

**Oral History Interview with Donnie Braddick  
For the Montauk Library Oral History Program  
Interviewed by Pete Chelkowski on September 28, 2024**

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:00:00] Today is September 28th, 2024. And my name is Pete Chelkowski, and I'm conducting an oral interview with the legend Donnie Braddick. Do you mind spelling your name for me Donnie?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:00:13] D O N N I E Braddick, B R A D D I C K.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:00:21] Yeah. This interview is part of the Montauk Library Oral History Program. We're cutting this interview from the sound studios at the Montauk Library in Montauk, New York. So let's start from the very beginning. That's what they want to know. You know, where were you born? What are your earlier years? Where do you spend your childhood?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:00:38] Well, I was born on Long Island and Huntington, actually, Huntington Station. And I grew up there and went to school. And my family was very involved in, like, surf fishing. And we evolved over the years and migrated to Montauk. And my father became a charter boat captain. And I kind of followed in his footsteps. He was the inspiration on fishing for me, and it just took off from there.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:01:21] Tell me, like, tell me what your parents names are, their occupations and like kind of, you know, if you know a little about their heritage, where they're from, whether they came from.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:01:31] Yeah. My mother was Nancy Nancy Martino, and she married my father, Frank Braddick. And they both my father was from the Rockaways and my mother was from Five Towns, Hewlett to be exact. And she comes from an all Italian, let's say, off the boat family. And my father, his father was from British Honduras, which they call Belize now. And his mother was from Spain. And that's where I got my English last name. But it wasn't from England. It was from British Honduras. And they wound up in the states here and and they grew up in. On the western part of Long Island. And that's that's how we wound up here.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:02:43] And do you remember why they immigrated from British Honduras?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:02:48] I'm not I'm not certain. My my grandfather was bilingual. And, of course, my grandmother, too. And they both spoke Spanish and English. And he was a court stenographer and also a fisherman. He always had a boat. They they started out in Far Rockaway and then wound up in Merrick and always had a boat behind the house and did a lot of fishing and boating.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:03:23] Do you have any, like, super fond memories of, like, being a kid and fishing or boating?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:03:31] Yeah. You know, when I was very small from when I could just remember things, we would go to my grandfather's, and he was. He was a funny guy. He would he would watch baseball. And they didn't even have remotes back then for the television. And every time a commercial would come on, he'd get up, walk to the TV, turn

the volume off, come back and sit down. And he would be talking Spanish with my sister, who eventually wound up being a bilingual teacher. And I never learned Spanish, but my sister did before Spanish was the number one language in this country. But my grandfather was he was pretty colorful guy. We'd come there or it would be misting and raining, but it didn't matter. He'd still be out there watering his plants and playing with the dog and working in the garage in the woodshop, or get the boat ready to go fishing.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:04:45] Do you know the story of how your folks met?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:04:50] I think they they met just from friends of friends. I don't really know that exact story, but they were together since they were very young.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:05:07] And do you remember what inspired that move? Like, how did that move to Montauk happen?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:05:12] Well, we we moved from one place in Huntington Station to the first house they bought in Huntington. And my father was heavily involved in surf casting and an organization called LIBBA. That's Long Island Beach Buggy Association. So we grew up every weekend. And any other chance we could get on the beaches fishing and camping. And me and my sister, we grew up on the roof of a of a truck that had a fold up tent type sleeper. And we slept there. And my parents slept in the truck. And we we just went fishing and surfing. And then we had a great, great time growing up like that. And that evolved into small boat fishing, which evolved into sales of fish, which that turned into charter boat fishing for my father. And then it just took off from there. And he he remained the charter boat captain and he still active at 89 years old. He still has his charter boat in Montauk Harbor and fishes as much as anyone. He's he's still in real good shape for that.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:06:49] Okay. So so you were in Huntington. So when did you guys actually, like, officially move do you remember? When did he move? You remember the circumstances? How old were you? How how did you feel about moving when you're young enough or were they really were you really out of the house?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:07:03] Well, no. We were coming to Montauk on the weekends and I was still in school. And eventually my father bought a home in Montauk and he we grew up at Inlet Marina. He had a cottage there. And that's where we spent all our time. And he kept his boat there. Now, you have to remember back then, my. Montauk was a tiny little one horse town that still is and is not even a traffic light here. And nobody really came except for the for the local people that lived here and the people that came, especially in the fall, to go striped bass fishing. Otherwise it stopped at Southampton. East Hampton. Nobody really came to Montauk as in the fashion they do now. The place has exploded.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:08:15] So what was like the population who were who were like the locals back then, do you remember?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:08:19] Yeah. Like, of course, the Duryeas and the Tumas and the there was a good local crowd. And as long as you conducted civilly, you got along fine. And I made a lot of good friends out here and. We we did a lot of good fishing when I was young, and I like to dive a lot also. And. I stayed until the let's see, the late 80s is when I, I expanded and moved from here.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:09:03] And when you first got here, was it like a locals only kind of vibe was, you know, where they very closed? You know, there it's a fishing village that

doesn't have much of, you know, you know, people coming in and out. What was what was the kind of the feeling, the the the attitude of the people?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:09:18] Well, you know, it's like any community when you when you come, I think you get treated like you treat others. So it seemed to move along pretty smoothly. Yeah. You know, of course there's a few bumps in the road, but it it was an easy place to get along in.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:09:44] And so did you end up going school to school here?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:09:49] No. I went to Walt Whitman High School in Huntington, and I was out here on weekends and moved out here full time right after high school.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:10:07] And when and what did you describe that, you know, where you moved to describe that area? Like what it was like like like paint the picture of Montauk a little bit. You touched on it a little bit like no traffic, like like paint the picture. What does it look like when you people like even the road itself would be.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:10:27] Montauk-It was just so quiet and peaceful. I grew up on the end of East Lake Drive, which not that many people use that road unless you had a specific purpose. There's always been an airport there. So there was that little bit of traffic and people lived along the lake. East Lake Drive travels right around down the coast of the lake to the end of the road was Inlet Marina. And it was just a small place. And we we mostly inshore fish out of there, striped bass, scup, which are porgies, you know, blue fish, inshore stuff. And then we evolved to blue water fishing, offshore fishing. And that we that's really what captivated me once I got a taste of that off shore stuff. That's basically what I did.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:11:40] Yeah. So talk about that. Tell me a little about like when you remember like the specifics of when that was maybe even like you sometimes dates, if you remember kind of the dates, you know, like, so, you know, when you started going out on the first boat, you remember whose boat you went out like blue, you know, blue water fishing first. Like when did you start? Did you think a job as a mate for somebody?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:12:00] Well, of course, all of the beginnings was going fishing with my father. And I would say in the like early 70s, we would go offshore tuna fishing. And he he pretty much showed me the ropes on how to catch tuna fish. And from there I got jobs and was lucky enough to fish with some of the better fishermen around and a guy who's not with us anymore, but his name was Chuck Weller. He was a real good boat handler and fisherman. He he showed me a lot. And what you do like in a lot of businesses before you own your own, if you get the opportunity to fish with some of the better ones and you take a little from here and a little from there and then you put it all together and come up with your own ideas and methods and techniques. And if it all gels, it works out good for you.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:13:12] So how long did that transition to you? So you went out with Chuck. Was that the boat you worked on the most? Were there other boats that you worked on?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:13:19] Hum? I didn't work on that many boats, but Chuck Weller, he was part of the Viking fleet, which is a commercial, not commercial, but a party boat fleet. And from there he moved on to running private boats. And the first job I got with Chuck

was running a Rybovich sportfishing boat and we would take the owner out fishing all the time. And it was really good because it wasn't it wasn't entertainment. The guy that owned the boat, Al Goldstein, he just loved to go fishing. And we didn't have to entertain guests. And it wasn't that formal. We went and we caught fish and had a good time. And and I started seeing how these fish were catching are becoming more worth some money. And there were two guys specifically in the harbor that were going out and catching bluefin tunas and catching them just about every day. And it was Greg Beecher and Paul Stern, and they both had small boats and they would go out and catch a bluefin tuna, bring them in. And it was like, wow, I'm out there catching fish for, you know, a wealthy guy and or charter boat fish. And these fishes started to become valuable. I enjoy doing it. I don't see any reason I shouldn't jump in on that bandwagon. And that's when I started fishing myself and I got my own boat. After running a couple of boats in the in the harbor, I did some charter boat fishing and I preferred to go fishing myself and commercially and sell my catches, put the fish on the market for the for this country or export. And that's what inspired me, seeing a couple of guys here, having a good time and catching fish. And that's what I did. I went from porgy fishing and striped bass fishing to catch in these big tunas and it it was a lot of fun.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:16:10] Tell me the years time of the years that that all happened. So. So what year was that?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:16:16] That was in the early 80s. And I dabbled around charter boat fishing and I by by the mid 80s I had a good knack at catching tuna fish and I was running a charter boat that I didn't own but a guy John Fischetti owned the boat and it was called the Fish On and I was running that charter boat and we were doing well catching bluefin tuna fish, yellowfin tuna fish. But pretty much I targeted bluefin tuna because they were the biggest ones. And I that's what I like to do the most. And that's what evolved into this catching this big shark. What happened was I was out on a charter in 1986 on the Fish On, and I had a group of guys that wanted to catch yellowfin tunas or I'm sorry, they wanted to catch a giant bluefin tuna. And we went to where the grounds, fishing grounds and let the bluefins weren't biting. And I was like, I know where we could go and catch some yellowfin tunas. And they were like, yeah, that be great, you know? And I had about a 20 mile ride, which wasn't bad because a boat was fast back for back then it would do 20 knots or better. So it was an hour away. I would say about half way. We started in the butter fish hole, which is south of Montauk. And we we were going more to the east to a spot and about halfway there. We ran into an object floating. You could see something floating ahead of the boat a mile or more. My mate was like, Mikey Skarimbass remembers. He was like, "Wow, look at that. What's that?" And I don't know. I just automatically knew it. That's a dead whale. And we went over to it, and it was a whale that died. Why, I don't know. Could have been old age. And it was floating and you could see tremendous bite marks out of it. And as soon as we got real close to it, we saw a real big shark on it and looked at Mikey and I was like, man, we're going to have some fun here. And the crew, the paying passengers were like, wait a minute. We didn't sign up for this. We want to catch some tuna fish. Let's get out of here, you know? And I was like, well, okay, we'll go catch some tunas. Because nobody else was there. And it was a flat, calm bluebird day. And it was surprising nobody else ran into that. So. So we left and we actually did catch a few yellow fins. Everybody was happy. It was about, I'd say, 4:00 in the afternoon. And I was like, okay, guys, we're going to call this a wrap, but we're going to go back to that whale. And now we're on my time. And as we were going back to it, I saw Frank Mundus coming in from off shore. He was doing overnight charters back then. And Mikey, who was my mate Mike Skarimbass, worked for Frank the year before 86. That was he worked on Frank's boat and I had worked on Frank's boat in 1974. So we were both very familiar with him.

And he was the shark fishing master. I mean, that was his game. And it was like if you were having, let's say, heart problems and like the world-leading heart doctor that walked by, you would kind of grab him. And that's what we did with Frank in this shark. I pulled over and said, Hey, Frank, meet me at these numbers. You know, I gave him the coordinates and I said, we've got something right up your alley. And he met us there and he had a charter. I had a charter. And they both agreed like, we have to go in, we have jobs and we want to live, things of that nature. And we were like, okay, my boat was fast. Frank's boat was slow, but a really nice big working platform. So we piled all his customers onto my boat and I blasted back into Montauk because it was only about 24 miles. So we got them in. They they unloaded off of my boat and I grabbed a few supplies, maybe, you know, case of beer, pizza or two. And I even I saw a friend of mine that was out visiting me and just he was out there to have a good time and he never went fishing. And I grabbed him and I said Jeff, come on, get on the boat. You're going to see some cool stuff. And he came back out with Mikey and myself, and we Frank was sitting on the at the dead whale, and the sharks had kind of, like, faded away, but we were marking them which is. You could see them on the on the sounder doing kind of like in a flight pattern doing ircles under that big whale. So we knew they they didn't go anywhere, but they just weren't up on it. And then it was it was summer, so it stayed light until 9:00 at night. So we decided, well, we'll just camp out and start in the morning at daylight. We don't really want to do this in the dark. And. That's what we did. We laid up. I tied my boat off to Frank's boat and we separated, just say 100ft. And we laid up waiting for daylight. And then, like in the middle of the night, all of a sudden, I feel like something bang the boat. And I'm like, man. We drifted together. I got up and Frank was still at the end of the rope, hundred foot away. It was one of the big white sharks came up, bumped the boat. I was like, boy, game on, you know? And we hung out because it got daylight. And we did hook a fish pretty quickly. And Frank's, one of Frank's crew members, John. He was the angler on the first fish and that fish. He wound up biting the leader off and we lost the fish. And I said, Well, I'm gonna I'm going to fight the next fish. And that's how I wound up on the rod for the next one. And we did hook that. We hooked another fish and I, we wound up catching it and it wound up being the largest fish ever caught on a rod and reel. And that'll hold forever, because since then, white sharks have been put on the endangered list. So you can't catch anything bigger than that fish because there's nothing like marlins and etc. don't get 4,000 pounds or over 3,000 pounds so that I know of. So we got that the biggest fish thing taken care of.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:25:30] In the record books.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:25:31] Yeah.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:25:32] Tell me a little bit about the actual, the actual the fight the talk about fish on and how, you know, what was the feeling. Just walk me through all that kind of stuff.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:25:44] Well, when we we hooked the fish and naturally had an on a or a 130 international that's the biggest and push lever drag a good, you know state of the art reel and it was on a Sabre rod which they don't that company is no longer in existence but we hooked the fish and that fish just took off. And it's like you don't put the brakes on, you know, a fish of that size. And so Frank was running the boat and he, you know, we cat and mouse the fish for a while and it we weren't in that deep of water where he could sound, you know a mile and just run the line off us. We we always had line on the reel and about an hour and a half into fighting the fish cat and mouse, he decided, all right, I had enough of this. And he came up and started charging the boat. And I can remember, like looking straight back and he has a fish on the top swimming, right at us hard as he could.

And now Frank's not backing up chasing him, he's going ahead. And I just. I put my head down and I was just cranking as fast as I could. And and I. I'm like, I don't feel him. He's gone. He's gone. They were like keep reeling. So the fish came right at the stern and turned off at the last second. He didn't smash right into the boat, but he turned off. And then, you know, we kind of put the brakes on em and he he was behind the boat, I'd say about 30 yards. And he come up, up out of the water and he was clamping his mouth open and closed. And I was like looking and my fishing lines going up instead of down into the water because the fish was so big. And he eventually he he started doing a roll. And that's what sharks like, similar to like alligators, though, get in that roll. And he started rolling and in the in the fishing line the leader was rolling around them and so we were getting closer to him and Frank backed up and we knew we were going to have one shot at him and everybody made the right moves. We got right close enough to him. He was right at the back of the boat and we we got him. Frank had a good game plan. He he called it a reverse tail rope. We put a rope around his head. And this is after we got a couple of gaffs in him. I remember once one gaff went into him, I knew this was going to be take him or break him. I got up and out of the fighting chair I was in and got another gaff into him. Frank and a crew member got a head rope on him. Then we got a tail rope on him. And like the fish, we were just like, shake his head or his tail and. He was breaking like three quarter inch, half inch rope, like it was nothing. But we eventually got enough ropes on them and and kind of had had them wrapped around the boat until we knew we had them secured enough. And then we released this head and started towing him backwards. And it sounds horrific, but that's fishing. And back then, it was like people were still under the the fear of Jaws. And if more people were happy than disgruntled about catching a fish like that and we wound up catching that fish, nobody had any idea how big it was. You know, how do you how do you estimate the weight of a fish that's 17.5ft long, you know? So I was like, well, it got to be 2,000 pounds. Well, by the time we came in and tried weighing and that was a procedure and it wound up being 3,427 pounds and. That pretty much that's the end of that story. And.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:30:42] So tell me about how when you when you came into the marina, tell us how many when you brought whether people there was their word out was that you got it? How is that? Because I've seen all the photos, all that stuff, to see the crowds. There was like the nets.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:30:54] It was it was almost like out of a movie because I got into the dock way before Frank. He had to tow the fish in and he has a slow boat. I was in a few hours before him, hours before him, and the word was out. Frank's coming in with a massive catch. The fish is on his boat and. There was a big crowd and people started coming to see it. The word got out pretty quick, by the time he got there and there was pretty much a massive crowd at the dock and it took a good while to get the fish weighed because initially we tried to lift the fish by his tail and weigh it like typical typical of weighing a big fish. But he was breaking ropes and the fish fell back in the water and it was like, oh man. And some guys jumped in and they came up with a cargo net, kind of put the fish in it. And and they went up to, I believe it was Riverhead and got a truck scale like a crane scale, something you would hang off a crane and weigh heavy items, say, like from a junkyard or whatever, and they rig that up and lifted the fish, let's say landscape horizontal. And that cargo net held it and the fish came up and out of the water and the scales just kept going up and up. And it stopped that that weight, 24, 3427. And then it went on from there. It was it was late at night by the time that all finished. And they they put the fish in the parking lot covered it with ice. And it was like. Almost like a parade of people coming to view that shark. And like I said, it wasn't because solely because of that shark bBeing big, it was still there was still the aura of Jaws. And, you know, Amity was people thought that

was Amagansett. And Clint was really a knock off of FrankMundus. And so it was it was almost like, okay, they wrote, they wrote the book and this and that, and we went and actually caught Jaws. So it was pretty cool. I would say that went on for a few days, bury it in ice. And people come and they'd view it and it was good. It got a lot of a lot of press, got interviews from people calling from like England, a chic from Saudi Arabia. You know, it's like people it it kind of made world news. I couldn't believe it but I they get more on hate hate letter hate mail. You know a woman thought I should be the one hanging from the [unclear]. Not that fish, you know, But most of the people appreciated it, you know, like, well, at least that one ain't going to eat me more next time I go swimming, so. It surprises me that it's still, it's still a topic. I did a review just a couple of months ago for a magazine. It's something that just doesn't go away. It's like it's not a major event, but it's it's entertainment to people, I guess. It's not like JFK assassination, but it's it's not 911. It's like it's it's it's entertainment. People people enjoy seeing Jaws going down.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:35:37] Yeah, I guess it is. It's almost sad that real life fiction turning into real life. Which one came first? You're almost like realizing the movie.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:35:44] Yeah. Yeah, that's. That's a good way to summon it out.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:35:48] And what other things? I remember. There are some. What other things I remember hearing some cool things for. It sounds like for years there was like a it was like, as you're saying, it's a constant. It does. It hasn't faded and wane and dip. But like I remember the letter you once got from some girl from remember, and it was written on it. It was written, you know, man who caught the largest fish USA or was like some.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:36:12] I think I think you talking about I got a letter and it was right right after that from a young boy in England. And he addressed the letter, the man who caught the big shark in New York. And it got to me. I got I got it in the mail. I thought that was pretty, pretty funny, you know, that you could address it like that and and actually receive it. And he he put a picture of a shark that he caught over there. And he was it was kind of a little touching, you know.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:37:00] Awesome shark story. Do you have any other, like, amazing fishing stories?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:37:06] Well, you know.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:37:08] I'm sorry. [mic noise]

**Donnie Braddick** [00:37:09] What I think is just some day's work. Other people are like holy crow. But it's just that's what we do. It's just like when people would say, congratulations, you caught a tuna fish today. It would be like, wait a minute, do you congratulate the mailman when he comes and delivers your mail? That's his job. So that's what I do. And if I couldn't catch a fish, I wouldn't be doing so. But yeah, I have a few funny stories. One time we were fishing and me and Paul, Paul Stern, we were fishing way offshore and we were laying up overnight. And sometimes if it was fairly calm out, we would go boat to boat and we would all jump on one guy's boat and we'd have dinner and maybe a beer or something and then get a couple hours sleep and start fishing again. So we were out and it was fairly good size fleet and a spot called Cashes. And I was pulling up to Paul Stern to his boat and we were all jumping off of my boat on to his and we were going to grill some steaks up or whatever. And my mate jumped off and I jumped off my

boat on to Paul's and we would just have them tied together. Well, as I jumped on to Paul's boat, my boat fell into reverse and starts taking off. And it's nighttime and we're in a fleet. And I'm like, oh my God, Paul. And he's like, okay. And so now he's got to chase my boat. My boat's going backwards and he's got me on the bow of his boat in the nighttime and he's pulling up chasing my boat. It's not going that fast, but that's kind of like, you know, jumping off a horse onto the stagecoach. I had to do that routine, and I'm on the bow of his boat. He finally gets to my boat, and we're close enough, and I dive on to it. And I got the boat. You know, we got everything back in control, but it could have just as easily crashed into another boat out there or whatever. So that was like just one of those events, one of those days, you know? And those are the life of the fisherman. But it was that's a pretty funny story. And I bet you Paul would remember that one.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:40:21] What about one thing we haven't talked about is, you know, you going out on like a 28 - 302. Do what what size boats are some of these 40. Like you go in sometimes, you know, you're going to Georges Bank. You're going, what is that, 110 miles? Is it, you know, is it dangerous? Talk about, you know, like people-

**Donnie Braddick** [00:40:43] You know, people drown in a bathtub. So, yeah, it's dangerous. But if you're scared, you wouldn't do it. So you just it's a matter of kind of like a respect. You gotta try and keep your head right and and have a have good maintenance on your vessel. You don't want to go out on something that's going to break down and sink and this and that because it happens to the best of them. But it's dangerous. But. It's just the way it is. You know, ironworkers and bridgeworkers and there's a lot of dangerous jobs and, you know, it's it's kind of a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:41:39] I remember the first time I went on a boat with you. We were in North Carolina and we went out and, you know, we got to you know, we're trying to film some stuff. And, you know, and there's like a little squall going on and like and you're all by yourself on the boat and it's like, it's awesome to be with someone who you have such confidence in. Like, I didn't have a single worry in my mind because I know you had like, my trust was 100%. Is there that level of trust that you have with people that you were working with? This is like trust and relationship of your mates really important?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:42:11] Yes, I've had some really reliable guys. Now, they might not have been the best citizens in the world, but when push comes to shove and if you are in a dangerous position, they were right there to help you, just like I'd be right there for them. You have to have like on on most of the boats I've been the captain or owner of and in charge. There would be 3 or 4 guys as crew members, you have to have at least one really good guy. And he he kind of makes up for anyone who's new or lacking. But yeah, you you need good crew members and you need guys that aren't going to crumble.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:43:15] So tell me a little bit also about so like we're talking about an amazing event. We're also talking about fishing in like Montauk. Walk me through how fishing was there. You're talking about the price of tuna. You know, people don't remember. A lot of people don't remember that, you know, tuna, you know, they would canned tuna like tuna was not something that people ate. It was like people were looking for Dover sole. I mean, whitefish was always the meat. Talk a little bit how like that that change and how that changed the the fishing industry here in the states.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:43:46] Well, like I started out, my passion was catching tuna fish. And I caught that shark that day because I could. And it seemed like the right thing to do at the time.



**Pete Chelkowski** [00:44:03] It seemed like there was an evolution that you were doing in terms of like you're doing. You started with like striped bass, you know? And of course the larger is always the better. And then you move to like yellowfin tuna and then what's the king? The king is the bluefin, you know, that's the giant. And then the shark just seemed to be the kind of natural progression of of size.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:44:24] Well the shark just was something that came together and I made it happen. And after I caught that shark, I didn't make a career out of shark fishing I didn't promote myself. I went right back to tuna fishing. And that's when I stopped. Right after that, I stopped doing charter fishing and started going bluefin tuna fishing myself because all of the sudden, these big bluefin tuna, they were really had no value before the 80s to get more than a dollar or two a pound for them was amazing. The people just they went to the canneries. They could have been cat food. They weren't choice Bumblebee fish, you know, that was like yellowfin or fancy white albacore it wasn't bluefin tuna, their darker, oily fish. But all of the sudden, the Japanese took note of them. And the way I understand it is a Japanese businessman was importing things to the states on the East Coast and wound up he was up at Nova Scotia and unload the plane and he wouldn't have anything to return to Japan. And that's it's awful expensive flight with no cargo. And he saw these big bluefin tunas. And Canada was really well known for big, big bluefin fish. And he saw them there and he took a chance and brought some back to Japan on the plane, cargo plane. And it kind of went off from there. And. Now the Japanese are very fussy and they would catch their own tunas themselves their their domestic fleet in Japan. But they. The quality of East Coast U.S. Canada blue fins were very good, especially certain times of the year. So they became high on the list and all of a sudden they started evolving into very valuable fish. And that's right at that time. And they were they were not that valuable, but they quickly rised in value. And the fishermen started getting paid more. And we started going at the first up from Montauk to Point Judith and selling fish there. And then we went up to New England. And specifically Gloucester was the first harbor we went into and were selling fish commercially and we helped between Pauly, Paul Stern, myself, we went up with our fishing rods and most guys, we used hand lines and fish and out of a basket for these big fish. And we revolutionized that using rods and reels. Now, there were guys that did it before us with rods and reel, but they were sport fishing guys and they really were wealthy guys and they they were doing it for sport fishing and. We went up with our rods and reels and we wound up doing doing pretty well and it really took off from there. Like I said, we didn't invent any thing specifically, but we came up with new techniques and I think we were the first ones to fight fish out of a rod holder instead of a fighting chair. And I did that until the year the Twin Towers went down was the last year I was basically bluefin tuna fishing, and it started dropping drastically the value. And there was so much competition worldwide. It used to be more like Boston bluefin and Boston bluefin or any fish caught on the East Coast. They just use that term Boston Bluefin. And they the market really peaked at my got as much as \$50 a pound for some fish and then it tumbled and I'd switch to long line fishing and it was no longer bluefin. It was big eyes and yellow fins and swordfish in big numbers instead of a fish or two at a time. We would come in with boatloads bigger boats and a lot of fish and sell them pretty much domestically trying to feed the country.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:50:15] I mean, I know like bluefin tuna, there's some regulations. You know, it depends on the year. Tell us about the regulations, about the bluefin tuna and all the other kind of long line and all the other kind of stuff. Are there rules and who who imposes those rules?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:50:30] Okay.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:50:31] Well, who creates the rules, too?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:50:33] Well, when I first started fishing, there were a few rules and regulations far and few between. And then all of a sudden, I would say it was the late 70s. People started protesting about the haul seiners. And those are the guys from the East End the Long Island with deep heritage on fishing off the beach. They probably started with horse and wagon and rode out in dories and and pulled the net and encircled fish and then pulled them back. And that transitioned into using beach vehicles. Still, they'd run their dories out at night, circle fish within nets and pull them back onto the beach. And it was called haul seining. And I never did it, but I was really impressed. They caught a lot of fish and as far as I know, those were the first people that got hit with regulations and got regulated right out of business. It was the beginning of the end for commercial fishermen. From there, that would have been state laws. The type of fishing that I did mostly in my career has been offshore fishing, which is outside of the three mile limit, and it becomes federal regulations. And when I first started, we went up to Gloucester. There was very little rules and regulations on a lot of the fishing. And they they were rules that you could live with. They weren't beat you up to bad. And when we first went up to Gloucester, there was a trailer on the end of the state pier and there were three federal agents assigned to that duty. And there were hundreds, if not thousands of commercial fishing boats with a lot of history. They were either porgy or Italian heritage pike. Cape Cod had a tremendous amount of Portuguese fishermen. Gloucester had a lot of Italian fishermen. And it went from three guys in a little trailer with thousands of people to regulate and boats to a minimum amount of boats with thousands of people and a giant building in Gloucester. And it was. It became so overregulated. It it was it drove a lot of people out of business. And we need laws and rules and regulations. That civilization needs that. But when it becomes overbearing and overwhelming, it destroys it destroys businesses and fisheries. And I feel like overregulation is a big part of the demise and in the fisheries. There were two major problems. It seems like it's so hard to get young people to work and and show up and physically do demanding work. The world is changing so much. And between or between having a hard time getting crewmembers and and fishing regulations, it really made it tough to make a living as a commercial fisherman and that extended to recreational fishing charter, boat fishing because there's limits on what you can catch. Size limits. And people are stopping from going charter boat fishing because they can't keep enough fish to justify the cost of the trip. They want to come home with a big pail of fish, not a little Ziploc bag. And it's it's getting tough in this country, too, to find a position where you're not up against heavy regulations. So. It's not that many people understand. It's it's like farmers. Farmers are very regulated. And I don't know much about farming at all, but I think some farmers are paid not to farm, you know. But it's it's a tough battle that you go against, and I hope it gets backed off a little. Within reason. We need conservation. And fishermen kind of know how to conserve, how to be conservative with fish. They don't want to wipe the fish out. Well, actually, some sometimes you want to catch them all, but I hope it backs off a little bit for the next generations. Or this this business will be done.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:56:41] The business can keep going.

**Donnie Braddick** [00:56:43] Yes, we want. I'd like to see the business keep going. But it needs and the young people have to get out there and go to work. And and the government has to back off on their rules and regulations. But once a rule gets passed, I've never seen it get overruled. So we've given up as much as we can. I, I hope they don't take too much more away.

**Pete Chelkowski** [00:57:10] So tell me a little bit about that. That's interesting. Like the evolution of fishing and maybe try to make it maybe is more I mean, it's I know it's general and East Coast, but also specific to Montauk. Like what what what did you see the evolution from when you started to now? Like what is that evolution of the fishing industry commercially?

**Donnie Braddick** [00:57:28] Well, when I first started coming to Montauk, it was it was a fishing town and there were lots of boats and there were southern boats coming up long line fishing. And it was really tremendous amount of commercial fishing from offshore swordfishing and big eye yellowfin fishing that there was tile fishing just. A lot of draggers, trawler boats and. Fishing was the game and a con has died out to just a few big boats here and some small up and hooker small boats like where I started. They remained along with the charter fleet. But the big commercial fleet, the long liners no longer came here. But it it opened my eyes to commercial fishing. And I did get a chance to do some commercial fishing, like harpooning swordfish offshore bottom long lining for tilefish. It was this a major hub. It wasn't as big as like Gloucester, where Gloucester was infamous for Georges Banks cod fishing, you know, with the sailing vessels and all. But I think Montauk had deep history and heritage and from the whaling days and and so on. Montauk turned into especially with the Covid. Covid. You could blame Covid for many things. And one of them is from is from changing the fabric of Montauk into this extremely high-priced tourist town. And a lot of wealthy people from the city came out and they started buying it up. And now Montauk is very, very pricey. I think it's rated as one of the or maybe the most expensive beach resort in the country.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:00:09] I didn't know that.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:00:11] It went from a small little town to it's a small little town, but it's really expensive on an extremely hard to to buy a home if you're somebody young and just you know that that grew up here.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:00:29] It sounds like that to me. I've been witnessing that and not just in Montauk but it seems like globally, like like real estate has gone to such a point that there's middle-class families can't afford to.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:00:42] Right. You're going to have urban sprawl everywhere. And I moved away from here because I thought Montauk was getting pricey. You know, the price of fuel, bait, ice, everything. Doing business as a commercial fisherman was tough for me when I could relocate and it was more economical. So I moved out here like 89 or 90, and I went to North Carolina and that was like Mecca for small boat, like 50, 50 foot foot boats, like for long lining. And that's what I was doing, you know, putting out like 20, 25 miles of line with hooks on it and catching tuna and swordfish. And there was that was a real small little town. And it still is. But it it had urban sprawl, but not like Montauk. Montauk went ballistic. And I didn't really have a sense of that going as far back as the late 80s or early 90s. But from then till now it's like out of control.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:02:16] It's a totally different world. Yes, totally different world. It sounds like. Yeah, that's it. It seems like globally and economics have are not conducive to middle-class families surviving, unfortunately. And I think there needs to be some big changes. I don't know what those changes are, but one thing that I didn't know about was that you actually free-dived and you scuba talk a little about that because that's kind of a part of you that I never knew and I was super surprised and super happy to see you like-

**Donnie Braddick** [01:02:50] Well, back in the 70s, right when I got out of high school, I was out here and there was a guy, Ron Dalbora, he he was running Gone Fishing Marina and I started out, he I was lucky enough to go diving with him. And he's got two sons, Danny and Ronnie Dalbora and I became friendly with them, but I started diving free diving for striped bass with Ron Senior, and I got the bug on that. And before that, I was scuba diving, lobster diving around the jetties and and whatnot at night. And so I did quite a bit of diving and Montauk was a great place to dive out of a boat for big striped bass. And we were out where all the charter boats and commercial guys would go fishing for striped bass. We jump in and and shoot them and you had to go to the bottom. Didn't get them on the surface. You went to the bottom and you took your shot and made it back up on a breath. So it was it was pretty challenging. And then I kind of I broke loose from that and strictly was fishing. And now I'm back to diving because I, I just sold my business, my long line boat and permits. And I built a second home in Florida. And I'm back to diving and I'm diving with one of my buddies I grew up with on Long Island that I showed how to fish and dive. Well, now the student is the teacher and he's showing me all the ropes and we're diving right off of Miami because that's where he lives. And it's like all these beautiful lobsters and fish like groupers, hog fish, snappers. They're all hiding in plain sight there, with diving right off the beach, out of a boat. And it's great. Now, I had did some diving way back in the day with Ronnie in Florida, and we drove in the Bahamas and I had some opportunities to dive, like in Mexico, Great Barrier Reef, Australia. I got around a little bit and but now I'm really enjoying the liberty of not having to wake up and go offshore for a week at a time and grinding out where I just go out. We get up early still and we go out, we do our day's diving and come in. I try and dive about four weeks, four days out of the week.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:06:05] That's awesome. So did you do this all alone? Do you have like a life partner? Like.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:06:12] Yeah. I have a wife and I got married right after the shark. I went we got we were together for many years. And my wife is Anne Niosi and we've we've known each other since like high school days, although we didn't go to school together to the same high school. But we we ran in the same crowd and she would come out to Montauk and she'd visit. And we we just became partners. And in 1999, we, we got married. And let's say she's the brains of the operation. You know, I got the brawn, she's got the brains. And. We're not real wealthy people by any means, but we've done good for ourselves. We got a couple of homes, and thanks to her, we're where we're at. She's very good financially. She's a mortgage banker. She understands numbers, and she learned how to curb my habits and spendings so we've done good together.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:07:49] It's awesome. Talk a little bit about your dad, because your dad seems to be kind of like a kind of in the fishing community, seems to be one of the kind of the stars of the shining lights that have been here for for for decades.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:08:06] My father was always good at what he did. And he taught me, never think you're the best. Just do the best you can. And he's been very successful. But his claim to fame is I just had dinner with him last night and I said, so how's it going? You know, are you're busy? And he was like, well, my mate, he's, he's having trouble healthwise. He says, I want to keep fishing, but my mates go to pieces. And most of my my customers are dying. And he says, no, I'm still going, but I'm losing everybody. I'm like dad you're only 89. You know, you got plenty of time. And I keep going. So he he's just I'm lucky I have some of his genes because he's still going strong at 89.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:09:12] Wow.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:09:12] Yup. Well, actually, his birthday is October 1st, and that's his 89th birthday.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:09:21] Close enough.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:09:22] Yeah.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:09:23] And just tell me what his name is and tell him. Tell me the name of his boat and tell me, you know, like, there's a lot of things that he does here, Like what his roles in Montauk are like.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:09:32] Well, the name of his boat is the Hurry Up, because he was always in a hurry and he wound up naming his boat Hurry Up. And he's been here for many, many years. And it's not easy to come into a town like this that you weren't born in and and prosper. And when you're in direct competition with local people. But he's he's done very well and he's become a big part of the community. He runs the blessing in the fleet. He he does all the ceremonies during the blessing of the fleet where he throws wreaths and ashes. And he's a big part of the community where, I came and left here, but I left my mark. But he's he's like the Eveready battery. He's just keeps going. So I hope he's got a bunch of years left in him.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:10:44] Is he you think he's like one of the oldest one of the oldest captains out there in Montauk? Can you think of anybody else?

**Donnie Braddick** [01:10:54] I don't know there was many legendary captains from Montauk and mates and fishermen by no means are we like the best. I never said that, but he's good. But there was like George McTurk, the Tumas, the Potts, there's infamous people from Montauk. And I'm not sure how old the oldest one was, but I don't think they were 5 or 10 years older than 89. So he's probably the oldest guy out there right now, but I'm not certain of it.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:11:39] You were also a star of a TV show called *Fighting Tuna* on Discovery. Talk about who was on that. Do you remember anything about that?

**Donnie Braddick** [01:11:47] Well, that was something I kind of got roped into because I never was I never really wanted the spotlight. We kind of like fishermen like to fly under the radar. Unless you're like a sport fisherman. I know. I kind of like I did that shark routine and that was entertainment. But. I went right back to commercial fishing, but that show was about commercial bluefin tuna fishing. And it's really it's it's it's hard to say it's commercial because you're fishing with a rod and reel instead of the big boats with hydraulic equipment and this and that. But if you catch something and then sell it, it's commercial. And I got involved and it's very unfortunate because there was a show already happening and it seemed maybe that they got the jump on it. And for whatever reason, I don't know. We we had a few episodes and then that went away and it was really good because I got to meet some good people that were producers. And Pete who I'm talking to right now is one of my good, really good friends and I it really paid to meet someone like him and the other one, I met another producer and his name was Scott Simpson. Do you remember him? Yeah. And what an awesome.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:13:54] Scotty Simper.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:13:54] Simper.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:13:55] Yeah.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:13:56] Semper. And he's he has a home in Utah and he's a he's from Australia, not Australia, New Zealand.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:14:04] New Zealand. Yeah.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:14:05] And he's always gives me an open invitation to go to New Zealand and I still keep up with him.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:14:13] Scott is a great guy. We were meant to be on a show just just recently, all three of us, me, me and he is awesome.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:14:19] I've asked him to send me some cool photos and he's he's done Mount Everest several times and he gave me some photos from from Mount Everest and then from all over the world on pretty wild assignments, just like Pete does.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:14:41] What about who else? We'll talk about another captain that you knew that that was on that show.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:14:48] Well, like I had said earlier, that guy that really inspired me to go get my own boat and be my own boss was Pauly Stern and one of the better fishermen on the planet. He's really good and he's a little rough around the edges, to put it lightly. But he was on the show together and he still bluefin tuna fishing. And he's made a good career for himself out of it. And I hope I run into him. He's very elusive. But we fish side by side for a lot of years. I'd say for a good 15 years if you saw him. I wasn't too far from him. Vice versa. We. We had a good one two punch.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:15:51] Yeah. There's something kind of interesting that I learned from you guys is that, you know, fishermen don't like to tell their secrets. You know the guy who's telling you their secrets, they're not fishermen. And the real fishermen keep it all really close to their chest.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:16:04] Yeah. Well, you know, it's like my wife has a sign on the door and says, "Welcome fishermen and all other liars." You know, it's. It's like asking someone in financials, you know, how do I go home and make \$1 million? Well, you're going to have to learn that the hard way.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:16:35] Fantastic. Donnie, I think that's a perfect place to end with the Liars Saloon. Unless there's something else you would like to add that we haven't talked about.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:16:43] Well, I would just like to say that Montauk has been the greatest place for me to grow up. And I'm so happy that my father is still here. He has great-grandchildren that come here all summer. He has a house just for them and my sister and her children, they enjoy this place tremendously and I'm so happy they get to see their great-grandfather still fishing. So it's this is a great place and I'm so privileged to be part of it.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:17:30] That's amazing. And do your. Did your sister ever do any of the fishing with you?

**Donnie Braddick** [01:17:34] My sister, she. She came around a little bit, but she was. My sister's a teacher and a do-gooder. And she she still teaching English as a second language. And she's she helps a lot of the less fortunate children in in her school district. And she does real well, but she makes sure that all her grandchildren and her children are well taken care of.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:18:11] So she's like, you're the counterbalance to Donnie Braddick.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:18:14] Right.

**Pete Chelkowski** [01:18:18] So fantastic. Donnie it was such a privilege to to meet you and interview today and know you. So thanks so much for taking the time.

**Donnie Braddick** [01:18:27] Thank you. And if you come to Montauk, enjoy it. It's a great place.