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Dyer, Robert ~ Oral History Interview

Joshua K. Wrigley

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Interview with Robert Dyer by Joshua K. Wrigley

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Dyer, Robert

Interviewer

Wrigley, Joshua K.

Date

September 18, 2013

Place

Yarmouth, Maine

ID Number

MCOHI_RD_002

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Biographical Note

Robert Dyer was born on August 4, 1931 on Chebeague Island in Casco Bay. He worked as a stop seiner, lobsterman and cannery worker for much of his life in the Portland and Casco Bay areas. He is a cousin of Bruce Dyer of Cliff Island who also sat for a recording. As of this interview in 2013, Robert was still living on Chebeague Island and in Yarmouth.

Scope and Content Note

Interview contains discussions of: stop seining, herring canneries, bait prices, sardine prices, locations for stop seining, whale encounters, life on Chebeague Island, purse seining, carriers, bailing and pumping herring.

Robert Dyer's interview is a rich description of the stop seine herring fishery that flourished in Southern and Mid-Coast Maine between the 1940s and the 1970s. He describes the processes by which they "shut off" coves and sold herring to canning companies in Maine and Canada.

Indexed Names

Bricker, Mabel

Douty, Sanford

Dyer, Carl

Dyer, Manley

Dyer, Wayne
McDonald, Jim
MacNeill, Monty
Moulton, Johnny
Ross, Richard "Pookie"
Toft, John

Transcript—RD_001

Joshua K. Wrigley: What's your name?

Robert Dyer: Robert Dyer. Born 19—...August 4, 1931.

JKW: On Chebeague Island?

RD: Right on the island. I was born right on the island, right in the cove where I was brought up. And the family home that's right on the cove and...on Chebeague. And of course everybody knows me. So you know...I've been there all my life. Until lately when I come over here. For the winter. I'm gonna stay here this winter.

JKW: And you live in Yarmouth now?

RD: Well, just for spring. If everything goes the way it's going, when it comes spring I'll go back home. If I feel good now. This is all according to how I feel. And so right now...till spring yes. I'm gonna stay here with my daughter. But we've been in our own house now 59 years right in the cove on the island there. And...So...that's why I don't mind getting over here cause you know you see deer. I see a lot more deer running around the fields here...more people...kinda relaxing in a way of speaking.

JKW: And you were a stop seiner for herring on Chebeague Island?

RD: Oh yeah. I started when I was right around 13 years old with my father. And then I went stop seining right up through till...let me think till I got over. Mmm. Gosh I can't remember the actual year that I got over. Let's see...'37...'47...my father was in the...oh I know. About '60...right along '60, '65 it slowed right down to a crawl and my father got too old to do anything then me and my brother didn't wanna do with it. And so I would say '65 you know...cause I went with him from the time I was old enough to climb in over the side of a dory. You know I went fishing with my father. And so...we done a lot of stop fishing. And we'd go from here up Cape Porpoise. We caught a lot of fish up Cape Porpoise. In fact we caught herring right where the president lives right there on the point. Right there in that cove.

JKW: You used to shut off that cove?

RD: We shut the cove off and took herring outa that cove while the president was right there. They let us you know they was watching us but they let us. They didn't bother us any. And stuff...so we only made that one set but they let us do it and get rid of our fish and take our seines and get outa there. But they let us do it. And I was surprised they did but we didn't see nobody. You know we didn't see nobody moving around up there.

JKW: So how many people were on your crew on Chebeague Island?

RD: Oh, just me and my two other brothers and my father. That's four of us and we had about 800 fathom of twine. We set around Old Orchard Beach me and the Rosses, the one you're gonna talk with. We set 800 fathom around the wharf of Cape Porpoise...ah Old Orchard Beach and took out quite a lot of herring. You know? So you see...I have quite a lot of experience...if you ever get talking to the Rosses though to Pookie you'll ask him about the time me and him took up so many seines there alone just the two of us when we set around the Old Orchard pier.

JKW: When did you do that?

RD: Oh my God. That must have been I don't know...way back in the '50s. Somewhere in the early '50s or something like that. He might remember more dates than I do but I don't remember dates that my problem. I've lost track of the sardining...of the dates of it because I've done so much stuff. I'll tell you right now it's impossible for me to follow through.

JKW: Well, what was it like sardining when you first started?

RD: Well, I liked it. But I'm a tell you something about sardining. You'd be up 3 or 4 days in a row. Night and day. You wouldn't lay down. Then when you would lay down you laid down on a piece of wood. Any way you could lay down on it to get a nap because you're working through the night. See you caught your herring at night. Then you take care of 'em at daylight. Then you get 'em in a square seine. Then the sardine carrier would come and then you'd take a smaller seine, a purse rig and take the herring out and put it in a sardine carrier. So we loaded 14 carriers in one day, see? So you was up well like that night and the day and at night we was up. You couldn't even sit down.

JKW: How many herring is that to load 14 carriers?

RD: Well there's 14 hundred bushel to a carrier. And they're all Canadians. That's when we're selling to Canadians and we loaded...we still had plenty left. They kept coming back and...but the best part of it was now about this whole business. When this all started, there was a yellow-painted sardine carrier come and the captain had infantile paralysis. He didn't have no legs. Ok? But he had arms. Well big arms. Rugged arms. My oldest brother had infantile paralysis. He didn't have no legs. He had club feet. But he had arms. If he got ahold of you he

could pull you right apart. He was so strong up here. And the guy comes to us and tied up alongside my 50 foot boat and he says, "We're looking for a market for all these big herring that you guys got." And he looked at my brother and he sees he's identical to him. Everything he done he had to swing himself. He couldn't walk you know hardly at all. And so my father looked at me and he says, "Tell him what you think." And I looked at Phebe and I said, "Phebe, tell him what you think." Phebe says, "I think that we ought to give 'em all of 'em." Well course now that took a hold. Cause they were two guys that couldn't walk and they were just like that. We had four—...well we sold 53,000 bushel that summer to the Canadians.

JKW: What summer was that? What was the year?

RD: Well I'm trying to see. I'm trying to think back...let's see. Trident was going...so that had to be '47 to '50 right along in them three years. Right along in there. I can't tell you exactly the year because the Trident Seaboard was still going in Portland and they been...was running the Trident out of there and he was still going at that time. And I worked Seaboard over in South Portland. That was still running. So that would have to be back in the early days. And so I would say that was in the late '40s. And...because...that was the only year that that happened. Just that one year. The rest of it was all regular herring years.

JKW: So it was just that one year that you sold to the...

RD: That was the most we ever took out. A lot of it wasn't nowhere near half the time because we got...what was it? 63 cents a bushel at that time for herring. And then it got up to \$1.14 but then we wasn't catching no amount. You known if you got 10, 12, 15,000 you was lucky for the season. See? Because the purse seiners started down south with them big purse seines and then when they went from cotton to nylon, that ruined the sardine business. And that's also what got rid of your tuna fish was these big nylon purse seines. Because when they set down there they could set a mile of seine. And them tuna fish couldn't get away from it. And then they'd smother 'em. See? And that's what ruined the whole works. And that's when we got out of it. When they started with them great big purse seines and stuff. And...

JKW: How far offshore were the purse seines setting?

RD: Oh God they go clear to Georges, Jeffrey's...down off Florida there you know, South America. That's where our herring come from you know is South America. They start there and then work up the shore and spawn the whole length of shore. And...because one year we was outside. We was 20 minutes outside the whistler Cape Porp—...ahhh Cape Elizabeth—I'll get it in a minute. And we had out 7 trawls and we started in our 35' boat hauling 'em. And all of a sudden them herring come up off the bottom. Miles of 'em! This was about the middle of the latter part of March. And my father, well sir, he lit up just like a light. And he said, "Boys, we're going home and get our paint." And boy we done alright that

summer. We didn't get rich but we done alright. Because them herring come up then and come in here to spawn see?

JKW: So you were setting around Cape Elizabeth?

RD: Yep, we was 20 minutes—there's a whistler outside the Cape and we was 20 minutes outside of that. Now that's quite a good little steam you know in a 35' boat. So that's where we was when them herring all of a sudden come right up off the bottom and everywhere you looked there was herring. And my father boy he lit up and he said boy we did too. We come right in got our paint and brought it home. And then the first of April boy we was ready to...getting ready for sardining and middle of May we had herring caught around the island. And so you had to be ready cause they only struck May and June and they disappeared a while and you got some in the fall.

JKW: Do you remember what year that was?

RD: Yep, I'll tell you right now cause that boat was brand new. Ah, we had her built in '48...'49...'52 cause we still had the six cylinder Chrysler on her. That was '52. Cause I got married in '49 and that boat when I went to town...that brand new boat she was a month old. When I went to town and I got married and we was trawling that would be bout '52 that happened. Yep. I remember that plain because I'd never seen so many herring...and whales! You talk about whales now being off in that boat and that big whale's coming right up alongside of you. They didn't bother us. We didn't bother them and they didn't bother us. We kept right on hauling our trawls. But everywhere you looked there was whales.

JKW: How many whales do you think there were that year?

RD: Oh there must have been a dozen—a good dozen. They's everywhere and running off in the morning you had to be careful you didn't run into one. Specially that one spring. It never happened every spring but that one spring...and we had one fellow with us who was scared right to death of whales. He didn't want to see one at all they were so big you know [inaudible] in that 35' boat. He'd go hide going off, he didn't want to see one. And I reced 'em! I used to race 'em. You know if I got 'em going like this I used to open my engine up and race 'em. My father's giving me the devil but I'd do it anyway. And...But there was a lot of whales off there that year. And everywhere you looked especially that day that them herring come up off the bottom I think that's what brought 'em up the whales. And everywhere you looked there was whales. And that summer I went whiting dragging now. Every day you'd see a whale and then a whale got caught in a guy's propeller one day off of there. Pushing right off the stern of his boat—a big dragger. He got cut and the blood was just squirting out of him but I don't think it killed him. He didn't seem...he just kept going. But that fellow says, "Oh, by God a whale just hit the stern of my boat and I think that propellor's cut his head!" Yep, there were a lot of whales that summer.

JKW: Do you know what type of whale it was?

RD: No, I never followed it through. But they...was big. I'm gonna tell you right now they was big because I'd...when I was racing 'em I could look right over at their backs when they come up like that and they'd be a lot bigger than my boat. My boat was 35' and them whales looked bigger than that boat was. So they were tremendous whales. And I never followed up much on whales and stuff like that. I don't know why but I didn't. I didn't really care I guess. But I used to watch 'em. Race 'em. Stay away from 'em cause I know they could be dangerous.

JKW: Did you ever see whales again feeding on herring when you were a stop seiner?

RD: Well not when I was stop seining so much. But there was one time or two. That's right. Come in to the boatyard...almost to the boatyard right where we had herring caught right there [inaudible] right in the middle of the island and they...

JKW: You mean on Cliff Island?

RD: No, Chebeague. They come right [inaudible] in through and the boys scared 'em back offshore so they wouldn't ground...cause we had nothing that would handle 'em and they kept taking guns you know and shooting down alongside of 'em and work them back offshore so they wouldn't smother you know and get all ground out and smother or something like that. And they...I didn't want to go with 'em afraid that they'd turn on 'em. They didn't though. They pushed 'em offshore again. And that's the closest in the bay right there that you'll ever see a whale and I never see it again all my years round Casco Bay. And that year what we call the Sound up from off Halfway Rock over by big whale boat—Pooke could pretty well...you go to Pookie he could pretty well show you—them whales that summer come right in through and that was in the early '50s cause we still had a canopy on the boat. We hadn't built a [inaudible] on the end and we still had the canopy and had that canopy till '57 see and that summer there were so many whales that...that was in the early '50s. And ah...so I remember that because that...well one feller this guy's brother that didn't like 'em he was with us around Goose Island and we were coming home just the edge of dark and everywhere you looked the place was full of sardines. They bay—the whole sound was full of sardines clear to Eagle Island out there where the...you know [inaudible] so I stopped and I said to Charley, I said, "My God look at the herring." And about that time that whale went just like that, breached right by the stern of the boat and I know I could have jumped on his back. And scared! Boy I wasn't long in getting that engine going over into short water. Boy now that...I stopped the boat you know to listen to the herring and he come up here just like that and blowed. Right in the stern of that boat. Well so now I'm telling you that scared me. And I got the boat underway and I headed for Chebeague for short water cause I tell you that was a big fish and you could hear him. After we got to the island you could still hear him blowing and chasing them herring out of that big sound. Cause there was a lot of water in that sound see? And they come right in by Eagle

Island where Perry landed up there and stayed there so long. So that's a lot of water...tankers used to come up in and go up into Harpswell there...that tank farm up there...and that's where them herring and everything would all go. Then in the fall we'd go up around that tank farm and Goose Island and catch all the little ones.

JKW: Was that the "brit" herring?

RD: Yep, and so there was a lot to it. Really, truth is there was a lot to sardining and...until the purse seiners struck and when they struck that was the end of the sardine business. It ruined it completely. And that's when we started getting out of it. And in fact, I worked in the Yarmouth sardine factory down here all winter cooking herring and Ralph's father run it and I thought, "Boy this is great having work all winter." But I didn't know I was destroying the business. They was up off the Isle of Shoals catching...you know purse seining in the winter time and shipping 'em to Yarmouth. And we'd cook 'em and then they'd pack 'em you know. Or they'd cut 'em into cans and I'd put the cans in the cooker and cook 'em. And I thought, "Boy this is great being able to work all winter" but the only thing is I didn't realize I was ruining the sardine business cause we was packing the herring they was able to catch with the purse seiners. See? And I didn't realize it. I was too young to realize that I actually ruined the business.

JKW: How did the purse seines ruin the sardine business?

RD: Well, course they could go anywhere and catch a fish. It didn't make no difference where they was. They could go anywhere they wanted to. Right from here to South America. See they didn't make...look at all the pogies. It's the same idea. Down around...well Florida, either side of Florida they purse seined so bad there ain't no pogies. We used to get pogies up here you know. And years some pogies would strike before the herring and the herring wouldn't come in where the pogy was. See the pogy would keep the herring right out where we'd never get any. We'd have to go lobstering all summer. And so they cleaned the pogies up with purse seining down south. Ok? And give 'em sold 'em to the Russians. In fact we had Russian ships right off here you know anchored for all summer long buying pogies and herring.

JKW: What were the best years for pogies?

RD: Well, all pogy was was lobster bait. They weren't sellable. They weren't useable. Just bait. Just fishing bait. And...but the Russians I guess they ate 'em. The Russians ate 'em cause there were two of them mother ships come off here to Halfway Rock and anchored and then the sardine carrier would take all our catch off to them and then pump 'em aboard. And between there and down south now they're almost extinct. You never even hear of 'em. And sardining...when I was sardining I could go up town to get all the sardine for lobster bait that I wanted for nothing. Now, they're \$200 a barrel. Them plastic barrels.

JKW: How much did they cost?

RD: Never cost nothing. When I went it never cost us any. But now if you went lobstering and you wanted a barrel of bait you'd...for that barrel you'd pay \$200. Cause there ain't no sardines. See what I mean? They're so scarce that...it's pitiable cause a guy bought a boat 2 years ago and he bought it to carry sardines with. He ain't took it off the moorings yet. They ain't found enough from the Maine Coast to New Hampshire for him to even take his boat off the moorings. See? That's how scarce that stuff is this summer. There ain't none. And what is around is shipped in. And Iceland ships in some. So...

JKW: When did you sell to Conner Brothers in Nova Scotia?

RD: They was in the early '50s. That was in the early '50s. Cause we had a...see up here they weren't allowed to pump herring with a pump into the sardine carrier. Conner when they come up we rented a 50' Novi boat that had a pump in it and that's how we pumped so many herring. See, we used to take 'em out with a long pole with a dip net...a big 3 bushel net on it. And that took all day. Well, with this pump you could pump a boatload in well, 3 or 4 hours. You know? And stuff so we hired a Novi boat and he stayed right with us all the time that summer while we...and then we...there were so many herring that summer that they'd come in 3 or 4, 5 o'clock in the afternoon we'd catch 'em before dark. The whiting, ok, the whiting would drive them fish in right on top of water all scared. You could hear 'em coming. Off of the points there and stuff. And we'd get ready. And when they'd hit, my father would say, "Alright, shut 'em off or you're gonna smother 'em." So we'd shut 'em off and they'd go down by. And, I don't know how many whiting, them great big whiting we'd take out of them and save for the lobster catchers.

JKW: How big were the whiting?

RD: Oh big ones. They was about...Oh my God, well I'll say they were 15" ...14", 15" fish. They was big yeah when they struck yeah. Cause when I first went for whiting they was big and when I got done they was little. So they were big. They were big fish. And they kept them herring coming—they'd drive 'em right ashore and that way we'd catch any amount we wanted to. My father would say, "Ok, shut it off. You know you're gonna smother 'em." Well we got caught and that's how we'd regulate it.

JKW: So they would drive them into shore on Chebeague Island?

RD: Yes, sir. Right there. Actually, the whole length of shore. The whole southeast side of that shore. They'd be...you could catch 'em any way you wanted 'em. But we didn't have to move cause we had all we wanted. And so we caught 'em right by the boatyard there. And so we stayed right there and some of the other guys caught 'em either side of us, you know? That summer there was an awful lot of fish. A lot of fish. And then course after that, slowly, the old purse

seines took over and that was it. No, I had a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun sardining. And a lot of years you'd go sardining for 3 months, then you'd have to give up and go lobstering the rest of the year to make a living. Cause there was gonna be one little squirt of fish come in and then you'd catch 'em up and that was it. And then I'd have to get my boat with my father and we'd have to go lobstering to stay afloat all the rest of the year till the next season. Then the next season you might you might do good. You might have a good year. That's something you never knew about sardining. One year you could say "Oh boy, I'm gonna get rich." Well you never. And then the next year you say, "I'm gonna starve to death." You never. So that's the way the fishing business is. Or was. And then...but now...boy I'm gonna tell you right now the fishing business is a disaster. The whole nine yards is a disaster. And so I'm glad right now that I haven't got to go fishing to make a...survive.

JKW: How big were the average herring?

RD: Ah, well...a sardine can is what? 4" or 5" long? That's what they wanted. Cut the head off, the herring would be a little bigger than the can. But they'd cut the head off, [inaudible] and then they'd put that fish in the can. And they'd get about 6 to a can. You know, you've seen a sardine can. Well they'd be...sometimes...and the more they got in it, the more money they made. If you could go catch littler ones they could get 4, 5, 6 or 8 in it they'd get more money for 'em. See? So the factories liked the smaller the herring. And then in the fall, we used to catch 'em so they'd get 7, 8 or 9 into a can. Which you didn't make no money cause they could only buy 400 bushel cause that's all they could pack of 'em. See they were so little and it took so much to pack 'em that that's all they'd buy is 400 bushel to a trip. So you see if you took out 400 bushel, well they wasn't paying a dollar a bushel so you see you didn't make much. In a way of speaking...so...

JKW: You said at one point you had large herring that no one wanted to buy.

RD: Oh yes, that was sardines...Connors...in the early '50s when the Connors bought all them herring from us and that was...big ones. Almost one can...one herring would fill one can and they didn't like them see. They couldn't sell them because there wasn't...you know...just couldn't do it. I don't know how they done it down in Canada and got rid of 'em but they did. Cause they bought every one we had. But up here, if they couldn't get at least 3 to a can or 4 to a can they wouldn't buy 'em. And cause...that's the way the sardine business was is how many cans of herring was in that can. And you know they canned herring with mustard too you know. When they canned a lot of herring. I didn't care for the mustard. I didn't...well I didn't eat it much anyway but...they canned a lot with mustard. And I found...I don't know if that was the Canadians or us but anyway they used...I never seen it in our sardine factory when I was running round there. But they did. They packed a lot of herring in mustard.

JKW: What other packing companies did you sell to?

RD: Oh, about anybody...anybody that could handle 'em. I mean if anybody wanted [inaudible] a bushel of herring you sold 'em. In order to make any money you had to sell 'em. And see there was John Toft and there was the Trident. There was Seaboard and Pike, Moses Pike family Downeast. They had a factory in town and stuff. Then we sold an awful lot down there to Rockland in that big factory down there that just shut down a while ago sold out from the canning business. We sold an awful lot of sardines one summer all summer long to 'em. And we done good down there that year cause they was paying \$1.14 for herring. And that summer we made enough to survive all winter without going lobstering. So...we...I can't remember now...it's been in the paper they still had draggers and stuff like that going out of that sardine boat and stuff like that. And we sold them a lot of herring. And ah...

JKW: Did you sell to Stinson and R.J. Peacock?

RD: Yep, oh yes. That was our biggest market. And ah...but when I first started, my father used to go for Seaboard Packing Company over in South Portland. And down in Lubec. They owned that in Lubec. The owners lived in Lubec. And he run it in South Portland. A big plant. It was a big plant. And we went for them for quite a few years. But now old Jim McDonald he owned the Trident Packing Company. And if Trident come down [inaudible] who lived on the island see [inaudible] we'd sell them...if we could sell them a boatload, we would just to help 'em out you know. And stuff like that. So...we almost sold to anybody that would buy a boatload of herring. We'd sell 'em because that profit, see that was profit...so that's where you made a few dollars if you could sell an extra boatload of herring.

JKW: Where were the best places on Chebeague Island to shut off?

RD: Well actually, the southeast shores more or less. Nothing on the backside or this side of Cousins Island it was almost all...and then...ah...Cliff Island was the biggest one. Ok? Cliff Island and Jewell's Island were the biggest places...[inaudible] just off of Cliff Island you could see it [inaudible] and...but on the shore where we caught most of our fish was Kennedy's Cove on Cliff Island and the boatyard right here on Chebeague. That's where we caught most of our herring. They were the only two places we had to go. You know? Cause there was plenty of herring when there was herring it was those two places that fished the best. And so that was the two main places. Then one year, we...there were no sardines in the bay whatsoever and her [referring to his wife] family's moved to Cape Porpoise.

JKW: Your wife's family moved to Cape Porpoise?

RD: Yeah, part of her relatives and he got up there and he started catching herring up there in places that never we'd heard of. And so he said to my father, he says, "Come on up" and he says, "And catch some herring I'll give you a place to catch some herring. But half of them will go to fish meal and half of 'em will go

to the sardine factory.” And so my father says, “We might as well. There ain’t nothing here.” So up we go and sure enough we caught a lot of herring there through October and then we did, we sold about half of the herring for fish meal and then we sold the other half to the packing company. Because they run big you know. They didn’t run small. They run big. And so...the factories would buy just enough to keep ‘em going but the fish meal plant would buy all you could sell to ‘em. And that boat held 1800 bushel. And we’d try to load her once a day if we could. And ah...but you only got about I don’t know, 40 cents...50 cents equal to a bushel for herring when you sold to the fish meal. And...but we got about 65...70 cents from the sardine factory, see? So you...we ended up making enough so we survived that winter you know, stuff like that. But we bounced around...we went to Rockland....ah yeah, we went to Rockland and we caught herring down there that ran about 6, 7 to a can. And we caught I don’t know...3,000 bushel and that was it. They completely disappeared. We thought we could be there a while and we caught them because we had a great chance to do it. And we caught them and too ‘em out and there was never another herring that showed up. So we had to come back home. And so you see you never knew what where what was gonna happen in that sardine business. It was a rough business now I’m ‘a tell you. It kept you on your feet.

JKW: How many other crews on the islands were there?

RD: Ah...let’s see there were...my uncle Manley. My uncle Carl. My father. The Rosses. Ah...4...there were 4 families that actually did the sardining. Then there was a couple on Cliff Island that was in the sardine business cause they fished the outer side of Cliff Island and stuff. They didn’t come in the bay any. They stayed right home...caught what would come in there. So there was a couple families on Cliff Island that went sardining and that’s about all there was around here. Ah...and then cause sardining was a tricky business. I mean, you could set a seine across a cove and you’d think you was gonna get rich and you take it out the next morning cause there wouldn’t be nothing behind it. See what I mean? If you didn’t know what you’re looking for...and course my father was brought up on...they used to go netting on them big double masted schooners the whole length of the Maine Coast. And of course his father was a captain aboard them schooners. And they used to go netting and...for herring you know and stuff like that. That’s how he learned how to go sardining. See? And you ever hear of “flaring in the water” or the stuff in the water...that if you at night you jump and it whitens up? That’s how you can tell where the herring are. Outside of your purse seine...ah...sounding machine, you know what I mean? Ah...at night in a dory, my brother would be pushing me along you know and I’d be looking down in the water and I’d kick my foot on the bottom of the dory and then the water’d whiten right up. Then you knew you had some. See that’s how my father learned me how to find them. See? ...and stuff...But you had to be careful doing that because we caught a lot down at the tank farm to Harpswell one time and a fellow didn’t realize---the lobster catcher was with us---and he didn’t realize what was gonna happen and he...we go in to take out the fish and he pounded his oars on the side of the dory and the fish rocked. Well we lost half of what we had in that pocket.

Square...you know...square seined off pocket. We lost...they rushed you know...went right out over her. And it killed half of 'em. And then so we only got about half what we figured we had in that seine. So you see you couldn't make no noise at night when they was bunched right up in a pocket. You had to be very, very careful what you done. Cause if they rushed, it'd smother 'em. See, they'd all try to go out over the cork line for one thing and then they'd smother. So see, sardining was a tricky business in a way of speaking. You had to be careful...engine-wise at night when you're catching sardines you had to be awful careful. Startin' engines and towin' them dories out you know, getting them seines out, you had to be something careful cause if you started them rushing, they'd be all gone before you ever got your seine out. See? All I can say is it was a tricky business. I liked it. But it was tricky.

JKW: When did the herring usually start to show up in the season?

RD: Ah, in...right around...let's see...April we'd...May... bout the middle of May. They'd...you'd start looking for 'em bout the 15th of May. You'd start going out at night and sailing around see if you could find any. And then June usually was the best month. If you was going to make any money, you made it through the month of June. And then they'd let go and in September they'd let go and in October the little ones would show up and you'd have a month or a couple months maybe as them little ones. Then, you know [inaudible] average. Very rarely would you have herring all summer long. You know, there'd be a spell, just like lobstering. Lobstering goes up and down. Sardining was the same way. And so...one year I remember it was in April we went outside, we see the herring outside. 3rd day of April. Raining cats and dogs. And my father says, "Yep, we're gonna go in and get our paint" cause the herring showed up. It rained every day all April. All through April. We never did paint. We went sardining! But we didn't paint. So you never knew when they was gonna strike. You had to be ready to go regardless whether you was ready or not you had to go. And that's why...that ah...some years you'd paint all up and you wouldn't set a seine.

JKW: When did the season usually end?

RD: November. Bout the first of November you could pretty well figure it's all over. You know, put stuff away. And ah...that was almost average too. November boy was just about average every year. After the first of November you know, it... that would be it. And then ah...so ah...you could depend on that right along. And then course, after that course after we got done that's when the purse seiners took over and I went to work down there at the factory. And ah...but anyway...as far as we're concerned, November was...that is...everybody took off and went deer hunting. They all had camps all down, way down Calais down that way. And so they all took all...the older men took off went deer hunting. I went a little but not much. Yep. So we had pretty good times you know...sardining...Ah, October...ah...let's see...must have been in the '60s...I'll say October. The 28th day

of October, John Toft¹ sent a sardine carrier down to House Island and Monty Machiel was captain. He says, "I want to buy that last boatload of herring you got." 2 o'clock in the morning. And I said, "Gosh Monty, I don't know if we can get the seine out of the dory. It's froze in." "Well," he says, "I got a box of donuts and a jug of coffee." Great big jug of coffee. And so it was me and my cousin Joe and my brother and my older brother that had infantile paralysis. Well, we said we'll try it and—oh, it blowed a gale of wind northwest—we had to run extra lines and anchors so to lure 'em into the seine so she wouldn't take everything ashore. And we started jumping and breaking ice before we got anywhere near the seine and we got the ice pretty well broke up and we put salt over...he gave us some salt too and we broke that ice up and we loaded him that night and then we took our seine up that morning and boy we was headed home. And that was about almost right at the last part of the month, you know? And so we figured we had time to...cause see years ago...now years ago we went skating in November. See, that's how the difference in temperature is. And so, once you got weather like that the herring would stop coming anyway. We had luck out on that one catch and we got 3,000 bushel and we took the last 1,00 bushel up to old John Toft at Seaboard—ah...Seaboard? No, it wasn't Seaboard...I can't remember now. But anyway, old John Toft was running it and he sent a boat down and we put a thousand bushel in it and then we took our seine up and come right home that day. And ah...so that would be...bout the 1st of November you'd put a...lot of...When I was first sardining, everything was cotton. And we had to dry everything before we could put it away. Then it got so that we would buy it all nylon and you didn't have to. All you had to do was just flake it away and forget about it, see? So it's...quite a lot of changes in sardining.

JKW: How much maintenance did the net require?

RD: How much a net would cost?

JKW: How much did it cos— How much did...how much effort did you have to put into maintaining it?

RD: When I first started, a lot. Cause it was cotton, see? But after we got nylon, very little. Very little. And as long as you could stay away from the seals, you didn't have any problem whatsoever. And once in a while, if the seals struck you, in the...what we called the pocket, we'd have to cut out, oh, maybe 20, 25 holes that them seals would rip in, you know take right out of your seine. And that'd be about a foot-and-a-half, two-foot-square and you'd have to sew in a place. And it would take you...it would take you a week to go through a seine right...you know to really do it right. And ah...but it would take all of April to put everything together. Now this is seines and dories and boat paint...take you all the month of April to put it all together. So we used to go part-time lobstering and my mother always picked crab meat. In fact, three quarters of the island picked crab meat

¹ John Toft was a manager for the R.J. Peacock canning company in Lubec, Maine. He set up a sister factory in Portland in 1930 that employed 350 workers. (according to an article in the..

anyway back in them days. And that's how they survived while we were working on the sardine rigs. See, they'd be picking...we'd sell a few lobsters and then my father would save the white crabs and my mother would pick 'em. And my daughter, my sister...and ah...so they'd pick 'em and sell 'em. That's how we'd survive while we're getting our sardine rig ready to roll, see? But the factory would buy all of our parts that we needed for the sardine rig. See, we didn't have to worry about money cause the factory...if we wanted any kind of paint or any amount of paint, the factory would buy it. Then we'd pay that back at a third basis. You know, they'd take a boatload of herring, take a third off and pay the bill back. That's how we...that's how they oh everybody done it. And so ah...we ah...that's how you survived back in them days...the sardine factory back...that's why we went for Seaboard Packing Company because the old man that run that...ah...when my father got his boat in the war and then the government took it...lost it for three years...ah...got it back again and then ah...cause he wouldn't run it. He run it for the government but for three years he couldn't go sardining. And so ah...in order to get his new boat back, he had to run it for the government. Well the old man loved bird hunting so that...in November my father used to take him bird hunting, see? And stay for a week up in the [inaudible] bay and let him go bird hunting. A whole bunch of 'em. There'd be 4 or 5. The boat had 7 [inaudible] and a [inaudible]. And he used to take 4 or 5 guys with him you know that really loved birding. And ah...so that's how that...if you got in tied into a factory like that and they'd help you out, that's the way we always went. Because in the spring you know, you didn't have much money to work with you know, after going all winter for nothing...lobstering and then just about surviving. And then...so they'd help us get ready for sardining.

JKW: Was Seaboard located in Portland?

RD: South Portland. Right where the...right alongside the railroad tracks where the big shipyard is. It was right on the side of the railroad tracks. Yep. And we used to watch them haul them big boats up over there. Once in a while. Yep. It was there for years and I don't know what happened to it after we got out of...you know...went out of business but...if they tore it down or what they done but...ah...they ah...that's where they was. And that's where all of our herring went for a long—almost all the time I went there. We sold a lot to different places but I mean that was our main thing. And the last...oh well wait a minute now...Moses Pike. The Pike Family outa Downeast, they come up and bought that place—the Canadian place right on this side of Portland where the railroad tracks go into the city of Portland. That's owned by the Canadians. And they bought that building from the Canadians. And ah...so...but it stayed still on the Canadian property, see? They just...I guess leased...bought...they didn't buy the land just the building. And they bought the last couple years from us sardining. And ah...so we sold quite a few herring to Moses Pike. [inaudible] Pike was in politics in Augusta and stuff. So we sold quite a few herring to Moses Pike too. Right at the very last thing before my father got sick. And then ah...then the sardining went...as he went down the sardining went with it. And then everybody went out of business. And Rockland was the last one. They just sold up the can factory a while ago. Made it

into a lobster place I think. And stuff, so...They held on the longest though, Rockland did. We sold quite a few herring down there too. When we'd have extra stuff you know. We sold a lot of herring down there.

JKW: When the herring came in in the springtime, what groundfish fed on them? What ate them?

RD: Just whiting. Just your whiting. And they're like a hake, you know what I mean? They filleted...you could...ah...some people wouldn't eat 'em. Some people wouldn't eat 'em but not me. But anyway they...that's all that ever drove herring was just whiting. And then, when the whiting business I think stopped here or slowed right down to a crawl, that's when all the herring got caught down there. Cause see there was nothing to drive 'em. And then ah...so ah...your whiting was the main part of your sardining as far as what you caught that summer bulk-wise. And I know that year...oh I tell you what year that was! When Chevrolet come out with that new Chevrolet convertible. Was that '52? They come out with that brand new red Chevrolet convertible? I think it was a '52 cause one of the boys that went with us that summer bought one brand spankin' new. And I bet that was '52 when that...cause that's when I think that Chevrolet come out. I wanted one but I couldn't afford it cause I started having a kid then. And ah...so ah...I had to stay down way down at the bottom. But anyway...yep, that's when that was. It was '52 when that ah...when we sold all them herring to Connor. Yep. And that's when all the whiting come in that time. You know? Drove all them herring in and we caught 'em fore dark. That was '52. Yes sir. I remember now cause I remember the car. I remember he bought that brand spankin' new convertible. And then ah...in '48...'49...no '40...'52 yeah. Yeah cause '49...'48, '49 they caught a lot of herring down Cliff Island and that's when my cousin bought a convertible car but it wasn't...it was a Studebaker car. And he bought it then and then when them herring struck down there that summer so bad that he ended up buying that car. Course he didn't have a family. Know what I mean? He was still single so he bought that car. So stuff comes back to me after a while. Yep, that's when it was though. It ah...Chevrolet come out with that '52 and that's when we sold all them herring to Conner.

JKW: So what...ah...what other species would you catch in your seine?

RD: Very little. Very little. Outside of mackerel—you know, mackerel were plentiful—but outside of mackerel and a few whiting that was it. You hardly ever got any other fish. Yeah, ah...that I can remember anyway. [inaudible] Maybe years ago they might have caught more cause when I...before I was old enough to go...cause they used to catch codfish up on the upper end of the island in the sound I'm telling you about where I seen all the whales. Before I come along, they used to go up there codfishing, see? But now, I don't know if there was much sardining going either then, way back then. Cause see the seine...I don't remember my father...when I come along, my father was just starting to build up, you know, when I was 12...13 years old, really sardining. So I don't know really exactly when my father really got into sardining off these big vessels, see? And

but what I ever seen, mostly now, what I ever seen was mackerel and whiting. And very, very little...

JKW: Why didn't the pogies school with herring?

RD: They wouldn't. Boy, if a pogy...I went down beside the point one day in a punt hauling my lobster traps. Rowing, see? And I s— ...pogies come up right around me. And I mean they're whirling! Just like this [motions with his hands] and my punt was going around...course it was a big punt and I was standing up and I was going right around just like this. And I had my oar and I was punching that one trying to kill it. I wanted to take it home to my father. Cause I had never seen one. I'd never...

JKW: What year was this?

RD: When I was... '37. I was only 7 years old. And ah...so ah...I done that. I shouldn't have been there but I was. I snuck down. And ah...cause I was only supposed to be in the cove you know with my punt. And so ah...I tried to kill one and so I come home and I said to my father, I got to tell you a story I shouldn't but I got to tell you a story. And so he said, "What?" I said, "I was down at Johnny Moulton's" and ah...down on the side of the point there. And I said, "All these fish all of a sudden come up" and I said, "I started in going just like this in the punt." "Oh, no," he says, "you didn't." I says, "Oh, yes I did." "Oh, no" he says. "That's the end right here." We never caught a herring that summer. Not one. Not a herring was caught that summer. Cause the bay filled right...in fact, we had an old big purse seine that we went pogy fishing with and my uncle Manley he owned a rig and we went with him and went all summer. In fact it was the year... '49... '50. It was 1950. Cause that's when my boy was born and that's how I paid the hospital bill. I went catching pogies and sold them as fish meal so I could get money enough to pay his hospital bill. That was 1950. And ah...so ah...there was so many pogies that all...well [inaudible] there come up from Florida, had about 4 or 5 of them great big boats, lot of colored guys in her you know for running and they set their big purse seines and a dozen of them would be in a dory, you know and that big thing hauling...you could hear 'em singing. And they'd fill her full out of the bay. And then she'd leave for a week or two and stuff so ah...we never caught a herring that summer whatsoever. There wasn't one around. That's why your pogies played a big part too. When they showed up like that you was in trouble. Cause the herring would not come anywhere near where a pogy was and so ah...that year we never caught a fish.

RD_002

RD: ...going...When I started in, I was 13 years old. And I bought a car. And, a '33 Chevrolet car. I had a lever action .30-30 gun and I had a shotgun but I wasn't allowed to touch one of 'em unless one of my uncles was with me. I was trained how to handle guns, ok? That's the way it was on Chebeague. You didn't...everybody on Chebeague went deer hunting, ok? But you didn't go out

and just...you went out and you was trained what to do. And I think that's what living on an island really you appreciate. Because you was trained how to handle stuff. And ah...so then later on, I bought a car and ah...so and then I got my...when I was 13 years old I bought a car and a boat and 6 lobster traps. That's what I had when I was 13 years old. And then ah...as you got older, I wouldn't have left that island for nothing. I mean I wouldn't...oh I had different jobs. I had to move you know...I went off the island later on in life. But when I was growing up, no. I wouldn't have left that island for nothing.

JKW: How much did those things cost then?

RD: Eh?

JKW: How much did the boat and the car cost?

RD: Oh, well the boat cost me about \$20. The car cost me \$20. And the lobster traps we built out of the woods. We'd build...bend our own stuff and sawed out large...old guy had an old saw table rig up there and we used to go cut trees and saw them into [inaudible]. My father did all of his. In fact, you know as I got older and we...in '48 when we bought the new boat from Beals Island—that style boat built down Washington Avenue, he knit half the heads for the lobster catchers on the island. They'd come hire him to knit heads he could do so well. And when I...in '49 to '52...ah...we'd go haul...one night's set haul 180 traps and get 300 lobsters.

JKW: What was the price?

RD: 36 cents. Cause I got 16 cents, and then it went up to 20-some cents. Then it went up to 30-some cents and it stayed there a long while. 36 to 46 cents it stayed there a long time. And then in the wintertime, it got up to 80 cents...during the winter months when it was hard getting offshore. And then ah...later on just before my father got real sick, we was getting a dollar in town in the wintertime. Before the lobster took off and went up...started up where they have been. So...but actually, I wouldn't have left that island now if it weren't for the way things are going. See, the cost of living over there: \$500 dollars for 100 gallons of fuel, alright? And plus your other expenses and then insurance, Blue Cross Blue Shield is \$400 a month on top of our oil and light bills and telephones and a television and everything. And I...Kristen says you ain't got to stay over there. You ain't gotta buy that high priced stuff. Come over here and stay for nothing.

JKW: When you were born on Chebeague Island in 1931, how many people lived on the island then?

RD: 200 in the winter and 1,000 in the summer. And it stayed that way for I don't know how many years it stayed that way. Ah...because anywhere from 180 to 200 people during the November till April and then the summer people come. Cause that's what carries that island is the summer people. The money. That's

what's keeping it going today over there. My...one of my boys is selectman over there. And it's money. It's the summer people. And buying \$400,000...\$500,000 homes you know. That's a lot of tax bill. And ah...my cousin Dick built a house on the water just below his father's there, just a short way from his father. His tax bill was \$9,000 a year. So you see the difference? I...And when we bought our house, that little Cape house we're in, we were paying \$63 a year for taxes.

JKW: So did you go to school on Chebeague Island?

RD: Yep. Oh yeah. I went straight through the 11th grade and then I quit. I got an A in Math and I had Bs and Cs, ok? And the school teacher said, "If you want to be an engineer," cause I wanted to be an engineer, she says, "You've got to go to South Portland." Well there wasn't money enough to get off the island. In a way of speaking. So I quit school. But I ended up overhauling diesel engines, overhauling engines, doing everything I wanted to do. I didn't have to go any— ...I didn't have to go to college to be in diesel engines. In fact, my boy next to the oldest one is still on the island in construction. He overhauled a Cummins diesel for the Cumberland Highway Department that's still running! And a grader.

JKW: When was that?

RD: Let's see. That would be. He was born... '55. That would...let's see...ah...then he went in the Navy. Oh in the early '90s. It'd have to be the early...cause he was in the Navy for...he was in damage control and at home we got a letter from Bath Iron Works sayin' the minute he stepped out of a uniform they wanted him. He wouldn't go down. He said, "Nope. I'm gonna be my own boss." He was in damage control for the Navy. He learned all his tricks of the trade from the Navy too with a goal of what he'd done. And now he's got 5 excavators and 4 or 5 bulldozers and trucks over there and they're working right steady there's so much work going on over there. Ah...his wife's daughter's husband...he's young just got out of the Marines and Jesus ain't he strong and so Wayne he had bladder cancer about 4 years ago and now I tell you we done some worrying and they had to remove all his bladder and put him on a bag and I says, my God Wayne you know [inaudible] worked for Central Maine Power had it done a lot earlier than Wayne and he's still going. He's my age. Just a week apart and he's still going strong and I says hopefully you...now Wayne's back you never know he's been sick with that cancer. They cleaned every bit of it out and stuff and he's going working every day all day long with his equipment.

JKW: That's great.

RD: Yes sir. They ah...things is going along like that and but island living oh I don't know...you couldn't have pried me off that island I tell you.

JKW: What was the relationship when you were young between Chebeague Island and Cliff Island?

RD: Oh, great. Actually, we used to go there and play baseball every summer. Every summer. We had a team of our own and we had the ah...

JKW: What was your team called?

RD: Nothing special. Just the island. Just Chebeague you know just like that. We used to go Cliff Island and Long Island and play baseball. And one of the Long Islanders over there, one of the Rosses, tried out for the Boston Red Socks. And he almost made it. He was so close to being good. And but he didn't pitch against us much cause I mean he was what you call professional you know. And I grabbed my bat – and I had a great batting average too – I grabbed my bat and I went up to the plate and Harley Ross says I want to pitch against you. I says, "Go ahead. You go right up there now and you pitch against me." He says, "But look, what I'm gonna do..." He says, "I'm gonna throw a fast – he could throw 90 miles an hour – I'm gonna throw a fast ri- I says, "Don't. If you do you're gonna lose the ball." He says, "I don't really think so..." I says, "Ok, let her come." I hit that and it drove it right out into the woods and we never did find it. So we had good relations over there and I had the goodest baseball average...batting average...we had a guy in the Army...he couldn't curve it much but he could throw it almost 100 miles an hour. But he couldn't strike me out. He never did strike me out all the time that the Army was on the island when they was there. And cause I had such a good batting average...

JKW: This was during the war?

RD: Oh yeah. He pitched boy and couldn't he throw that ball I'mma tell you...and every time he hit it we had ah...300...320 feet of field and I always hit it into the left field cause I'm right handed and he never could strike me out and ah...so ah...we had a great time with them boys. Really truthfully we had a great time with them boys on the other islands and course we'd all mingle I mean there was some relatives and some [inaudible] and stuff so ah...now the O'Reilly family was nor relation what...and we was closer to them than we was any other part of Cliff Island. Everybody got along so good I mean nobody even fishing...lobstering we'd go down and fish right amongst 'em and nobody bothered nobody. We didn't cut our net traps and they didn't cut our traps and stuff. Everybody got along great. And we ah...back in the war I think what done this too was my age growin' up too my uncle come out of the Navy and he got hurt and he got a disability. And...but he could still go...you know it didn't cripple him. He could still go and so he got his lobster traps and another soldier that retired from the...and married a woman on the island was his stern man and he was a Polock and he could pick me and you up and he could walk off with us just like we was 5 lbs. a piece! Oh what a strong man...strongest man on Chebeague. We used to test him out just for the hell of it and he was the strongest man on Chebeague.

JKW: And they served together?

RD: Oh yeah, they went together. My uncle took some traps down to Cliff Island and put 'em way down on the other side of Cliff Island. Well now them days I guess back then you didn't do that in the '40s you know early '40s. Cause I wasn't old enough to be down there anyway. And so they called my uncle up and they said come down and get your traps and get 'em out of here or we're gonna cut 'em up. You're gonna lose 'em cause we don't allow Chebeaguers down around Cliff Island. And my uncle says, "Look, I just got out of the Navy. I'm on a disability. I can live for another hundred years without going lobstering. Now if you guys touch one of my buoys, I'm gonna clean house." He says, "You ain't going lobstering and neither am I. Cause I'll lose my license and you won't have no traps." They never touched him. And I think from then on things changed and that...and then cause some of the Dyers down there were of relation to us Dyers on Chebeague so that helped change things then sardining we always round and helped everybody.

JKW: Did you work with Bob Anderson and Bruce Dyer on their crew?

RD: I worked alongside of 'em. Now his father...his father used to be caretaker over Hope Island you went by it...Hope Island going down to Cliff with all the new houses going up and hotels down on...Hope Island if you left Chebeague and went down to Cliff...you went by Hope Island...he was a caretaker on Hope Island for a hundred years...just exaggerating but...all the time I knew him...he was caretaker...one of the nicest old men you ever wanted to be around and then when they built the boat down Cliff Island...they built a lot of boats there...lobster boats down there...we were down there all the time. All the time while they was building them boats during the good some part of the summer and stuff so that...cause Long Island...half of Long Island or a third of Long Island was of relation to Chebeague. My mother's family come from Long Island and stuff. My mother was a Long Islander.

JKW: What was her name?

RD: Mabel Jor- ah...Bricker. And then my father which was born on Chebeague married her, brought her over here and then so we had relatives on Long Island and during the war we lived on Long Island with her for a couple of years because my father couldn't get home cause my mother wouldn't see him at all you know while we was growing up. And then so I ended up on Long Island ah...during the war for a couple years. I went to school over there for 2 years. Yeah and then...but I just ah...you know, everybody kinda liked everybody I guess cause God we all got along great.

JKW: What was it like living on the island during wartime?

RD: It was hard but it was all right I mean cause we had our own woodlot, a woodstove and then we had kerosene that we got tickets for you know we could buy so much kerosene for your wick burner for your kerosene stove. And we had a great big pot belly woodstove in the living room opposite from the bedroom and

there was a place where you could cut wood all winter long and nobody'd say a word. Hard wood you know. And so you didn't have to worry about heat you know. That...ah...and then the old man that owned the grocery store...ah...my mother...passed me a handful of money and we had to have red tags to buy meat with. We didn't have no red tags. So my cousin Doug says to...ah... "Let's go to the store and get some candy" so I said to my mother, "We're gonna walk up to the store and get a piece of candy." She says, "Here, take this money and see if you can buy something for supper." And I says, "Alright." So she gives me a whole handful of money and up we go. And George come out with this great big roast. I mean it was a big one. And he was cuttin' it into like 4 lb. roasts and 5 lb. roasts you know and Doug looked at...Doug says to "Whadda you got in your pocket?" Well I hauled this roll of cash out. Well George see it and Doug says to George, "Boy wouldn't we love to have some of that but we ain't got no red tickets." We bought it. The money you know!

JKW: How much did you buy?

RD: I think about 8 lbs. Cause there was ah...4....1...2...3...4 kids and my father and mother and so I bought a nice great big giant...when I got home my mother said, "How did you get that?" and I said, "Well I ain't gonna tell you!". And ah...so ah...anyway ah...that's how you got by you know...at times it was hard and course the rest of the family ate clams. I wouldn't eat clams. I hated clams. I never would eat a clam. But the rest of the family loved clams and stuff and then ah...Uncle Manley's wife's father used to bake mussels and I used to eat baked mussels. He'd shell 'em take the top shell off and put stuff on 'em and put 'em in a stove you know on a tray and bake 'em and they wasn't bad you know...so actually...then you could always go on the shore and pick up them big white crabs you know take 'em home and cook 'em. They was right there on the shore them big white crabs that they pick today for crab meat. They was always on the shore. And ah...then in the summer when I was a little kid you'd go wading when the 11 foot tides was around – the low drainers – and go...you could find them holes and stomp and the lobsters come out of it. We'd grab him and put him in a kettle. See? You got by. It...we never thought nothing about it. And then ah...fact it's just as easy to get by then as it is right now actually moneywise you know and stuff and ah...because you didn't need...gas was \$5 a gallon...ah...it was a dollar for 5 gallons in '48 and '49. That's what we was paying for a can of gas was a dollar. And then ah...but that dollar come just as hard as the 5 dollars does now over there cause it...you wasn't getting nothing for nothing, see? I dug...I dug a barrel of clams ah...'40...'50...let's see we'd been married 2 years and her mother got sick so we moved up to her house. So that was '49...'50...'51...'51 I went and dug a barrel of clams, took 'em home, shelled 'em, blacked 'em, took 'em to town and got \$14 for 'em. Now it took all day to do it. All night to shell 'em. And I...the next day I went to town on a Casco Bay boat. I said, "Never again will I go clamming." And I never have. That was the end of it right there. But, Sanford Douty lived just a short berth from me, an old fisherman, said to me, "Yeah but if you'd a gone and dug another barrel of clams and done the same thing, you couldn'ta lugged the groceries out for that \$24 dollars...ah...14...\$28...\$48...14...yeah \$48 right?"

Alright? He says, "You couldn'ta lugged the groceries outa that store you coulda bought for that money." He says, "Think about it." But I still didn't go clamming. That was the end of it right there. And ah...you ever hear about smelting? You ever smelt you know...river smelted with hooks?

JKW: No, no.

RD: Well years ago you know we could go and catch oh, 20...30 bushel of smelt with a 3 fathom deep seine. Right on the shore in November. And...

JKW: On Chebeague Island?

RD: Yeah, all around the bay. Actually, all around the bay. And ah...so ah...one of the selectmen on the island said we're gonna put a supper on for all the old timers. Will you fellers go get some smelt? They'd fry 'em. Oh they was great to eat. And me and Pookie, the one you're talking about...his older brother... "Yeah we'll go get 'em." So we went and got 2 or 3 bushel right up the boatyard and took 'em up and they fried 'em all that night. And there was a lot of smelt around.

JKW: What year was that?

RD: Let's see, that would be...that would be in the ear- late '40s. Early '50s. And ah...cause I know it was just about the time we got married you know. Right in that time. And cause we ate smelt long after we got married. We used to go smelting. Then when we bought our camp down to Calais in the Town of Waite we used to go all through October smelting at night when there wasn't no sardines and catch smelt and take 'em down and sell 'em, give the money to my father so him and my mother could go deer hunting for the month.

JKW: So did the smelt usually arrive after the herring?

RD: Yeah, bout the first of October they'd show up. I mean the smelt would be about that long you know. They'd be beautiful smelt and we used to go smelting and sometimes you could get 'em...a lot of smelt if you got it right you could catch a lot and so ah...but they didn't pay much but I mean we made enough on them so my father and mother could take...go smelting...go hunting on that smelt money without spending the money they had to live on.

JKW: So these smelt were over a foot long.

RD: Oh yeah. Some of 'em was. Some wasn't. Some was. But today they ain't. They're all little fellers. They're almost extinct. And ah...but ah...in fact I ain't seen a smelt for quite a few years and ah...but years ago like that when we were young, real young we used to we used to go smelting so my father and mother could go...cause we used to go down and spend a week...that's about all I could afford. Then I had to get back and go to work. But ah...they had enough money out of that smelt money that they could afford to stay there the whole month you

know. So that's how...we used to do a lot of smelting...and capelin...now capelin had a stripe down their side...a silver stripe. They weren't worth nothing. You couldn't...you wouldn't eat 'em. You'd just throw 'em away.

JKW: How often did the capelin come around?

RD: Very, very...they was mixed in with the smelt. You had to be...you know...they weren't nowhere near as thick...just a scattering...you had to be careful...they'd pick 'em over to make sure they weren't buying something they couldn't use. And ah...but they weren't worth nothing. Nobody ate 'em.

JKW: When were capelin most present around the island? What years?

RD: The same time...October...November. And then...ah...by the middle of November they'd disappear...everything would disappear. Just before the ice season started they'd all disappear. Yeah...so well that would be the end of smelting too. And ah...

JKW: When was the last time you saw capelin?

RD: Oh my God, I'll say let's see...I'll be 15...18 years ago at least if not more. Cause ah...ah...who was it tried to go smelting one night just for the devil of it and they caught oh maybe half a bushel of smelt and no capelin whatsoever and but the...smelt were so little they didn't bother 'em. They didn't save 'em. And ah...so that was a long while ago. Maybe longer than that I don't know. Time flies I'm tellin' you. And ah...cause '88...back in '88 I'd had my 20 years on the roads...see what I mean? I put in 20 years...'69 to '88 on the roads. So you see time flies and you know you're thinking just yesterday and it ain't yesterday it's a long ways away.

JKW: Was it unusual to see capelin with the smelt?

RD: Not years ago, no. Not when I first started smelting with the boys you know my father and then the boys and stuff. No. You had to pretty well cull 'em over...there were always a few maybe oh a 10 quart bucket if you got 20 or 30 bushel of smelt there was a 10 quart bucket of capelin you'd have to pick out. They'd take it out on you now if you didn't the way you sold 'em you know. You...they'd deduct so much...they'd know they'd be in there. So we used to pretty well have to sort 'em out and ah...but it didn't wasn't too bad of a job. It was a good job. Cause we all had dip nets you know. We had the [inaudible] special dip nets you'd use, buckets and stuff. So it didn't take long to go through a pile of smelt....but...no them was the good old days I'm gonna tell you.

JKW: How many carriers did you work with when you were stop seining?

RD: Well actually, where we went all the time with one. Then the Trident had one and ah...John Toft had 3. Ok? And we...Monty MacNeill we'd only more or

less use one of his. We knew him good. So we'd use one of his. So actually, not many.

JKW: Was Monty MacNeill an islander?

RD: Not till later on. He married a girl on the island after the sardine business got done and then he got alcoholic and that was the end of him. But ah...he married a girl on the island and ah...they were together quite a while and had a couple of kids and then the fishing business went backward dragging...he tried to go dragging and stuff...and then he drank so bad that it put him right out of business. And ah...so ah...but Monty'd...actually, his father...well his father knew everybody on the shore. Whole length of the Maine shore. He was one of these old fellers that could talk to everybody and he knew everybody, you see? And ah...so that's how Monty used to go with him and ah...Monty would get to know a lot of us. See what I mean? And that's why we had Monty come down that night and take them in that awful ripping cold night and stuff cause we knew he knew what he was doing and then he knew what who he was and how it was to work with him. See? And that's why we liked to work with him. You know...stuff...around the island every...all the sardine carriers that we worked with...everybody knew about everybody, see? And then the boys that come up from Rockland we got so charley with them...the old captain [inaudible] cause we knew him great you know. Cause he used to come up the most from Rockland with a...the *Luanne*. He kept the *Luanne* out of Rockland. And in fact she's still going down south now as a sail yacht you know. I seen a picture of her a few years ago in one of my seacoast magazines that I get and she's still going as a sailer. They put masts and booms on her, put sails on her. Took the pilot house off and they had the wheel aft anyway that big wheel you know. And they built a pilot house right over that wheel...now they've taken that pilot house off and you stand outdoor and she now is a sailing sloop down south. Yeah I seen a picture of her I happen to know I seen the name I recognized it and ah...they never change the name on a boat. Bad luck. Once a boat was named, that was it. You'd never change the name on a boat cause it's bad luck. See? So if you ever buy a boat and it's named, don't change it cause you'll end up sinking or something outside cause it's bad luck. Yah. Oh dear. No, I've had a lot of fun. I had...I had one job...now this ain't nothing to do with sardining while I was growing up and I was home and there come a northeast snow storm. And I didn't have nothing to do. Couldn't...I...this was before I went to work on the roads. '65. And I had a bulldozer and I was plowing out a road with my brother and my cousin Joe come along and he says, "Come on, I got you a job." I says, "What?" He says, "You're going to town go to work with me as an engineer on a tugboat." I says, "You're kidding!" I says, "I've never seen an engine in a tugboat!" He says, "You're going to town to be an engineer on a tugboat." Well I parked my bulldozer and went in the house and got everything straightened out with her. I says, "I'll be home next week I guess." And I went to town...I was put in as the engineer of a tugboat and ah...so ah...old Fairbanks Moss and ah...only 600 horsepower and ah...but I stayed in there. I stayed working for the company for 3 years and I was home once...4 times a month...4 nights a month. And I could see Chebeague every day

and every night pumping black oil. And I had to learn to pump a barge because the pump man was on pot which I didn't know it cause I didn't know it was around and he fell off the side of the tanker back onto the tanker one day I wasn't with him that day and it killed him. And I had to go the next day and start running the barge.

JKW: What caused him to fall?

RD: Dope. He was [inaudible] right up. And they knew it but they didn't stop him from going. And so anyway ah...they didn't do nothing about it. We kept right on going and the next day I went up and loaded the barge cause I worked with him see, so I knew how to operate the barge and for 2 1/2 years I pumped black oil. But I made money. I worked 24 hours a day some days you know you would sleep standing up because it took 9 hours to load the barge and 9 hours to pump her out. And you couldn't let that oil get below 135. The reason my feet were sweating and I was freezing to death in the wintertime you know. But anyway that was the kind of job that I had to take to survive to feed the family. And I would have stayed right there rest of my life if the old man had stayed if the company had kept a...kept it going when he had that stroke. But his brother was a lawyer. One of the biggest lawyers in Portland that was going. And the minute he had that stroke he put him in a nursing home and sold right out that day. You know, that was it. And didn't I love that job though? God. Going running around them tugboats pushing on them tankers you know, being engineer. Nobody ever questioned you. No license whatsoever. Nobody ever questioned you. And I eventually got a license and stuff like that and I had plenty of time to get my captains license if I'd a wanted it. And ah...so...I went to New York on the *Fannie J*, you must have heard of that name but she was a 90 foot tugboat. She's the first coal fired tugboat come into Casco Bay and they converted her over into GM you know diesel engine and 4 of us went to New York. 2 come home. Go bunk ridden and so Jake says, "You got to tow that barge from New York harbor to Portland Harbor. I said, "Ok." Now all I had was a compass and a car radio when I left the Statue of Liberty with that hundred foot barge in tow and she had a 58 ton, 7 cylinder Fairbanks Moss engine sitting on deck, bolted down. And I sat 52 hours on a stool towing that barge to Portland Harbor.

JKW: What year?

RD: Ah...'56. Ah, '65...'65. I worked with them from '65, '66, '67. I remember the three years I worked for them. And I towed that barge down and after I got road commissioner on Chebeague there was 3 Coast Guardsmen come down standing on the wharf cause they wanted to dredge it all around the wharf. And they was all looking around. And course I had to pick on 'em. So I was in charge of the roads then you know the stone pier and all that anyway. So I walked up to 'em and I says to, "I gotta ask you guys a question." And they says, "What?" I says to, "You got more braids on than you have brains in a way of speaking." I says cause I know the Coast Guard and I've been around a long time and I says to, "But I gotta ask you a question." And they said, "What?" I said, "If you was in New York

Harbor you know and I was ah...it was 1965..." And I says, "And you had a hundred foot barge in tow and all you had was a compass and a car radio and they said ok, take this boat to Portland Harbor," I says "How many of you guys would do it?" They said, "None of us woulda dared to done it." Now I never steered into the Canal during the daytime coming from the New York side. I did this side going in but not coming out, not coming from New York into the Canal.

JKW: That's the Cape Cod Canal?

RD: Yep. And I...they stopped me. And they said, "Are you the Captain?" I said, "I must be cause I'm the only one steering and there ain't nobody else aboard to steer." They let me sign the papers and let me come through and he says, "Now I gotta tell you something. You're gonna meet 2 freighters. Now be careful." Now this is at night. And ah...so my brother was with me. He served me coffee and toast all the time coming down through. And ah...so I looked up and I see these lights coming course I knew what it was. And luckily now I had head tide. So I slowed her down till I looked ashore and the lights wasn't moving on the houses. Then I drift right over till she picked right up on the side of the Canal and the barge would automatically just stay there and she'd just drift right over too then the boat would go by and I'd open her right humming wide open again and come back out and get underway again. That's how I got by them 2 freighters coming up through. So you see, I had the knowledge of being a captain but I never wanted to be one. A licensed captain. I didn't want to run no party boats.

JKW: So it was slack tide when you were in the Canal?

RD: Oh no, it was head tide cause all I had to do was slow her down to half throttle and I stopped. And I laid there till they come up alongside me in the little patrol boat. [inaudible] had a hawser that big around on that barge you know. And they was out from here, oh...yeah it's almost across the road to the trees over there and stuff so I had a long tow line so course my brother he couldn't lift it up it was so heavy so ah...we...I towed it down and got it through and stuff and that's why [inaudible] they bought a tugboat and towed it from down south up here and we took it to Bath Ironworks and installed the engine. The guy hoisted it aboard you know? So we knew how much it weighed cause they had a scale on the crane down there and they knew what it weighed. And...I had it all ready to start when Jake had a stroke and that's when his brother come in and sold out. I'da stayed right there an engineer cause I could already hook up the air tank and everything...cause she was all ready to run [inaudible] and all they had to do was hook up the air starters and stuff like that you know and the fuel oil and stuff like that. I'da stayed right there. That was a great job. Good money in it. And ah...cause for some of them paychecks I was bringing home \$1,500 a week. That's a lot of money back in '65.

JKW: That's still a good amount of money.

RD: Yes, it is. But now I couldn't lay in a bed and couldn't lay down in a bed. I laid on the floor you know and I had to stand up even till I regulated quite a while after I got home cause I you know you sleep any way you could. Any time any way you could. [inaudible] what ruined your body in a way of speaking. Jobs like that. And ah...but now when I was road commissioner I ploughed snow for 4 days and 4 nights and never laid down. Right on the island now. We had 17 miles of road. On that island. And it snowed every night for 4 nights in a row a foot.

JKW: This is on Chebeague Island?

RD: Yes, sir. Yep. And ah...I ploughed snow for 4 days and 4 nights without laying down.

JKW: How much coffee did you have to drink?

RD: Haha, I wouldn't even dare to estimate it. Cause I would drink 7 cups of coffee a day till the doctor slowed me down a little bit here a while ago. And ah...he got me down to 5 cups and now they cut me down to 3 cups. And ah...but no, I was drinking 7 cups on the average.

JKW: Is that the secret to living a long life?

RD: Yep. Ah...no, no it aint. Bologna. Now I'm gonna tell you a little story. Half of Chebeague looks at me today and they'll say the only reason you're going today is bologna. When I was 6 and 7 years old, I used to go to the farm and the old man up there used to buy them long rolls of bologna and he'd slice it with a big knife. And I used to walk up with my father and eat bologna. And then in the... '48, '49 and '50s when we was going offshore haddock fishing in the little 35 footer, we had a 6 cylinder Chrysler gasoline with a cast iron muffler. I'd take my bologna and slice it, take it off and put it on the muffler to warm it and eat it. Well, then I went from there into town to work and I ate bologna sandwiches, tugboating. Alright? Then I come home and went to work for the town and I started eating bologna, you know, every morning I had a bologna sandwich. One slice of bologna. That's it for the day. Then, ah...

JKW: That's all you'd eat for the day?

RD: No, in the morning. That's what I ate for breakfast. One slice of bologna and a slice of bread. That was my breakfast. And I'm still doing it today. Right today this morning I got up and had a slice of bologna and a slice of bread and a little cruller. That's what I had for breakfast. And so then I went to work from '59 to '88 for the town and when I was home, now of course a lot of the time you weren't home during the winter months you weren't home, but when I was home I had my prize bologna sandwich and I used to cook it over the gas stove. But I had to wash the stove. My wife would make me wash the stove cause the grease in the bologna...well then I went to work for Scott Douglas [sp?] driving trucks in Yarmouth after I retired from ah...the town and so Dr. Haskell in Yarmouth said

to me one day, I walked in for an appointment, he said, "You shouldn't be standing here." And I says, "Why?" He says, "Your cholesterol is 336." Well I says, "That ain't nothing. That ain't gonna bother me none. What work I been doing and done..." And I said, "Bologna...cholesterol ain't gonna get me" and ah...so says, "What are you doing?" and I told him what I'd been eating. "Oh my God," he said. "You've got to stop eating bologna." I says, "I can't." Well, he says, "Go on to turkey bologna." He says, "Try turkey bologna for me." And ah...so ah... '80... '90...this was in the '90s... '88... '89... '90. This would be '90. And he says, "Try turkey bologna. See if you can stand it." Well by going over to turkey bologna, I don't warm it. I eat it cold right out of the refrigerator. You know? And ever since then I've been on turkey bologna from '90 right to now and I don't miss a morning and I keep 4 or 5 packs [inaudible] all the time froze ahead and stuff and I got up this morning and I had my bologna sandwich. And I'm still gonna eat bologna. I got 3 more packs froze in the freezer so when they get down to 2 slices, I grab one, thaw it, and it's just as fresh as can be.

JKW: That's quite a supply.

RD: That's what keeps me going. See? And ah...if I make it through next spring you know, next summer, I'll be 83 and that...that ain't a bad life. And I'm the oldest Dyer out of the 4 brothers that lived right in the cove. I'm the oldest Dyer as there was. They all died 80. That was their limit. And I've made it to 82. See? And that must be the bologna that's kept me going. See? Cause the rest of them all died in their 80s...you know, my father was only 76 when he died. But he died of cigarette...ah...disease. Emphysema. Flooded his heart Dr. Grey [sp?] said. From smoking. And he smoked right up till he died. He didn't quit. Till he died. The day he died. He had cigarette butts in his pocket. Cause I got his shirts. And ah...so ah...he wouldn't give up smoking. It was worth more than life to him. My older brother, same way...he smoked right up till he died. And not me. I quit 20 years ago. See? And eating bologna...givin' up cigarettes and eating bologna kept me going.

JKW: Well, I hope you...I hope you go for a long time.

RD: Well, I do in a way of speaking though. Her sister in Waterville is 93 years old still at home. Alone. Her older aunt, next to the oldest is 86 or 87 in Boston and one of the boys lost his job and everything so he's moved in with his mother in Boston and she's 86. Beverly will be 84 in November. So...I gotta...if she tells me what to do, then I think I can make it. But ah...cause see I never done housekeeping when I was growing up. I didn't have time. Housekeeping...I was always working. I never stopped working. I just retired when I was 81. When I was 81 years old we got a 70 foot hydraulic crane home on the island. My boy had it. I run it all summer long when I was 81 years old, working, setting houses up. See, I just retired last year. When I turned 82...when I come out of the hospital this spring, the doctor said don't go to work for a while. He says, "You just relax and build up strength." So I just retired back you know you know, I'll say last fall, November. See, I never knew what retirement was. I went right one job to

another just as fast as I could go. So I didn't know what retirement was till this last year. And this ain't been no good. I tell you right now it's put too much pressure on me cause I want to work but I can't. See, cause I can't breathe and the infection in my stomach upset the whole apple cart. And I can't breathe good and if I get running around and stuff my legs start bothering a little bit and oh, I'd love to go home and go to work but I can't so that's why I'm over here. It's a hard old pressure on your head thinking I want to be over there with my boats and equipment and everything working with my boy on running the equipment but I can't. Doctor said no. Well now if I'd hurt anybody and the insurance company found out, the doctor said no, my boy would lose everything he's got. See, cause they go by what the doctor says. Not by what you want to do.

JKW: Bob, thank you very much for talking with me today and I wish you all the best as you continue on.

RD: Well, I'm glad to talk to you and to remember some of the stuff that I can remember being my age you know.