day. In some parts, we can use the clam, and you'll do better than a guy using horseshoe crabs. But if you're up in the canals and using the clams, you're going to catch the gulls. The gulls ain't worth the [fiddlers?].

NS: What other kinds of things did you have to learn in order to do this well?

CW: What? Smoke fish or catch eels?



NS: Yes, the whole business?

CW: I don't know. Just once you got to know the bay, you do all right. You figure it out. Year after year you figure it a little bit. You get things down pat a little better every year. I don't forget where I put them no more, stuff like that. Every year, you learn a new trick. Maybe in twenty years, I'll be good at it. Maybe.

NS: It's pretty much that's the time it takes to become serious around here.

CW: Yes. Serious, I don't know. I guess the term profession is, professional is when you make money at it, right?

NS: Yes, I don't know.

CW: But then you got professional and then you got professional-professional. Man that's going to make a lot of money at it. So, I'm not at that point yet. But I'm looking at all kinds of burners in the fire. I'm working on ten projects at once. But what're you going to do?

NS: I –

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

Reviewed by Nicole Zador 7/7/2024