Oral History
Rhonda Wayner
Seattle, Washington
September 8th, 2017: 2:00 PM
Interviewer: Kim Sparks (PSMFC, NOAA Fisheries AFSC)
Note: This is a follow up interview.

Text in brackets [] signifies interviewer/s interpretations, and/or clarification of the narrative of the interviewee.
Text in parentheses () represent nonverbal sounds and activity during interview.

Kim Sparks: I was reading your transcript again, and you said some really interesting things about how you got started fishing, was with an interim permit. And with this other fishing partner called Huggy. And I was wondering if you could talk more about how you got the permit and how you got started fishing with this partner?

Rhonda Wayner: Well, you know, I was very young when they got the permit. My mom and my dad got the permit for me, and had it in my name. And partly I mean, I remember fishing at a young age. They are some of my earliest memories, but I don't quite know the entire process. I know my mom had to fill out a bunch out papers and say that I was able to be there. I had to learn how to sign my name and I had my social security number memorized, and you know, stuff like that. But at that time in my life I was mostly over on the west side [of the Kvichak River]. There was huge camps over there at that time. And people used to fly the fish from the beach over to Naknek to have it processed.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: Because it was quite shallow in there and then the tide went out quite fast, so it was really hard to get any kind of tenders in there. And we didn't have a skiff at the time. We flew back and forth to the west side, in the Vinanas trees area—for lets see, I think I was about six? Until I was about fifteen is how I fished that way, using the interim permit. But I wasn't able to use that permit after a certain time period—because at the time it was under review, and that's why it was called the interim, cause they were trying to get all the paperwork processed, and by the time they actually went through the process and I was fifteen, they said I was too young at that time or something—to show that I had the history before I was six years old to fish it. Even though my family had been fishing for generations—so the State took it back.

But—the guy that I fished with over on the west side—the first year I remember there was a bunch more people—one of the ladies was my great aunt. She was my grandfather's sister, and she and her husband were kind of like the caretakers of me over there, since I was quite young and my mom trusted her. But I had so much more fun with the other kids, and they all slept in a whole different area, and she had a tiny tent, there was—you know—right there on the beach. So I would mostly hang up at the big cabin, and sleep on the bunks up there because it was warmer, and there was so much more going on. And, you know, there's people my age, kids my age, running around at that time. But then every year it

seemed to be dwindled, less and less people because they didn't quite open up the Kvichak side for fishing, as often.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: So people ended up getting different sites at other locations or else sold out. Because either the price wasn't right or they weren't able to fish, or there was, you know, some issues with flying the fish over, because that cost extra as well. Or maybe they just had a falling out with Big Jim or people called him Huggy. I called him Big Jim. He was a really interesting character, from Winamac in Nevada, and he was a really interesting father figure for me for my summers. So, he taught me a lot about things when it comes to flying, and three wheelers and you know, shooting guns and you know, stuff like that. But fishing, you know, I got a little spoiled cause I was—for a couple years I was the only girl. And, I was young, so he kinda spoiled me a little bit by letting me do girl things like cook (laughs) and carry water and then boil the water for washing and drinking and stuff like that. So, I got to do some of the girl things, I guess we called it. I don't really know how else to explain it, but he did have a fishing camp over in Igiugig toward the later part of his career. He got that from my grandmother. We was renting it or leasing it from her, so I would—you know—when it was slow or it was closed then I would head over to Igiugig and help cook and clean until they opened this up, and then fly back and—so I was kind of doing double duty so I could make extra money, and you know, see just a whole different side of the fishing industry, when it comes to the sport fishing versus the commercial fishing.

Kim Sparks: Wow, and so it sounds like it was maybe this connection with your great aunt that started you fishing over there?

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah, I mean my mother, you know, kind of lined it all up and so I went over there with my great aunt as my caretaker, but she was only there that one year, I think. I don't think she was there the year after that.

Kim Sparks: Okay, and then how did you, how did you learn how to fish before that? Or was that your first time really fishing?

Rhonda Wayner: Before that I mostly just helped the family, you know, I remember driving the three wheeler at a really, really young age. Well, I don't know if my dad held the tote or like a bucket or something on the back with fish in it, I just have these kind of memories. Or else I'd sit on the back and they used to put some of the fish in gunny sacks, you know, when we'd pick them from the beach and then would drive them up off the beach. But that was more of the subsistence type thing, it wasn't so much of a commercial fishery at that point, you know, that I remember. Beause my mom and my grandma and them, they fished commercially down at the other site. So, I just remember those times with my dad, and I think that was more—more of a subsistence.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: Type fishing, so instead of the commercial. So, when I was six was the first time I think I really did commercial fishing, you know, they did have a boat, I don't really remember going out on the boat.

Kim Sparks: And when you did subsistence, was that on the—the north or the south side of Naknek?

Rhonda Wayner: The north

Kim Sparks: The north, okay. Okay, and then you spent, you said, maybe six or seven years over on the other side of the Kvichak [River]?

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah, I think it was maybe seven or eight. Because I can't remember if I was six or if I was seven, but I know I stopped when I was fifteen. After my fifteenth year, and I started working at the grocery store and I actually helped fish with Elma Anderson one year, I think I was sixteen that summer I fished with Elma Anderson. Norman Anderson's mother and Freddie Anderson's mother. So it was just her and I who ran her site that summer.

Kim Sparks: And then, what did you do after that?

Rhonda Wayner: I mostly did a lot of accounting type work. I ended up working for Naknek trading and you know, from 15, 16, 17, I worked for them in the summers—doing the counter. Working in their accounting office. Ordering things for the hardware side of things and then I started working with the youth with the Parks and Rec Department for the Bristol Bay Borough.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: So I would do that in the summers and I did that off and on for a couple years. Well, I did it consistently for I think, 18, 19, 20—I think it might have even started when I was still in high school, I'm trying to remember one of those last years, because I kind of worked my schedule around it, so I could go to work like normal 8 to 5 and then go to the store after that, and work the evening shift. They used to stay open until 10pm at night, and a couple years they even stayed open until midnight when there's a lot of people in town. But, and then after that I started working at the Port of Bristol Bay with the other side of the industry, with the barges and the boats mooring up there and, you know, scheduling the dock space. So I worked there as an attendant, the night shift.

Kim Sparks: Oh wow

Rhonda Wayner: Kind of interesting (laughs)

Kim Sparks: I bet

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah

Kim Sparks: And then, what brought you back to fishing?

Rhonda Wayner: Well, once the kids came into the picture, we did subsistence fishing. You know, I came back after college and, we would put up fish with my grandma. She always loved to teach us different little things with my Grandma Violet, so we

would put up fish with her, and basically just help her cut them and carry the heavy things and, you know, tie knots and hang things, and you know, can them. It just always fun. She made it fun, and she sent you good food, and you heard stories. And then as my kids came into the picture, then it was just kind of fun. It was the thing to go down to the beach, and see everybody. We'd go see my mom fishing with my grandma and my aunt. Or my grandpa, you know, my aunt stopped. And so we would go and visit them. Or see them from a distance and we'd have our subsistence net out, catch some fish, put them up. Either smoke them or can them. And as the kids got older, you know, I told my mom you know, how we did kind of hope to maybe get into the fishery someday, but we just didn't quite know how we'd do it. My husband was a pilot, so he was busy in summer and when my grandmother was considering selling out my mom asked me if I'd be interested in fishing, you know, fishing it. And I said, you know, I didn't want to put any pressure on her. But I said, If you do commit to buying it, then you know, maybe not that first summer, but that next summer we could commit to fishing for you, you know? At least me, and if Paul got some time off, then he could plan on being there as well. And so, then we've pretty much been fishing ever since. So that was, I'm trying to think of when it was—I think it's been twelve years ago now.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah, that's kind of how we got into it. My mom was always a planner. And she knew it was a desire of our heart to do something like that as a family. And I love that my kids, both my daughter and my son have taken it on as part of their identity. And revolve their lives around it, it just wouldn't seem right if they didn't have anything to do with the fishery, you know?

Kim Sparks: And this was your Grandma Violet that was potentially going to sell her permit?

Rhonda Wayner: Yes

Kim Sparks: Okay. Do you know why she was thinking of selling?

Rhonda Wayner: She was just older and, you know, after a certain stage in life and—you just can't continually transfer the medical permit over and my mom, you know, had offered to buy her out before, she just wasn't quite ready at that stage.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: So she just was at the point where she was ready.

Kim Sparks: Okay, how do those, if you don't mind me asking, types of conversations go in terms of how permits get—passed down in families?

Rhonda Wayner: It can be tricky, you know, with anybody whether its family or not. It kind helps to have something written (laughs).

Kim Sparks: I bet

Rhonda Wayner: Cause then other family members might get upset, you know, so I think it was more of a promissory note type thing.

Kim Sparks: Okay. And is it something where they're expecting the payout every year or?

Rhonda Wayner: It varies, some people want a percentage. Some people want a set dollar amount. Some people give so many years to pay it off. I mean, it varies between different people.

Kim Sparks: Okay, and is that something you see either Harmony [Rhonda's daughter] or Reese [Rhonda's son] wanting to do in future?

Rhonda Wayner: I would love for them to do, you know, what we've done for my mom, cause we're in the process of buying her out and—its, you know, it's definitely a process, but we also want to make sure that she has income for her retirement, and so if our kids could do something like that for us, that would be wonderful.

Kim Sparks: Yeah, and keep it in the family.

Rhonda Wayner: Um—hum

Kim Sparks: Yeah, how long do you think your whole family has been fishing? How many generations?

Rhonda Wayner: Oh, if I were to count my great grandmother—Agnes Astrada— I think either subsistence or commercial—definitely over 100 years (laughs).

Kim Sparks: Wow. And have you guys always been in the Naknek area?

Rhonda Wayner: My great grandmother, she used to fish over up in Graveyard.

Kim Sparks: Oh okay

Rhonda Wayner: Um-hum. But my grandmother, Grandma Violet, she fished on the Naknek beach. Before then I think they used to fish over on the South Naknek side, cause they were on the South Naknek side, but I don't know all the history about that so much, but I do know that my grandpa when he fished for the older man that they were right there on the Naknek Point beach. So, and that must have been in the 1930s or 1940s. Oh maybe early 1950s. I'm not quite sure, because my mom was born in the 1950s, so she's been fishing with him ever since she was like five or six.

Kim Sparks: Okay. And then how did you, I know you talked about this a little bit, but who first taught you how to fish?

Rhonda Wayner: I guess I would have to say there's different types of fishing, like over on the west side—I mostly learned how to fish from—Big Jim or his sons. Cause they would go out and they'd be patient with me. My hands were too small to fit any of the gloves back then, so I would just not use any gloves. So, but they would go out by foot, you know, instead of going out in the skiff. So you would have to wait for the tide to go out. While my mother, she was on the boat with us for three years—and maybe even a little bit longer. But we went out with her in the skiff, and so—her way of doing things was much more efficient, and you get better quality fish, and all that, because you pick them more often. So—I would

say my mother really taught me how to fish, that's how I got to see my mom as an athlete. I never thought of her as an athlete before I saw her fishing.

Kim Sparks: Because it was such involved, hard work?

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah, it's very physical. And it was nice to see that side of her

Kim Sparks: I know in our last conversation we spent some time talking about family roles, and especially Harmony talked about that. But I was wondering if you could talk more about how your whole family is involved in fishing and how you guys decide who does what?

Rhonda Wayner: Well, I think basically it's like where your gifts and talents are, like for me, I really enjoy the tide. Like determining where it's going to be at a certain time, and reading how the wind and situation is and if we should go out early or later based on the tide and the wind and, you know, those situations. So I kinda help guide when we go pick and how often we go pick based on how many fish we have and how the wind is going. And my husband, he's a pilot, so he really loves the wind, so he'll kind of say, Well that's a good fishy wind or that's, you know, he knows the details about that even a little bit more, but I kinda track the tides and where it's going be at a certain time, and what we've had historically, and the beach changes a little bit too, so sometimes it's muddy. Sometimes it's more sandy or more gravel so that kind of helps determine how we do things. So I kinda have that role and—you know buying all the stuff and pick up, you know? Kind of prepare, do all the preparation and make sure everybody's fed and do all the laundry.

And then my husband—he kinda helps with most of the maintenance and the set up at the beginning of the season and the skiffs and running the skiff during the season. And my son also does that with him. It just depends on how much time he has at the beginning of the season. And then our other crewman—we call them just like the superstars, they just come for like a week or two—fish when its fishing hard, and then they leave again, you know? And then if we have younger people, like when Reese and Harmony were younger, and then I had my nephew who fished for a little bit—we usually have them do the beach crew. Like they would come, I'd tell them when to come at a certain time when the water's a certain level so they can still pick the fish in the water, and meet the boat when we're, you know, picking in, and they could kind of meet us there with their fish, and the fish all picked in the water and we don't have to pick on the beach or in the mud, and it's a lot easier. And the fish are cleaner, it's a lot less work—so if they're younger, then they usually start and learn how to pick fish that way. And sometimes I'm probably the most patient one to go out there with them, and pick on the beach with them, to teach them how to do—you know, to care for the fish. To pick it. To bleed it. To, you know, to handle it and stuff like that. And it's entertaining too. It's not as much fun if you're doing it all on your own. So it's nice to buddy up. And then there's just some people who are super-fast pickers, you know, you just want them to pick fish. Don't worry about anything else, just pick fish. You know, Eric Hill was that for us, because he knew how to pick fish since he was a little kid, he's been on boats with his dad, and we kinda have him

as our, one of our fast pickers and—but he's with us all season long and we've been really fortunate to have him there with us.

Kim Sparks: You talked a little bit about your role in teaching the kids, and—doing the cooking and cleaning—in your opinion do women have special roles in the set net fishery? And what contributions do you think women bring to the fishing industry?

Rhonda Wayner: I think there's a lot of self—sacrifice. Because you tend to sacrifice sleep (laughs) you get things done that need to be done that nobody else really wants to do, cause it's easier to get it done than to argue with people about doing it, you know, if that means people are losing sleep.

I think the main thing was, you know, if you're a mom—even if you're not a mom, you know, I kinda saw that when I was over on the west side, if you're a female you take on the female role whether you're doing the man work or not. You know, so you could be doing like regular fish crew or crewmember position, but because you're a woman and you might be a better cook than other people, than you have other jobs in addition. But the nice thing is, with a crew what like we have with, you know, husband, son, our son's best friend and you know, other family members—they tend to let you go and cook and get off the boat when its freezing cold. So you can go cook and prepare something that they enjoy. So there's definitely benefits to being, you know, with a crew that is mostly male or you know, something like that cause they do treat you a little bit differently. They know you sacrifice sleep. They know you do all the little extra things that they just don't even think about doing.

(laughter)

So, you know, like washing their laundry and their dirty socks so they have clean clothes and you know, stuff like that, so you do sacrifice sleep, but you do get a lot of other perks along the way too, so—just depends on how nice your crew is.

(laughter)

Or if you are related to them or not, and you could hold it over their head forever (laughs)

Kim Sparks: Oh funny

Rhonda Wayner: But no, it's good. We got some thoughtful crew, and it's fun to serve people who will really appreciate it, because when you're working hard and you're really hungry and you come back and you have some, you know, clean warm clothes just out of the dryer and food to eat to warm your belly so that you could just go straight to sleep while other people, you know, cook and clean for you, that's amazing. That's a huge gift.

Kim Sparks: Yeah, especially when you're that tired.

Rhonda Wayner: Oh yeah. You don't even want to, like a lot of times, they don't even want to leave the beach. So you know, if I leave a little earlier and, I have something cooking at the house that I just kind of need to get all the extra fixings for and

bring it back down to the beach, then I leave the beach, come back down, you know, try to get everything ready for them when they come in and do their final delivery—or else I stay on the beach and cook and do everything there at the beach cabin with you know, it's kind of tight quarters and stuff like that, but then you're ready to go and then everybody can stay down at the beach and sleep, you know? So you don't even have to leave the beach—we're really thankful we have a cabin down there and that we have electricity and a stove. A lot people don't have that.

So—but environmentally we have noticed a change in the different type of fish. I don't know if we mentioned it to you, but when we first started fishing and even my mom would say, You know, we're kind of used to seeing the smaller fish at the beginning of the season. A lot of times we—we just kind of count on it. They usually have the smaller fish for the first week or two, you know, early on in June when we're fishing in June. Toward the end of June, we normally would start seeing like more of the Naknek fish, like the very last week of June to the first weeks of July when the bigger fish—we call them Naknek slabs—come through. And those ones, you know, they're beautiful. They're big! They look like they could be, like smaller kings, jack kings because they're so big. But then we've seen like really short, stubby fish. We've seen really, really long skinny fish that just don't look the same, you know? They're just different looking fish. And some kind of look like they have a little coating, like a slimy kind of coating on them. They're just not the same kind, it's like—it doesn't smell fruity or anything like that, but it's just different. And it's mostly been in the past three years that I've really noticed that. But, you know, I understand that with hatchery fish and all this other stuff too, but some look like—they're just really short and really stubby kind of fat with no real tail area (laughs) so those ones, we make fun of them. But, you know, it is a little bit different that we've noticed that way. We've also noticed more jellyfish earlier on in the season. We used to have more jellyfish toward the end of the season, but we have them throughout the season instead of just more toward the end—and then the other—the flounders they kind of come and go based on, I think it's been based on how they would have the outflow and the guts and, you know, that process through the canneries. So I think the flounders have changed based on how the processing and the grinding of the guts has changed with the fishmeal plant there now. So those are the main things that I've seen with the water and the fish.

Kim Sparks: Yeah, you mentioned in a text earlier that you had chatted with Betz [mother] and Harmony [daughter] about birds, bugs and you touched on the strange looking fish (laughs).

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah, well and then the birds, you know, we have seen hummingbirds, believe it or not. We saw a hummingbird at my mom's house, and so Fred put out these hummingbird feeders, you know, and he got one. Only because he had heard rumors about it, like in Kenai, and so he goes, Well, I'll try it. So he has seen that. They do have more fleas. They've never had fleas in Naknek before. But we've had friends who had their cat like infested with fleas.

Kim Sparks: Because it's just too cold for them otherwise?

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah, it used to be.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: So, its just—and even with the freezing of, you know, lake Illiama area and then the freezing of the river to cross over the river, you know, sometimes it used to be frozen for months at time, you know, in the winter, like starts to freeze or it used to start to freeze in November and we'd have more snowfall and all that kind of stuff and just colder for longer periods of time. But it, you know, last year was the first time they had a really good snow and frozen river, because in the years past it didn't freeze entirely, you know?

Kim Sparks: Okay, yeah we had heard that from a couple people actually.

Rhonda Wayner: Um-hum, so that was the main thing—that, you know, I was kind of thinking about when it came to the birds, bugs, and the fish.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: Thanks for reminding me about the birds and the bugs (laughs).

Kim Sparks: Yeah (laughs) And how long, you said maybe a couple of years this has been going on?

Rhonda Wayner: I would say about three—our friends who had their cat infested with fleas, that was about two years ago I think she told me about that. But the hummingbird we saw, that was about three years ago. And he hasn't told me if he's seen more since then, but you know, it's definitely been different. Even certain things that they've been able to grow in their garden, you know, weren't able to do that in the past, so—my stepdad, he likes to have a garden in the summertime, so—transplanting different kind of berries. They actually had some—trying to think about which one it is—it's more of a high bush kind of a berry—that he transplanted there that they—I don't know if it was originally from like Minnesota. You know, I don't know if he brought it all the way back, or if he just found that variety that he liked, and planted there in Anchorage when people have all these greenhouses and stuff, you know, that they put it in.

Kim Sparks: Um-hum

Rhonda Wayner: So things have just been—just doing way better than they have in the past, so.

Kim Sparks: Wow, so it sounds like it maybe—just in general the last couple of years—have been warmer?

Rhonda Wayner: Um-hum, last year was an exception, it did get cold. But the two years prior was super warm, compared to the prior, you know, compared to historical years.

Kim Sparks: Okay, and then I was really, really intrigued with what you guys were talking about last time, with the water being warmer, and needing to really—ice your fish and maybe not being able to get it down to a cool enough temperature.

Rhonda Wayner: Oh yeah! That's been a bit of a challenge with us because as set netters, we deliver quite often and so, you know, we go out. We pick the net, and we try to

stay on our fish, and on our net so that we catch them fresher, quicker and get them delivered faster. We just tend to have a better product that way, and I mean, a lot of times we deliver the fish and they're still moving, you know? But the struggle we've had is the cannery wants to show that yes, they have been icing their fish, and we have, you know, an aluminum skiff. So sometimes the transfer of heat, so we've trying to—like have that extra insulation so that the slush bag doesn't have contact with the actual boat itself. There's something in between. You know, that has slowed down the melting of the ice so that it can actually cool down the fish faster, but when you pull the fish out of the water and its, you know, at a certain temperature and they expect it to be you know, ten degrees colder, you have to, you know—when we don't have that many fish, you know, the thing that we're trying to (laughs) weigh is the benefit of sitting on the fish a little longer and getting it to a colder temperature. But if you sit on it a little longer, and then you have to go deliver it and—its kind of defeating the purpose of having a fresh, fresh product when as soon as you deliver it they're going to put it on ice anyway, you know? (laughs)

Kim Sparks: Right, plus you guys have to—run with the tides.

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah, and we can't just sit around and wait for the fish to get cold. We have limited capacity on our boats—so we do try to, you know, move our fish as much as we can and get them as cold as possible. We do have some friends who have been modifying their skiffs—to get a different type of a hull or they can put different type of totes inside their skiffs with ice directly in it. We transfer ice from our tote. We got an extra truck and everything just—a flatbed so we can have four totes of ice on there. And then extra trucks that we have with totes in the back too to help, if we need more ice then we can definitely have it available if we need it, cause if you don't have access to ice—you know, the canneries or the processors—you don't get the better price. So, you're in that competing market and we wanna have—you know, our fish and our product speak for itself by providing something really good. And we have consistently been able to—I think we were one of the first people to start icing our fish— almost ten years ago. That very first year was the very first year my mom started icing the fish when we—especially when we were delivering it to Naknek Family Fisheries that I used to be part owner of, and so was my mom, but since then a lot of other canneries require it. You know, everybody needs to do it and the drift boats, they have RSW or else they have like, you know, of course the holds and the capacity to hold more fish for longer periods of time and chill it down a lot faster—because they have access to it when we just don't.

Kim Sparks: Yeah, I was going to ask if this continues to be a trend, does that mean—like boat modifications or getting—getting a freezer on the boat type of situation?

Rhonda Wayner: We just don't have the capacity, I mean a lot of the boats—right there at the point that we fish next—they're some people that don't even have a roller.

Kim Sparks: Really?

Rhonda Wayner: Yeah they use man power to pull their nets over. We have a roller, you know, so that does help save our backs and everything, but with the roller and the

hydraulics, we do have a generator, you know, we have talked about being able to—there's such a thing as nano ice—my daughter in law was telling us about it cause she worked on a tender—but that takes up room, you know? To have something like that, that takes up a lot of room and then if you get it damaged or wet or cold or you know, with the sea water and stuff like that—I don't know if we could afford to—to invest in something like that at this point. But, you know, we're trying to be creative and think outside the box—we just know everything costs money too, so if we can hold off maybe two more years, and then build a skiff that we want when we can afford to, then that will help a lot, you know?

Kim Sparks: Okay. And then going back to, sorry I realized I had one more question about women—do you have a sense of kind of like the percentage of women permit holders in Naknek?

Rhonda Wayner: I don't have a sense necessarily. I know more women fish, or they used to fish the set net operations because the guys would go out and, you know, they'd be on the boat for extended amounts of time and then the females would stay home—fish set net and have the kids with them—I just think that somethings are lost on some people now that there's the skiffs that you can go and you can pick the net in the water instead of just waiting for it to go dry. Some people back in the day, they would just wait for it to go dry and pick the net, you know, in the mud or whatever and you weren't required to ice the fish so you had a lot less responsibility and planning and expenses—so in that way it might have been a little easier. But it's very physically taxing on women—and people in general. So when you're out in there in the elements, rain or shine, you know, fighting the wind, the wave and the tide—it's definitely a physical challenge, and I think a lot of people—kinda—I guess they look at set netters as, Oh they got it pretty easy. Because we're on land, but a lot of them don't—unless they've actually set netted themselves—they haven't factored in the physical labor in the set net industry, you know? (laughs) Because it's so physically taxing. You don't have the boat to haul it onto, and keep everything clean, you know? If by some chance we can't get the net—pick it while everything's still wet and in the water—we are forced to pick it on the beach, and in order to deliver the fish, you have to clean them all. So that means you touch that fish like three or four different times, transferring it from one thing to the next to rinse it, to you know, to then deliver. So—when it comes to the amount of women in the industry, in set netting or just commercial fishing in general—I think a majority of them would be in the set netting—but that might have changed, you know, more recently.

Kim Sparks: Okay

Rhonda Wayner: I know some captains who love to have women crew on their drift boat because, you know, they keep things nice. They, you know, make it more homey and are probably conscientious and take up less space.

Kim Sparks: (laughs)

Rhonda Wayner: You know? (laughs) So, easier to fit them in a bunk (laughs).

Kim Sparks: Funny. So sounds like its maybe more, more of a family affair in terms of set netting these days, possibly?

Rhonda Wayner: You know, I mean, that's what I've seen in the past, and I do see a lot of people who still try to keep that as part of their family tradition and we just—we think it teaches a great work ethic and you know, the tide waits for no man or woman or child. So (laughs) that's kind of like our motto, you know? So its kind of nice when we're out on the boat and my daughter would come down, and she'd be the beach crew that day, and she'd come down with the dogs and maybe one of her cousins and they'd pick on the beach and you know, bring us little goodies and snacks and so we'd be able to visit with them and—its part of that personal responsibility to pay attention to the time. Get down there when you're supposed to. Contribute some way, shape or form to something that benefits everybody.

Kim Sparks: Very cool. And then you mentioned earlier that your son and daughter have really made this part of their—their personal identity. Is that something that resonates with you as well?

Rhonda Wayner: It does. I mean, I feel like I'm from a fishing family. I've always been, but there were a lot of lapses in time where I, you know, sought out other things or traveled to other places. The idea was always to fish like my mom and my grandma and my aunt did, because they were three tough women and we were so—kinda up on a pedestal as—and that was before I knew how much work it was, doing what they did. I heard stories, but until you actually do it yourself and see what they are talking about—from personal experience—you don't really have a clue, but for me, I knew it was always in my blood. I'm not afraid of hard work, but I've been an athlete in a different way, so I didn't really think of fishing as a sport—its more like a marathon, cause you're going in day in and day out, you have to keep going on when you don't feel like it, you know? And, so that was—kind of interesting to see my mom as an athlete, instead of just my mom, and it was like, Oh well maybe I got that from her instead of my dad, you know? (laughs)

Kim Sparks: Yeah, yeah

Rhonda Wayner: That mentality of just keeping on, you know, even though you don't feel like it, you just keep doing what you gotta do—because you have to. You don't have many other options. If your fingernails are falling off, or if your wrists are hurting, if you know, if your knee aches, you still do what you gotta do and you'll get it taken care of after the season is done. But part of my heritage really is—I guess more respecting the women that I had as role models and trying to make them proud too. You know, its really been nice for me to make my mom and my grandma proud. It was harder for my grandma, I think to—to not be part of the fishery as it is my mom. My mom is still active in it because she—she does spoil us a bit and cooks for us and, you know, comes and visits and, you know, hangs out with us in between time when, you know, before we're sleeping or after we woke up. She's still active in that and helps with all the other grandchildren now that my kids are older—you know, she helps in a different way still.

But with my kids I think it's been kind of special for them to grow up in it, and have that as their norm. And when they were younger, we would let them sleep at nighttime, and then wake them up and have them fresh during the day, and not to—you know, exhaust them when they're young, but I remember what an adventure it was for them to stay up all night and its dark and stormy or, you know, it was always kind of exciting. And they started to really enjoy that, that part of it. That they were a full crewmember and were able to stay up and stay in the boat, and do all those other things, you know, that they had a job to do. And were needed.

Kim Sparks: I guess to wrap up, I'd to know what do you think—or what's the most important thing to you about fishing? And you've talked a little bit about the—definitely your family connection and pride and identity, but just if you have any final thoughts on that?

Rhonda Wayner: Well (pause) such a deep question (laughs).

Kim Sparks: I know (laughs)

Rhonda Wayner: Its, you know, it is just something that has really brought our family together. Not only me and my kids, but definitely me and my mother, and then the respect that I have for what her and my grandmother, and aunt did—and then in return to feel that respect for how we honor them by being good to them as they age, and help to care for them in their retirement, and as well as with our kids, you know? So its, you know, since I'm in the middle of this generational thing—teaching my kids how to work together as a family, for the common goal, I think that's priceless. That's something that you can't learn at a regular job. And the concentrated time together—yeah you might drive each other crazy, but in the end, it's the reward of not only the financial reward at the end if you have a good price, but the time. You can always make more money, but you can never make more time. And we have concentrated time that's uninterrupted, and we get to really know one another, and that's really valuable and totally priceless, so—I'm thankful for that.