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Tony Sougstad

BY NANCY SOLOMON

In 1987, I began working at the Arts Council at Freeport, New York, as a folklorist documenting maritime culture. At the time, Tony Sougstad was a Freeport dragger fisherman who grew up in Flushing, Queens, but had lived in Freeport since the 1960s. He was 50 years old when I first met him. Like most fishermen that I met, it took some time before I could get him to agree to an interview, especially since I had only begun working in Freeport in the spring of that year. When I offered to help him pack up his fish for the market, he began to trust me, a trust that lasted for decades.

Tony became a dragger boat captain in 1970, after working as an engineer, because he didn't like working on land. Using his understanding of geometry, Tony captained a dragger boat, the *E.T.*, named after his wife (Eleanor) and himself (Tony). Although there were Norwegian fishermen among Tony's ancestors, his family were farmers in the Dakotas. Tony learned to catch fish from Frank Cona and his brother Charlie Cona, longtime commercial fishermen who shared a dock with Tony, until they retired in 1988. Tony learned to make nets

originally of cotton from Frank Cona, using "4-seam Italian nets" and "Yankee" fluke nets. In 1987, there were a variety of nets used, including a small mesh net to catch whiting and a larger net for flounder and other "bottom" fish that live on the ocean bottom. All nets have a tapered seam which works the best for catching fish, according to dragger fishermen. Tony also learned a great deal from Billy Granau of Freeport, a longtime commercial clammer, who retired in the late 1990s. He harvested a variety of species including fluke, flounder, squid, and whiting.

Most fishermen have had their share of close calls on the water. Here is an important story told by Tony in 1987:

We got up in the morning, and we could see in the sky little puffs of smoke—that signals bad weather. So, we said we'll make another couple of tows, and we'll get out of here. So, we started home, and on the way home, the wind came out of the east, then it came out of the southeast, northeast, and pretty soon, it was blowing pretty

good. The ocean was fairly white. There was also a leak in the boat that sprung open again. About five o'clock in the evening, it was raining and blowing so hard, the rain slanted across the deck; it hurt my face it hit so hard. So, about 8:30, 9 at night, we decided we couldn't make any more headway, because the boat was filling up with water, and she was sloshing around so violently, there was no way we could pump it out. I was pumping like mad and saying 'Hail Mary' like mad, I figured we'd had it. The boat was going down.

We called Chatham Coast Guard, and they sent a helicopter out, but they went to the wrong boat. We're so tiny out there, who would expect to look for a tiny little boat all the way out there? So, they hovered over a Russian ship that was maybe five miles from us, and they said no, we're not the ones who are in trouble. It's the little guy over there. So, they came around and dropped us three pumps. And, the boat got dried out. And then, he left, the helicopter left. I thought, "Oh my god, where is he going?" So, the Russian came alongside, and he yells, "Hey, cap-i-tan, you need assistance?" That's the only English that he knew. I said yes, yes. So, they threw us



Tony Sougstad with students from the Freeport School District. Photo by Nancy Solomon, 2019.

a line. They tied us up, and I'm telling you, when the boat was dried out and we were tied up in back of that Russian, I didn't care where they towed us."

During the past 10 years, the dragger boat remained at dock with rare exceptions. Tony explained that the government restrictions on what could legally be caught and sold made it extremely difficult to make any profit. As a result, he went clamming in the bay, and at times, operated a gill net.

Tony was a master storyteller and fishing net maker. He was very knowledgeable about the ocean's ecology and how regulations have affected fishermen. He had a number of excellent narratives about danger on the ocean. He worked with Long Island Traditions' adult and children's programs for 30 years. For many years, Tony attended regulatory meetings and in 1989, successfully fought the Village of Freeport's plan to remove the dragger boats from Woodcleft Canal. He was beloved by many fishermen and baymen, where he worked the last few years. We lost Tony on October 7, 2019. As a folklorist, he taught me the value of preserving stories and traditions, so that we may all learn from them.

As more and more fishermen are retiring or working part-time, I urge you to document and listen to them, so that we can remember them for future generations. There are many threats to this livelihood, including regulations, climate change, and the development of our working waterfronts. Through the years I've met many fishermen, both recreational and commercial, who have taught me a world of knowledge. If you know someone like Tony, introduce them to your local library or arts council, where others can learn from them. And, if you need help, let the great people at New York Folklore, the publishers of this magazine, know. Thank you! ▼

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Submission Guidelines for *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*

Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore is a membership magazine of New York Folklore (www.nyfolklore.org).

New York Folklore is a nonprofit, statewide organization dedicated to furthering cultural equity and cross-cultural understanding through programs that nurture folk cultural expressions within communities where they originate, share these traditions across cultural boundaries, and enhance the understanding and appreciation of folk culture. Through *Voices* New York Folklore communicates with professional folklorists and members of related fields, traditional artists, and a general public interested in folklore.

Voices is dedicated to publishing the content of folklore in the words and images of its creators and practitioners. The journal publishes research-based articles, written in an accessible style, on topics related to traditional art and life. It also features stories, interviews, reminiscences, essays, folk poetry and music, photographs, and artwork drawn from people in all parts of New York State. Columns on subjects such as photography, sound and video recording, legal and ethical issues, and the nature of traditional art and life appear in each issue.

Editorial Policy

Feature articles. Articles published in *Voices* represent original contributions to folklore studies. Although *Voices* emphasizes the folklore of New York State, the editor welcomes articles based on the folklore of any area of the world. Articles on the theory, methodology, and geography of folklore are also welcome, as are purely descriptive articles in the ethnography of folklore. In addition, *Voices* provides a home for "orphan" tales, narratives, and songs, whose contributors are urged to provide contextual information.

Authors are encouraged to include short personal reminiscences, anecdotes, isolated tales, narratives, songs, and other material that relates to and enhances their main article.

Typically feature articles range from 1,000 to 4,000 words and up to 6,000 words at the editor's discretion.

Reviews and review essays. Books, recordings, films, videos, exhibitions, concerts, and the like are selected for review in *Voices* for their relevance to folklore studies or the folklore of New York State and their potential interest to a wide audience. Persons wishing to review recently published material should contact the editor. Unsolicited reviews and proposals for reviews will be evaluated by the editor and by outside referees where appropriate. Follow the bibliographic style in a current issue of *Voices*.

Reviews should not exceed 750 words.

Correspondence and commentary. Short but substantive reactions to or elaborations upon material appearing in *Voices* within the previous year are welcomed. The editor may invite the author of the materials being addressed to respond; both pieces may be published together. Any subject may be addressed or rebutted once by any correspondent. The principal criteria for publication are whether, in the opinion of the editor or the editorial board, the comment constitutes a substantive contribution to folklore studies, and whether it will interest our general readers.

Letters should not exceed 500 words.

Style

The journal follows *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* for questions of spelling, meaning, and usage, and avoids gender-specific terminology.

Footnotes. Any notes should be endnotes; footnotes are not used. Notes should be used sparingly, with information incorporated in the text if possible. Ancillary information may be submitted as a sidebar.

Bibliographic citations. For citations of text from outside sources, use the author-date style described in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Language. All material must be submitted in American English. Foreign-language terms (transliterated, where appropriate, into the Roman alphabet) should be italicized and followed by a concise parenthetical English gloss; the author bears responsibility for the correct spelling and orthographics of non-English words.

Publication Process

Unless indicated, New York Folklore holds copyright to all material published in *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*. With the submission of material to the editor, the author acknowledges that he or she gives *Voices* sole rights to its publication, and that permission to publish it elsewhere must be secured in writing from the editor.

For the initial submission, email your submission, prepared in Microsoft Word.

Copy must be double spaced, with all pages numbered consecutively. To facilitate anonymous review of feature articles, the author's name and biography should appear only on a separate title page.

Tables, charts, maps, illustrations, photographs, captions, and credits should follow the main text and be numbered consecutively. All illustrations should be clean, sharp, and camera-ready. Photographs should be prints or duplicate slides (not originals) or scanned at high resolution (300+ dpi) and e-mailed to the editor as jpeg or tiff files. Captions and credits must be included. Written permission to publish each image must be obtained by authors from the copyright holders prior to submission of manuscripts, and the written permissions must accompany the manuscript (authors should keep copies).

Materials are acknowledged upon receipt. The editor and two anonymous readers review manuscripts submitted as articles. The review process takes several weeks.

Authors receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which their contribution appears and may purchase additional copies at a discount. Authors of feature articles may purchase offprints; price information is available upon publication.

Submission Deadlines

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Fall-Winter issue May 1

Send submissions as Word files to
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or

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