Georgen Charnes: My name is Georgen Charnes and I am here with the students of Nantucket Lighthouse Middle School, Katie Ponce, Evelyn Hudson. It is April 6th, 2011. We will be speaking with Carl Sjolund here at his home in Nantucket. You're an experienced scalloper and fisherman?

Carl Sjolund: Yes.

[laughter]

GC: We're here to hear a little bit about your experiences on the water. Mr. Sjolund, do you understand that this interview is going to be available to the general public as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA's Voices of the Fishery Project?

CS: Okay, sure.

GC: Okay, great. Go ahead, girls.

CS: You ask me the questions and see, and then we'll kind of get on to what. Sure.

Female Speaker: What's your full name?

CS: Carl H. Sjolund, S-J-O-L-U-N-D.

FS: Where and when were you born?

CS: When?

FS: Where and when?

CS: Right here in Nantucket, October 13th, 1944. I'm the 15th generation from my family that settled here, on my mother's side of the family.

GC: On your mother's side, right. Your father's from Norway.

CS: Norway. Yes. But on my mother's side, they were the first settlers that came to Nantucket in 1662 from England.

FS: So, you grew up here?

CS: Oh, yes. Where else would you want to grow up? [laughter]

FS: I don't know.

[laughter]

FS: What would you say is your occupation?

CS: Well, right now, I used to offshore fish on the big boats. I did that for over ten years. I did everything from fishing on the big boats out of Nantucket and New Bedford. I spent two years fishing out of Alaska. But now I bay scallop. I've been doing that since I was in grade school, and I do that every winter. That season runs from 1st of November to the 1st of April, because you only can catch them in the cold weather months when they were at their prime. Then the rest of the time, you give the bottom a little rest and let them spawn and so forth.

FS: We've been studying how to create open-ended questions, so we have a list of things to ask, but it's just a guideline. So, feel free to veer off topic.

CS: Sure.

FS: How long have you been scalloping? But you've scalloped here mostly?

CS: Yes. The difference between a bay scallop and a sea scallop? The ones that get way offshore, the big shells like this, and then the small shells that are corrugated. Those are the bay scallops. I've done both. On the bay scallop fishery, it's just a daily fishery. You have a limit. Then once you reach a limit, you come home. In the sea scallop fishery, it's changed over the years. But that can be anywhere from five to twelve day trips on a vessel similar to this.

GC: That's the commercial scallop? Twelve trips a season?

CS: You mean the sea scallopers?

GC: Yes.

CS: It's changed so much over the years. It's extremely regulated. On the offshore grounds now, they have areas they open and close. It's like conservation measures. They'll close an area for two or three years or maybe even more, and then allow the boats to go into those areas, and then they close the other areas. But even when they go into those opened areas, they're under very tight restriction of how much they can take, how long they can stay in there, et cetera. They have an instrument on the vessel now that assure, through computers and all that, they know exactly where those boats are at all times. So, if a boat goes into what they call the closed area, it's a big fine. They'll lose their license and everything. And they're very restricted. Very, very restricted.

FS: Was your family involved with fishing?

GC: Oh, yes. My father was at sea for over fifty years when he first came to this country. School was over when he was fourteen, and he left Norway when he was fourteen years old and went to sea on a big freighter. That freighter left Norway, and he was on that ship for seven years, and it never returned. It went all over the world. It went into different parts of the world. It was in Russia, it was in Africa, it was in Japan, it was all over the United States, taking cargo,

whatever was needed from one port to the other. It could be steel to Japan, wool from Australia, grain to Russia, cotton to India or from India. The ship never came back, never stopped back in Norway when he left there. So, he stayed on the ship for seven years.

CS: This was Rolf?

GC: Yes, that was my father. That's R-O-L-F. After seven years, [laughter] he landed in Boston on the ship. He had some kind of a second cousin that lived in Nantucket that was of Norwegian descent. He said he'd come down here and visit his cousin. Well, his cousin had married a fisherman that had a boat, and he started with them. He was to sea for over fifty years. He built two of his own boats. This is the last one he built. He built one before that. Actually, even after he sold this and he retired, he ran boats up until well into his sixties as a captain.

GC: This is (Karl?) Henry?

CS: Yes. He had her built right after the war, 1946. See this? That was the steering wheel from her. She was built in Fairhaven, Mass. Casey Boat Yard, during the war was building sub-chases and so forth during the war. When the war ended, there was such a demand for fishing boats. Because during the war, they took a lot of the fishing boats and used them for patrol. So, there was a need for all new boats. So, then that's when they started to build them right after the war. They were all wood. They weren't built in steel, not at that yard.

FS: That's beautiful. What happened to it?

CS: He sold her and she sunk someplace off Long Island. Well, they all got to go someplace.

GC: That's right.

[laughter]

CS: As long as you don't take somebody with them.

FS: Yes. Have you always been an independent commercial scalloper or did you work for someone else?

CS: Well, when I did scallop, I always by myself. But when I was sea scalloping, of course, you can have as many as eleven men on a boat that size. So, you're just part of the crew on the big boats. But bay scalloping, yes, just by myself.

FS: How has selling your scallops changed over the years?

CS: It's basically selling the scallops, the bay scallops you're talking about. It's about the same. It hasn't changed much since I started. It's just that prices have gone up. But everything else has gone up.

GC: Right. Yes, that's true.

CS: We used to get gasoline for 30 cents a gallon and we got 55 cents a pound for our scallops when I first started. This year, what is gas? $4 a gallon and we got $17 a pound for our scallops. But what makes the price is the supply and demand. This year, there wasn't much supply.

GC: It didn't even go.

CS: So, that's why the price was up. But next year, it could be $10 a pound. It varies.

GC: So, when I lived in Newfoundland, you could go buy fish off the back of a boat. Then I understand here in Nantucket, people could do that. They could also buy scallops downtown. But now, what markets do you sell them in?

CS: Yes. I sell them to sales, seafood and stuff. Well, yes, see there's more [laughter] rules and regulations. When I was a kid, there was always somebody who's selling fish right off the back of their truck on Main Street. They have a nice little ice chest and all that. Well, then they bought a house as well. You need a screen and then you need a hot and cold running water. Then you need stainless steel benches and then you need all these. Well, then the person says, "I can't do it." You cannot do it. You almost regulate it right out of business. It was just a one-man operation.

GC: It becomes big business.

CS: Yes. So, it's just too expensive. Then if you did sell them like that, you'd have to get a little bit more to cover all the things you have to go through.

GC: Opening shanties have to have hot and cold running water. Now that was since I've come here.

CS: Yes. I've always had my own shanty and that's at Parker Lane there and I built that in seventy-one. We've got hot and cold running water and toilet facilities. We can use the houses right next to it, so that's all right. We've got a big refrigerator, a big commercial. It's actually one of the big Pepsi ones. You open the doors, so we can put everything in there to keep everything cool. But we sell them as soon as they're opened. We don't hold them until the next day. So, it's a first class product.

[laughter]

FS: So, you did some other fishing, like commercial fishing?

CS: Yes. Did you ever see that thing on TV called the deadliest catch? I did that too. In 1979, I fished in Alaska. We were fishing the king crabs. I was single then and I went up to Alaska and I had some fishing experience and it was very difficult to get a job. But I finally got a job on a boat and the first part of the summer, we were shrimping. Catching them small shrimp, like those little tiny shrimp. That's as big as they get. When that season was over, then we rigged the boat over to king crabbing and we were catching the big crabs that are big. So, we did that until

the season was over and then I came back to Nantucket.

GC: What was your typical day on the water?

CS: Well, it depends if you're king crabbing or bay scalloping. [laughter]

GC: Yes. I think she means here in Nantucket.

CS: Yes, you mean here, bay scalloping?

GC: Yes.

CS: Yes. Well, here, we're regulated with that because you can't actually start until 6:30 a.m. You can't put your dredgers in the water. I mean, you can be on your boat at 2:00 a.m. if you want, but you can't actually start fishing until 6:30 a.m. and it's a limit. Each license holder is allowed right now five bushels per day and if I have somebody with me, we can take ten. But you can't take more than ten if you have three people. You can't take fifteen. Ten is the max for the boat, no matter how many people you have. The thing is, you try to get your limit as fast as you can or as soon as you can because then you have to get home. I always open on my own. This year, my son was home from school, so he went with me all winter. So, you try to do as best you can, try to get them as fast as you can. You don't want to be necessarily the first one in, but you definitely don't want to be the last one. [laughter]

GC: How do you get the scallops? I mean, I've gotten family scalloping.

CS: Yes, we tow these small dredgers.

GC: Same, same as the family?

CS: No, you're using push scoops, right?

GC: Yes, I'm using push.

CS: With a long pole?

GC: Yes, push right.

CS: Yes. You haven't seen a bay scallop dredged?

GC: No, I don't think I have, really.

CS: You have girls? Oh, well, I'll show you in the garage. I've got a hundred of them. [laughter] Yes, I'll show you.

GC: So, it's behind the boat.

CS: If the boat drags them along, we tow eight at a time. Now, the sea scallop is only towed two, one on each side, but they're huge. They can be 10 to 16 feet across. We're limited to so many inches across, 22, 23 inches across.

FS: Have you ever had any close calls while you were on the water?

CS: Nothing super serious. I've never seen people get hurt, and I've got hurt and all that. But nothing, never had a boat sink under us or anything like that. Seen some really rough weather, though. Some hard wintertime fishing is [laughter], it's one of them things. If you say you're fishing offshore here, say from Nantucket, 150 miles out, on the edge of George's Bank or something like that. A lot of times you can't get home in time for bad weather. So, they just wait out the weather until it dies down. Because it takes them so long to get home, wait for the wind to die out, so long to get back. So, when I was fishing and my father, when they got really bad weather, just what they called lay two. They'd just shut the engine off and drift like a duck. They could do that for days, until the weather calmed down and they could start fishing again. But it had to be pretty bad before they stopped. Because you have to remember that the first fish you catch is down in the hole on these big boats, and they're getting older all the time. So, you only have so many days before you have to come home, because then the fish wouldn't be prime. They would spoil it. So, they work in some pretty rough weather.

GC: What is the biggest fish you've ever caught?

CS: Individual fish? Oh, boy.

GC: Do you go recreational or commercial fishing? I don't know how much fishing you –

CS: Well, I've done most of it's all commercial.

GC: Commercial?

CS: Yes.

GC: So, you're not an Angler's Club Tournament guy?

CS: No. My son, he's the sports fisherman.

GC: Is he?

CS: Oh, he's really good. I used to say to my father, one time when I was just a little boy, he'd come home. It was the summertime and I was just a little kid, maybe six or eight years old. I said, "Gee, Dad, can you take – " because he was gone almost all the time. I said, "Gee, Dad, can we go out in the pond and fish a little bit in my little skiff?" You know what his answer was? He says, "How would you get any enjoyment out of that catching them one at a time?"

[laughter]

GC: He sounds like my husband when he hears people talked about getting trout. He's like, "They only come a few pounds. I want to get something a couple hundred pounds." [laughter]

CS: Yes. One at a time. Well, the biggest fish I think , it's a halibut. I don't know if you know what a halibut is. It's a flatfish, like a flounder. They can get up to 600 to 800 pounds. I mean, they get really into the delicious fish. It's pure white meat. They're a flatfish and they grow to be quite old.

GC: Do you catch those often in Nantucket?

CS: You can, but they're very, very scarce. Most of the halibut you get is from the Pacific up in Alaska. Those halibut have to be caught hook and line commercially. You can't catch them with a net. They have to be hook and line. It's a conservation regulation that's been in effect for years and years. The Canadians and the Americans have an agreement on that because they share the border. Same with them, both coasts. They have agreements on where you can go, where you can't go and [unintelligible].

GC: To prevent overfishing.

CS: Yes. I mean, there's more regulations today [laughter] than ever. Some go a little bit too far, definitely, and some were needed. Like the mesh size on the net, years ago, it was – I don't know, 4-inch size for the mesh. Now it's 6-inch size. So, a 6-inch mesh, a pretty good-sized fish can get out, which is good. You need the small ones to keep going. Because today with electronics, the boats are very, very efficient. They know right exactly where they are. With all electronics, they see the bottom, they can see the schools of fish. So, they have to have these restrictions.

GC: What do you think are some regulations that have gone too far?

CS: Well, this mammal thing with the seals, I think that's ridiculous.

GC: What's that?

CS: The seals. Years ago, when I was a child here, there was a bounty on shooting seals.

GC: Oh, right. That you can't get within certain, like 10 yards.

CS: Yes. It's all foolishness. I mean, how many seals did there need to be? I've read where a seal eats 10 pounds of its body weight every day. Now what do they eat? They eat fish, they eat soft-shell lobsters, and everything like that. Then they say the fish is gone, and they blame it on the fishermen. But how about the seal? You go out to jetties at any tide, and they're sitting on that jetty, and if you go up to Muskegon, the shoals are black with them. In Canada, they shoot them. I was over in Norway two or three years ago, and for 75 cents, you can get a license to shoot the seals. Because their fishery is more important to them than a few seals. I'm not saying shoot all the seals. I'm saying, but it's got completely out of control. I mean, we never saw seals in Nantucket in the summertime when I was a kid. You'd see a few in the wintertime, but not in

the summer. Now the people go up to Great Point, they cast them for bluefish. They pull the bluefish up, and the seal comes right up after them.

GC: Right. Yes. It's a famous movie that was on YouTube last summer.

CS: There's people that have come here for years from New Jersey to fish in the fall, sports fishing, and they said they're not coming back again. Because everywhere they go, the seals are taking the fish right off the hook. Another regulation that's completely screwed up is what they call the spiny dogfish. It's like a sand shark. You know what a sand shark is? They're about this long. They get about 3 feet long. It's like having a wolf in a chicken coop. They eat all the small little fish, the little codfish, the little haddock, the small flounders and all that. Well, when the fishing got really bad, say fifteen or twenty years ago, the government wanted to do a big survey. So, they did all the survey. Then the survey showed that, gee, 75 percent of everything the survey boat was catching was dogfish and skates. So, they said, "Gee, maybe we could get a market for the dogfish. That would get rid of some of the dogfish, let the codfish and the haddock and the flounders come back." Well, now they have a restriction on how many dogfish you catch. They say, they don't want to overfish the dogfish. Well, that's the craziest thing in the world. [laughter] The old fishermen would roll over in their graves if they said that there would be a restriction on dogfish. There's times when you'd be offshore here, maybe ten or fifteen miles, and all you see is these small fins going through the water. It's dogfish. I mean, they won't bite you or anything, but they do a tremendous job on the small fish. So, that's a regulation that's gone completely nuts. The people that make these regulations probably come from Kansas. [laughter]

FS: What are some of your likes and dislikes about being on the water?

CS: Oh, I don't know. You've got to like it. It depends on what fishery you're in. If you're on the big boats, that's all they get different than the base galloping like I do now. We leave in the morning. We're on the water before 6:30 p.m., and we're home every night. You get a nice warm bed to sleep in. But if you're on the big boats and you're gone for seven to ten days, you can put in anywhere from sixteen to twenty hours a day. Because they work on a ship, the boat never stops. Some of the men are sleeping, some are awake all the time. The boat never stops day and night. So, after four or five days, [laughter] you're pretty tired, but it's all part of it. Every fishery has a little different thing like that.

FS: What's the most difficult part about being a fisherman or a scalloper?

CS: You mean on bay scalloping?

FS: [affirmative]

CS: Well, I don't know. Well, not difficult physically, but the seasons fluctuate a lot. Some seasons we can have a lot of scallops, and some seasons, for unknown reasons, the catch is way down. Basically, it's Mother Nature that does that. People will say to me, "Well, you've been scalloping so many years. Well, how come it was a bad year?" And I say to them, "Do you ever go out and pick cranberries?" And they say, "Oh, yes" I said, "Do you go out and get

cranberries?" Beach plums. Every year you go to beach plums. Some years, you get a lot of beach plums. Next year, you won't find enough to fill a cup. Nothing you can do about it. It's all part of nature. But now with the bay scalloping, in the last few years, they've done more research on that. Like down at Brant Point, where they had the lab, they're actually raising them. They're raising the seed, and to see if they can produce some seed that would help. You would never be equal to what Mother Nature does. But it would be something to keep this industry going.

GC: It was really bad this last year.

CS: Well, the thing that saved us this year was the price. [laughter] It's usually one way or the other. It usually balances out. If you have a big crop, then the price is down. Of course, this year was exceptionally high. In the last fifty years, they used to call them cape scallops. We call them bay scallops or whatever. They got them anywhere from Long Island Sound, all up around Connecticut. The cape, like in Wellfleet and Chatham and all that, but a lot of those places don't have them today.

GC: Really?

CS: Nothing like Nantucket. Nantucket is the last place that has a natural set. The vineyard has scallops, but a lot of theirs is produced by seed. They propagate them. The bay scallop is the first shellfish that is affected by pollution. Quahogs and oysters, quahogs can live in a swamp.

GC: Mussels, yes.

CS: Mussels. They're all filter feeders. By having a lot of shellfish in the harbor, it actually keeps the water clean because they're cleaning the harbor all the time. They're filtering that water. So, I don't know exactly why the other places have had a major decline. It can be from overbuilding, fertilizers, runoff, pesticides. Things like that are not good to go in the water. We're surrounded by nice clean water, so maybe we're the last hurrah. That's why it's so important to keep the fertilizers, et cetera, out of the system, oils, and things like that.

GC: I know you're on several town committees, right?

CS: Yes.

GC: I wrote them down someplace, Harbor Plan Implementation Committee –

CS: The Shellfish Management Plan.

GC: – and Nantucket Land Council.

CS: Yes. I'm on the Land Council and the Nantucket Shellfish Association. I figured maybe it gives back a little bit. If I can help in some way, a lot of people just kind of – we have the Nantucket Shellfish Association. If we can get twenty guys to show up [laughter], that's a big deal when there should be two hundred. Because it's to their benefit. But I guess it's like all

organizations, the ones that squeak the loudest do the least.

GC: Yes, sometimes.

CS: Yes. But that's all part of it.

FS: How has fishing life changed on the docks?

CS: Oh, from the big boats. That has changed a lot here in Nantucket. Nantucket is very, very tough to have an offshore boat here, because you don't have any supplies. Years ago, when I was growing up here, we had a huge ice plant. Because all the boats would ice their fish. There might have been six or eight boats fishing out in Nantucket with anywhere from two to nine men crew. It was considered a decent job, a good job. But you have to go where you can get all your supplies, like New Bedford or something like that. They have everything. They have the shipyards. They have any possible thing you would need because they're geared up for it. They might have 300 boats in there. That's a big port. That's the biggest sea scallop port in the world is New Bedford.

GC: Really? The price of gas?

CS: Yes. With a big boat, you couldn't land any amount of fish. You couldn't land, say, 10,000 pounds of fish. Which is nothing for a big offshore boat because there's no processing here. Years ago, they actually took the fish out in Nantucket and shipped them on the steamer to Woods Hole and (out to?) New Bedford. But as the margins got thinner, you have to go to where you can do the best. In Nantucket, the bay scallop is fine because it's a daily thing. Then you get your sports fishing. There's a couple of guys that fish commercially for conchs, but those are, those are daily, a daily thing. They go out in the morning, they come home in the afternoon. So, there is a market for a smaller volume, but not with a big boat, it's almost impossible. I mean, it was getting bad when I was a kid, I mean, and things were just declining the services and the price of fuel and everything. Because it's like you're going to stop and shop here and you go to stop and shop in the mainland, the difference in the prices.

GC: So, there was more of that stuff around the dock when you were younger?

CS: Oh, yes. There was a lot more activity. But that whole dock area now, like where the Grand Union is and all that, that was completely all changed in the late sixties and seventies. There were actually commercial wharfs there. But all that was taken out and put into a marina. Because the fishing boats, the ones that were here, weren't put enough. They couldn't charge them enough to maintain the docks, which I can understand, because the dock repair is very expensive. You can charge the fishermen so much to tie his boat up there in between trips. But it comes to a point where how much can you charge. It's the bottom line. It's economics, basically.

GC: Do you have any funny or interesting stories that happened while you were on the water?

CS: Oh, God. [laughter] Oh, boy. I don't know, interesting ones. I guess they're all interesting

at some point or other. [laughter] Oh boy, interesting ones. Oh boy, well, everyone is a little different, you mean funny stories or something?

GC: [laughter]

CS: Well, I mean, sometimes, when I was offshore dragging, we'd go like two or three days and didn't have hardly any fish at all. Then within 24 hours, we'd almost have enough to go home with. I mean, that was interesting. That was fun. We'd pick up 30,000, 40,000 pounds in less than twenty-four hours, and that made it interesting. We thought it was fun too because we were headed home then. [laughter]

GC: So, we'll just kind of wrap it up here maybe. What do you think is the most serious issue affecting fishing or scalloping industry today?

CS: Well, that's two different, the bay scallop?

GC: Bay scallop.

CS: Yes, the bay scallop.

GC: You sort of answered that with the pollution.

CS: Well, the pollution is, and then there's another thing that we really can't control is the erosion. When I first started like in Muskeget and Tuckernuck, the water was a lot deeper. Today, due to the erosion, when it broke through at Esther's Island, it broke through in sixty-one when I was in school, and it broke through four or five years ago on Patriot's Day. Well, that sand washes into the harbor and it covers over the eelgrass beds. You have to have eelgrass to catch bay scallops on. Then it makes the water very shoal. So, when the scallops do spawn and they're growing in that shoal water, the seagulls can get them. So, we've lost area due to that, which it's almost impossible to control. It's not caused by man. It's just caused by nature. In Tuckernuck area when I first started it was a huge area. Now it seems to be stabilizing and coming back with eelgrass, but we've lost a lot of area.

GC: So, when it went through council about taking sand from offshore and bringing it to like the beaches, were you against that or for that?

CS: Oh, at Sanctity?

GC: Yes.

CS: To build up the bluff? Yes, that would be a tough one. Yes, I know they're even thinking of putting rocks and all that along the Sanctity Beach. It only seems to be only a certain section of that shore that's eroding. Because when you go down by where the Coast Guard Loran Station is, it's actually built out. So, I mean the sand comes from one and goes and builds to another. Yes. It's unfortunate that those people have those houses on those bluffs, you can see straight up and down. But I don't know, it'd be very expensive. It's tough. It's really tough to

control. It may work, I don't know, but you don't want to ruin the bottom that's off there. Like say you're pumping sand in and you're pumping it on like a mussel bed or something like that. So, there's always an effect one way or the other.

GC: Well, any other questions you guys want to ask?

FS: Well, I had a question about what you thought of the wind turbines, like if they were to put in wind turbines in Nantucket sound.

CS: In the sound?

GC: Oh, good question.

CS: Yes, I'm all for the wind turbines. But I think being on the water and being around salt water all these years, I think it's not a good place. If they put them on the land, then they can be serviced easily. With a little pickup truck, drive right out there, guy go up in the ladder, change something. But when you're putting that piece of steel, I don't care what they make it out of, and put it in salt water, it can't last. You look at any boat that's made of steel or anything, and you see rust continuously. I don't care if you're like on the ferry, and they keep those up really nice. Fishing boats, they're being drenched with salt water all the time, and you see the rust in the pitting and everything. I think with the turbines, that would be the problem. No problem putting them on the land. I don't know why they can't put them up on the Cape. What do you call that? National seashore. I mean, the wind doesn't just blow an ant at the sound.

GC: Public land. [laughter]

CS: It's going to be some kind of a tax thing. Nothing against the turbines, but putting them in the salt water, and to maintain them, I think it's going to be extremely expensive. But we do need energy, and I have nothing against that.

GC: Okay, great. Thank you for talking to us today.

CS: Do I get an A?

[laughter]

[end of transcript]