

Name of person interviewed: Steve Cassidy [SC]

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 24, 2011

Interviewer: Mike Petillo [MP]

Transcriber: Laura Orleans

Abstract

Steve Cassidy is a self-taught diver who just cannot retire. Steve's recalls not only the tragedy of fishing, but the effect on those who share in it.

Demographic information

Sex: Male

Ethnicity: White

Age: 85

Occupation: Diver

Key words

Role

Shoreside business owner/ operator

General Social and Cultural Characteristics

Family, family roles, family organization

Social and Cultural Characteristics of Fishing

Other social & cultural characteristics of fishing

Business and Economics of Fishing & other Maritime

Shoreside support services

MP Ok it's Saturday December, December wow! September 24th. We're here at the Working Waterfront Festival in New Bedford talking to Steve Cassidy. It's a little after 2PM or 1:30 and yeah Steve's brought in a bunch of historical documents and photographs and articles, we're taking a look at them so what is this first picture here?

SC This is the first one probably. That's me as you can see right there.

MP Bending down there?

SC And this is a rescue that was done at Horseneck Beach in let's see if I can remember '55.

MP And you were life guarding here?

SC I did life guard there. The first year of Horseneck that the, the beach is a surf beach that was taken over by the state. It's a state beach now. And in those days, what happened was there was a bar room at the end of the beach called Spindrift and the guy had a license to run the rest of the year so that first year that they took over the beach which was in July perhaps he was allowed to stay open. So people would go in there and get hammered and then they'd go out in the surf and then they'd try to swim in through a rip and all hell would break loose because they didn't have brains enough to get out of the rip and swim parallel to it and then come in. So it was an interesting year and uh, that's, I was already starting to dive, doing dives and I remember the only thing that shows is that I was pretty capable in the water. That's all

MP Yeah. So you had started, started diving by this point but you were still primarily a life guard.

SC Yeah I was a life guard there at that time.

MP This was 1955.

SC Yeah

MP Ok

SC And that's about all I got to say about it except that's when I started in this stuff.

MP Ok. You know the water was your friend so to speak. You could, you could...

SC I was

MP I was comfortable in it, you were

SC I was a strong swimmer

MP Ok

SC Very strong

MP Ok

SC And it, I like workin' the surf because it was a challenge. A lot of the guys get their credentials in swimmin' pools. And when they get in the surf they get into trouble. When you save somebody in the surf, the problem is you get to 'em and then you gotta get 'em in. So what you do is you run a buoy which you put across yourself and a reel and then you reel out to 'em.

3:00

And then when you get 'em, you either put the strap on them or you go into the carry and then you give the signal and then the guys on the beach pull you in. But when they pull you, they only pull you after the wave breaks and then they pull you until the next wave is about to break and then they stop so that you can rise up with it.

MP Mm hmm

SC And then after the wave breaks over you and they pull again. But sometimes people get over enthused and then they'll pull you in right through it and that's, you hope you get to the beach quick because you know you're trying to hang onto this person and it's a challenge. The state now still has the beach, but they've got all kinds of equipment that we didn't have because we just opened it up. And it was an interesting year. And that's how I got started. This one is, wait a minute, here's, there was a little paper they used to publish in those days on the waterfront and here's a description of what was goin' on.

MP Mmmm

SC So I was gettin' a lot of work. And very little sleep. But at that age, doesn't bother you.

MP Sure.

SC I was lucky that I could, and I never went to a, I never went to dive from any course. I never took a course. I went out and bought the equipment. I was livin' in the housing project, I had one child. I was livin' in the housing project and striving to get out and I went to a place called MacGees which was a chain type of sports store and I bought my equipment for twenty dollars down and twenty dollars a month. And when I got back to the house, my wife was upset. Because she said what did you do that for? I says, this is what I'm gonna do. And she said well I wanted a vacuum cleaner. I said well this'll get you a vacuum cleaner and a house. And it did, eventually. And that's how it all started. It started just because the money you could make teaching school was not very great in those days. Teachers were starting out about three grand a year. And I was a Catholic. And there was something called the rhythm system. And I didn't have rhythm. What I had instead was five kids. Ok. So I am now a, I became an agnostic and finally an atheist because it just didn't make sense to me. And it still doesn't. We're producing children like crazy and no one is figuring out how we're gonna raise 'em.

6:00

And I'm not just talking about the, what people have as their religious beliefs, but we are producing a bumper crop of children who are not getting, properly educated and properly parented. And this is going to be one our biggest problems. It's already our problem, but it's gonna get bigger. Because I was asking about young American boys. Why aren't those American boys down there? Well first of all when I grew up, there were no drugs. I mean people smoked cigarettes. And back then, when you showed up to go off shore, you better be straight because we worked on gear going out. The chain bags didn't come made up. Your twine tops didn't come made up. We made 'em goin' out. We worked all the way out and all the way back. So the industry has changed a great deal and you know, you can talk about the good old days maybe they weren't so good, but here's a piece I put in the paper which got this boat is now tied up at Pier 3 and if you take a minute and read it you see what I was askin'.

7:23-8:05 Silence while reading

MP Yeah so this article is about keeping a ship for a, an exhibit, would you say?

SC Well

MP A working demonstration, would you say?

SC Yeah. Not steaming her or anything else.

MP Right

SC The reason that vessel is

MP And we're talking about the Columbia

SC Yes. The reason that vessel is out of days, 'cause one she's wood, she's 26 years old, but she does not have modern hydraulics. The winches are different from the winches used now. And only a few old guys would probably be comfortable with them. But she's a good, she could still go fishing right now. She's a very good sea boat. And she's just outmoded. And so she went for three million dollars.

9:00

She's being offered for a hundred and twenty five thousand. The only way anybody will buy that boat would be if you figured out, if we junk her out, we take the engine and all of it's saleable, useable gear off her, can we recoup our money and make a profit and the answer is no. At least my son and I who's in the welding business on the waterfront, we sat down and figured it out because if I could think, if I could figure out a way that I would end up with enough money to make it worthwhile, then I'd, I'd do it. I could afford to do it. But it won't work. The figures just don't match up. But this boat belongs to a guy named Dan Eilertsen. He's got six boats over here. I used to work for his father, Harkon. Harkon was called Hank, but Harkon was the name of the Norwegian king. And he had a boat called Barnacle Bill. And I worked for his son Dan for awhile, but

there's no way that this boat is going to go fishing again because fishing is now restricted. They paid three million dollars for the papers. That's all. And he immediately went out and bought a steel boat. Ok. He now owns I think six boats. But if he were to give her to a non-profit deal, like the City, he could probably do better than a hundred and twenty five thousand dollars. Because the way those non-profit deals work and everything else, if you get to the right, if you know how to write an appeal, ok and you get to the right agency, then you may get five hundred thousand or two-hundred fifty thousand and they could save her. Now have you been down to Fort Tabor at all? Fort Tabor is right on the promontory standing out Clark's Point. If you, this is New Bedford Harbor, and there's this promontory sticking out, couple of several miles and then the other side is Clark's Cove so it's like a finger sticking out here. And down at the end there used to be a fort that is outmoded that is Fort Rodman. It had big heavy artillery guns when they still had artillery. And they want to put a monument down there and where they want to put the monument there's a sign a proposed monument to fishermen with one hundred and ten feet or a hundred feet roughly north there is a small stone pier, not a pier a slip, dock face. That was built back in the 60s, early 60s when I was doing the work on the hurricane barrier.

12:00

And Parhini put it in there and it's all dimension stone, beautifully fitted and then it's got six piles there and there's room enough to fit a 92 foot vessel, barely in there. And right now I've already checked the water level in there and there's about eight feet when we did the job way back then. [some type of interference, phone ringing?] Now it's silted in there's about five feet. But you could clean that out. And you could get that vessel in there and there she would stay. I'm not staying you steam her or anything. Now she's inside what's in Fort Tabor. And people pay five dollars to drive a car full of people in there. And there'd be the monument here and then a hundred feet away from all of it would be the Columbia and they could do just what they're doing down here today. Take people aboard, take them down the foc'scle let them look around, take them in the engine room, show them the fish hold. Maybe crank her up and run the winches, show them how the dredges go up and down and it would be a participatory experience instead of just standing blankly on the dock and looking at fishing boats. All the time I've been working down here in the summertime, you see tourists come down, right? They walk onto the dock, you can spot 'em immediately because you know of the way they're dressed and everything and they stand there and they look around. And they're looking at dead fishing boats. Nothing's going on. You've got three deep and four deep sitting there. And they look, they have no conception of what they're looking at, nothing. They don't know anything. They just look. And they look around for a couple of minutes like this is it? And then they scoot off the dock and that's the end of it. There's no way that they, they have little boat that runs around in the summertime that can show you oh there's the doors, there's a boat takin' out, but they have no way of actually knowing what fishermen have to do for a living or how the whole business works. It's like the cemetery of dead boats. So anybody who wants to get a tourist attraction in New Bedford has got to conquer that. You got all these fishing vessels here, but you've got them at the dock. Nothing's happening. And when you look at it. If you don't know something about fishing, you don't even know what the hell you're lookin' at. So it's a waste to, a

tremendous waste. Now if you read here, the Morgan was the last of the whaler's, ok. She had a tremendous record and they saved her and she was put at Colonel Green's Estate. Colonel Green's Estate is in Dartmouth and it's on a promontory that sticks out called Round Hill

15:00

because it looks round in profile. And he had a big estate there. He was Heddy Green's son. And they had a bizillion dollars. And he had an airfield there that he made. He had the first radio and he used to let people come down there and listen to the radio when it was a brand, I'm talkin' 1920s, so. And then he took the Morgan and he actually made a slip in there and put her right in there, built for that purpose. And my father happened to work on the, this is the depression times now, things are tough. My father happened to work on here helping rig her, okay? And I have a picture somewhere of me like four years old on her, or maybe younger. Anyway, she was there and she was a splendid thing. Now what happened was this, 1936, Colonel Green died. His big house on Round Hill was still there. Magnificent mansion. And the Morgan sat there from '36 to '38 when we had a hurricane. She got somewhat damaged but not seriously. And then from '38 onward she sat there. Now there was a guy named Henry Naylor. Yeah Henry Naylor who I know the name, but I don't know much more about him. He tried to save her. He formed an organization called Whaling Enshrined. And he tried to collect money, ironically from all of the people who made their money in whaling and then smartly invested it in the textile industry and New Bedford of course was the premier textile city in the United States at one time along with Fall River. But the people wouldn't come up with the money. It was bad times, they were scared. But, so what happened was in 1941, November 8th, the Morgan was towed to Mystic Connecticut. Now if you go down to Mystic Connecticut, that is the premier drawing card. We disavowed our heritage and the thing is the people who actually had money, there was still money around you know, everybody wasn't poor. There was still money there, old money, that ironically got it's origin in the whaling industry and they wouldn't part with it. Now it wouldn't have cost a hell of a lot to keep it here in those days, but deep pockets and short fingers. Right? Wouldn't do it. So she ended up in Mystic Connecticut. Now the same thing is gonna happen here with this vessel. And ten years from now after she's junked out, somebody will have a brain cramp and say, we should have kept the Columbia. So I'm trying to forestall that. Now what's in it for me?

18:00

Nothin', nothin' at all. I just think that we're losing our history. Our kids don't even know, the kids going to school today don't know nothing about World War II, Korea, Vietnam or anything else. They can't even, some kids in grammar school can't tell you what state they're in. I mean it's amazing they don't teach history anymore very much or geography. They seem to be teach feel good esteem. I want you to be, I want you to have self esteem. You can be ignorant as hell, but as long as you think you're one of the esteemed children, then that's wonderful. Huggie, kissy, feely, morony. Ok? That's my opinion and I used to be a school teacher.

MP Yeah I wanted to ask about that definitely at some point about your teaching career and also obviously your diving career two very different things, but maybe, maybe there's similarities and crossovers in terms of stuff that you've learned and dealing with people

SC Not really. I got into something else because when I first started teaching, men were just beginning to come into the teaching system as a result of the GI Bill. Now, every man that I knew was married, newly married, but whatever. 'Cause we were all young then comparatively. And every one had a summer job. They ran, drove bread trucks or did anything. And everybody had a side job. Guy in the next room sold encyclopedias for Christ sake. Everybody had a job because they were starting to raise families and they could not survive on their teaching income by itself. And because in those days we were, what's the word I wanna use? We were testosterone oriented so we were all punching out babies like you wouldn't believe. In those days, families had three kids, four kids, five kids, six kids and it was common. And in those days, there was a stigma on, if you were a man and were the bread winner, then your wife would be at home with the kids. In those days, they talked about latch key children, you know what they are? And the idea was if you were a man you were gonna make enough money to support your wife and children and when you add a bunch of kids and she's doin' three loads of laundry a day, she's gotta stay home to raise the kids and that's the way it was supposed to be.

21:00

So what happened was all of us were pressed to find an outside job. And so I found an outside job and I found somethin' I could do and I went to my strengths. I mean nobody's gonna pay, a life guard didn't pay shit. In the summertime? The girls were plentiful, but the pay was lousy. And so consequently, every guy was running to whatever strength he could find and I don't fault them for that. They were good teachers. And they were hard working and they were most of them were pretty idealistic and they tried to do a good job, but teaching has never been well respected. It has more prestige in other countries than it does here. And it pays ok now, much better than it did, but in those days, it didn't pay well. And so consequently, if you were making three or four thousand dollars a year which sounds like peanuts today, you could scrape by. But you didn't wanna scrape by. You had kids. Who's gonna buy the ten speed bike? So everybody, every teacher that I know was hustling, he was a hustler. And some of them worked after school at one job or another. And some of 'em, everybody worked all summer long, everybody. So consequently, some stayed and some found a better income stream and went for it. And that's what happened when we figured out, first job that I made any money on was on a vessel called the Katie D. And I bought the equipment and I was gonna go, I knew the fishing fleet was not using divers, but in those days nobody thought of that. So what I thought was wait a minute, I could do some of this stuff. So I was on the pier and nosing around and the Katie D. came in, she was towed in big wooden dragger with Newfoundlanders aboard. We had a lot of Newfoundlanders, they were good fishermen. They were the first ethnic group that came here. And they came from a hard scrabble country, Newfoundland. Right? So consequently when they came from Newfoundland, they were ready to go to work and work hard. And they made good livings, comparatively. So this boat got towed in, she's tied up at the dock, I found out she got a

net over the wheel, and I think hey. I walked up to one of the crew and I said hey, I bet I can get that net out of your wheel. I'm a diver. I anointed myself. I'm a diver.

24:00

And he says ah boy, no, boy. My son, you can't do that. And I says well I'll tell you what, if I can't do it you don't pay me. He says, oh, ok. So I went in the water. Two hours later I had it out. They were happy as clams at high tide. And they said what do I owe you boy? And I says off the top of my head, forty dollars. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Forty dollars for two hours? A gigantic light bulb went off in my head and I said, I think I'm into something. And that's when I started. And then I chased it like hell. Now there were divers around, but nobody was, they were sport divers, they went out and looked at wrecks and stuff like that. But they weren't down on the docks lookin' to make a dollar. And the only reason I got into it was I was there to make a buck, any damn way I could. So that was it. That's how I got started. And then I got guys workin' for me and I got a tug, small tug, fifty foot, put her up on the ways and worked on her couple years and got her in shape and then I started pullin' boats in because when a boat breaks down, the Coast Guard won't bring her into the dock, because they did a few times and they had damage and it was just no. So they brought 'em as far as a place called Brooklyn Rock, Green Flash out here about five miles. And then a commercial vessel had to pick them up, take 'em in and put 'em to the dock. And that's how I got into it. And then so, I tow 'em into the dock and sometimes it'd be a diving job on it and then I'd get the diving job as well. So I could see, I could see money there and it was all about money. It wasn't about anything else. Anyone said to me, you love diving? I don't love diving, it's a job. You know? Now I've done a lot of sport diving with my wife and it's fun, but I'm not a tree hugger. Oh, look at that yellow bellied sap sucker over there! Yeah ok. Oh there's a shark! Yeah ok. Just don't bother 'em. What do you think of these sponges and...Ok But after you are a spectator for a certain amount of time, for example we've been to Grand Canyon and rode the mules down and did all, everything you could think of, done white water rafting and the whole bit. And it's ok. But it's not for real. So after awhile, you start, I mean how many buffalos can you look at? Right? You take pictures of buffalos. You bet. We took pictures of everything. We never even look at the damn things. We can't even remember how many vacations we've been on. I ask her, when were we in Saber Island? She remembers bein' there, marvelous diving there, but we can't remember the year.

27:00

It all runs together. If you went through the, we never dated the pictures, if you went in the drawer and started looking, you'd say when was this one taken? Well I don't know, what the hell is that? So you get to a certain point and vacations are nice, but if you work hard all your life and you don't have any hobbies, you don't play golf, you don't play tennis, you don't hang out with the guys, you're not a drinker, and you don't collect stamps, all of a sudden you're sittin' there sayin' now what? Now what? And so I went back to work. And people think I probably, probably think I'm nuts. And I'm, I haven't got as many customers as I had, I've just gone back to work recently, two months ago, but it's pickin' up and in the middle of winter when it's rotten, miserable, cold and rainy or snowin' like a bastard, I'll show up and I stick with you till the job is done and if you ask

me why I do that it's cause I'm hungry. I've always been hungry. I grew up in the third floor tenement and there was two papers in New Bedford, the Morning Mercury and the Standard Times. Now this dates me because its going back about '42, no '39 maybe. And I had a route with 75 papers at night, the Standard Times in the afternoon. Now you're allowed to have one paper route. But there was the Morning Mercury and I had a chance to get another route in the morning. I thought how can I do this? So what I did was I used my mother's name which was Doyle. So I had Cassidy in the afternoon and Doyle in the morning. And I used to get on my bike at five o'clock and ride down to Weld Square where they dropped off the papers, get my papers, go in the diner there and get a cup of coffee and a donut like a big man and drink my coffee and eat my donut, deliver my papers, back home, get into my school clothes, and away I went. And everybody in our neighborhood was poor. It was a poor Irish ghetto only we, the word ghetto wasn't common in those days. We were all poor, but I didn't feel poor because everybody around me was in the same boat. And nobody ever used the word the poor. It wasn't used. And not only wasn't it used, everybody knew everybody else and the neighborhood was a pretty strict place. If you screwed up, we were playing football in the street one day I lived at 99 Hazard Street on the third floor. And cop came by. Beat cop. And he said, no boys, no, no football.

30:00

So we knew that. Officer's name was Sweeney. We says, yes Mr. Sweeney. So we stopped playing. Sweeney goes around the corner. [mimes passing the ball] Sweeney's not stupid, guess what he comes back. Guess what? Who owns the football? Me. Give me the football. I gave him the football. He says I'll give it back to your father. I thought, oh shit. Now he knew my father, my father knew him. I didn't see that football again 'till the next football season. My father said, you know what this is? I said, yeah. He says, you know why I got it? Yeah. He said, I'm puttin' it in the closet. There's where it stays. The neighborhood policed itself. And the kids, we weren't little wimps, don't get us wrong, we weren't wimps, but when you can't have a society that works unless it has a common ethos. Without the common ethos, you got nothin'. Diversity is a mirage. A society that is too diverse has not common set of rules. And that common set of rules and the conformity to those rules holds society together. As soon as everything is free for all, then whose rule are they gonna obey. Well...A friend of mine a fisherman had a son, this is twenty years ago and in those days the kids were starting to get a little antsy. The kid was 18 years old and gave his father a ration of gov and he said the line used then was well I didn't ask to be born. His father looked at him and said, neither did I. You were an accident. And the kids went right like this. And I laughed like hell. Because 90, probably, 50 percent of our children are accidents. I don't recall ever saying to myself, oh tonight we're going to make a baby, like we're gonna bake a cake? This is garbage. I mean there's so much bullshit around, right? Planned parenthood, how much parenthood is planned? Do you really believe this crap? I don't. And I'm old enough to have seen it all and now we have people who are models that we look up to and what are they? I once asked a class I had, I taught science, I had a class and I asked them who Dr. Jonas Salk was. And they were?

33:00

I said well he, thanks to him, he developed the first polio vaccine. But if I asked them the name of a rock star, or a movie star or somebody of that nature an athlete, they'd know it in a minute. So we hold up the wrong models. And then we wonder why they emulate them. Think about that. The other thing is this. You have a family arrangement. We're gonna have a nice evening. We're gonna stay home. And we all stay home and we put the television on. And we all sit there and watch the television. Now tell me how much interaction is goin' on there. You open your mouth and Quiet I can't listen. So what is a family evening? You might as well go to the movies and watch the movie. Because the children don't interact with their parents as much. The children have a whole sense of communication, whole method of communication that their parents know nothing about. They have cars they are mobile. When I went to high school nobody had a car. We walked to football practice; we walked home, blah, blah. Nobody had a car. The idea of every kid owning a car and driving to school was insane. So we have no control and the term bringing up your children is never used anymore. We used to say, parents would say that's a well brought up kid. Brought up? What is he brain dead? I'm talking too much. '

MP No, no. Not at all. I wanna make sure that we get talking specifically a little bit about some of the diving and you know how it interacts 'cause

SC I ran my mouth there. Sorry about that. I was...

MP You don't have to be sorry about anything. This thing can hold everything. I just wanna make sure we get, we're good, we're totally good Steve. What I was thinking of is just trying to trace a little bit of the timeline here. So you were teaching in a school and then as your summer job you were life guarding?

SC Yeah.

MP Ok and then you made the transition into full time, into living in the water all the time and workin' on the docks and workin' as part of the working waterfront as opposed to being in the classroom.

SC Yeah.

MP Ok. So...

SC But I went, see my period of fishing was in, before that. Ok. It was in the early 50s.

MP Alright.

SC After I, while I was in college and when I got out of college I went fishing for a couple years and then I went back and got a teaching job to be, I don't know what the hell they thought it was gonna be, I thought it was, the thing I was told, get this, you know it's weird how decisions are made.

36:00

And you can look back on your life and say, oh Jesus, I turned to the left and I should have turned to the right. I had a prof that I respected a great deal. And he was in a dismal course called economics. And it was something you had to take so I took it. And this guy was a former Navy pilot and this was just after the war and so we respected him and everything else. He was good. And he asked what's the most important crop we raise in this country? Oh, soy beans, corn, bluh, bluh, bluh. After everybody went at it he says, the most important crop we raise in this country is children. And a light went on in my head. I felt, I felt, it's true. Being a teacher would be a good deal. If you really cared about it. And I think that's why I veered in that direction. But remarks like that, you run into a professor somewhere in your life or a teacher somewhere in your life and that one magic moment they get through to you and it can do it a pivot. Sometimes a good one. And it was as far as I'm concerned I think teaching's a noble profession. And I think it's vastly under-rated. Anyway go ahead, you were asking.

MP Oh, so but the transition from, so you had some fishing background, you had done enough fishing, a little bit there and that combined with a desire to support your family, support yourself, make a good living, put you into diving full time.

SC Yeah. But something happened before that. I was also, see I'm searching, okay? I mean it, so what happened was after I was fishing, I got into a business called the shack fish business. I don't know if you know how that works. I'll explain it. When a boat comes in, let's say a scalloper, she not only has scallops, but as a by-catch, at certain seasons of the year, she'll pick up a fair amount of fish. Now understand the regulations in those days were not like they are today, suffocating. A scalloper would bring in fish. A dragger, might, where she's fishing, get a whole, couple of thousand pounds of lobsters. So this was the by-catch. Now when you went to the door to sell your fish, your scallops to the dealer, the dealer would not give you the same price for your fish as he gave the draggers.

39:00

Ostensibly because your fish were not as good. In fact they were better, because when fish go into a cod end, if you're catching a lot of fish, they get squeezed out pretty good. But when the scalloping, that dredge is gonna come up about every hour and you're gonna have scallops in there and maybe some rocks and whatever, but you're gonna have fish and when that dredge comes upside down and you dump 'em on deck, those fish are gonna be alive in many cases, flappin' around. Now, you have a barrel on deck with salt water in it and you throw them in the barrel. Now at the end of the watch, every six hours, they open the hatch and they put the scallops down. They've been washed and bagged and they go down. And that's when they put the fish down. They ice 'em up properly and everything else. So those fish in some ways are actually superior to the fish that were caught the first day in a dragger or the second day in a dragger. Especially if they were taken alive. But the dealer, being dealers would knock 'em down two cents or so. So what we did was, a group of people grew up called shack, they called 'em night riders, 'cause you spent most of your time out there at night waiting for the boats to come in to catch them early in the morning before they sold at eight o'clock. And so I got into a

business with another guy named Billy Desmond who was extremely bright young kid and there as Dave Dolinsky and there was another guy Breezy Avila and the three of us would be down there vying every day to go aboard these boats and buy their by-catch which could be lobsters, which could be fish. And we would pay them cash. Now the beautiful thing about that for the fishermen is when he settled up he got a check, but the shack was cash. He could stick it in his pocket and Uncle didn't know. Now depending on the season of the year, the amount he could make from that shack fish could be pretty big. He might come in with a thousand pounds of lobsters. In those days they were selling for maybe 45, 47 cents a pound, but it added up to good money in those days. So you'd go aboard a boat with the other shack buyers that you were competing with, there were only three of us, and you'd make a bid on what he had. And Dolinsky who owns a restaurant, his son owns a restaurant down here was the big shack dealer. He would buy most of it. You had to be careful, if you bid against him, he'd bid it up so high and then he'd drop it on you. He let you have it, now you got, Jesus I got two thousand pounds of lobsters, we didn't have any refrigeration. So everything had to be gotten rid of right away.

42:00

So this was the shack fish business. And I got into that for the very same reason I was on the waterfront to begin with. I was looking to make a dollar any way I could. And we made some pretty decent money. We'd buy the lobsters, we'd buy the fish and we sold them primarily to restaurants. And we always had, everyone had to have a dealer where if he couldn't sell the stuff, he could dump it on the dealer for less money so then he didn't. So then he didn't. So we'd walk around with a thousand dollars in cash in our pockets. And we'd buy what we could in the morning that we felt we could sell. And then we'd sell it and go onto the next day. Luckily I didn't need much sleep 'cause I was down here all the time. And so you see what happened was I went from a teaching situation to the shack fish business to diving. And it was all about one thing, if there had been a better way to make money, I'd have been right at it. But there wasn't so I went at this.

43:06

End of tape

Interview Part 2

Henry are gone, are going or gone. People like me won't be around much longer. Everything that happened back then is lost. So what I started doing was, my wife says why don't you write a book? And I said I don't think I have it in me. It takes too much effort and blah, blah, blah, blah. And I'm not a professional writer and bah, bah, bah. However I started looking back at things that I knew about the fishing fleet and I can remember so many poignant stories that no one will ever hear and know that really get the essence of how this business works. You go up to the Seaman's Bethel and you look at the cenotaphs and ok, that's there right? There's a guy's name there. But what isn't behind that name is the wife and kids and everybody else who never got closure. He's out there still sailing in that vessel. I'll give you one example. Just one. There was a guy named Donald Correia called "Sunny". He was a friend of mine. He was wounded, was a marine, he was wounded on Okinawa, I believe. He came home, got discharged and he wasn't disabled. And he went fishing. He was a scalloper. He went out with a girl named Anasatia Anamese. They lived up in the housing project up in the west part of the city. She was absolutely beautiful, Greek girls can be beautiful. She had a sister who was beautiful too. He and she were engaged. They were going to be married in about a month. He came in from the trip in 1950 that was 61 years ago. And he lived on Cedar Street in New Bedford. And he went home and his family had chicken pox I think it was and in those days they used to quarantine you. So he couldn't go home. He was going to get married in three weeks. What the hell was he gonna do? Well what happened was he went back to the dock. And there was a boat named the William J. Landry. It didn't fish all year. Fished mainly in the good weather. And it had just been overhauled and blah, blah, blah. Was partly owned by Kelly's Shipyard. And the Norwegian skipper who owned it. And it was short a man. They didn't always go out with eleven men, sometimes they took less. Anyway there were eight men on that boat and she went fishing. This is April, beginning of spring right? A terrible gale came up around April 4th, heavy snow, tremendous wind. And what happened was, this boat was coming back through the slew and she got near the lightship and her engine quit. The Hornbeam, a Coast Guard Cutter tried to get to her, but understand in those days they didn't have radar. And in a blizzard, they saw them and they lost them and couldn't get a line aboard. So that boat drifted back into the shoals and all the men were lost. Pieces of the boat were found later but that was it. No man was ever found. So this is what happened to Sonny Correia. He outlived the war, got wounded on Okinawa, came home, got engaged to be married and this is what happened. So there's a girl left behind. Now I'm gonna tell you the rest of the story and you'll think this is, I made it up but I didn't. The sister who was the same age or very close her name was Athena Anamese. She was going out with a fisherman named Jerry Bishop. Jerry Bishop was on the Bobby and Harvey, a scalloper. In those days, the dredges were made in such a way that the bag went right up to what's called the edge of the dredge. In other words it wasn't a big bite like this one. And when the dredge came aboard, the guy on the winch head, the winches aren't like are today, you had four turns and you were takin' this up with a four part tackle. And you had to swing it aboard and when it came in far enough so you could drop it over the rail, took the turns off real quick and down she came. Well the man forward would grab the dredge when she came in like that and when they started to drop it, he would put his weight on it and bring it down. So that it wouldn't land like this inside. Well what happened is the vessel

took a queer roll, she took a sea and the dredge which was coming in and this guy was hanging on to it to bring it down, it whipped back out like this and pulled him overboard. He fell down between the dredge and the boat. The dredge came back and bingo. He's dead. This happened the trip before Christmas. Everybody made a Christmas trip and then came in for Christmas. So here's the second sister, loses the same. And I don't know what ever happened to her. I know that this happened. So these two sisters, both lost men at sea. And the second sister was pregnant with Jerry Bishop's child. Now if I told that story to somebody, they'd say you made it up. But I didn't make it up. This port is filled with more tragedies then you can possibly imagine. I'll give you another one. This is the same year that these two happened. They happened in April. In May, a small trash boat is running through he harbor to go for trash fish. One ran into the other in the dock, she went down and two men, it's three men on her, two got out, one drowned. Right here in the harbor. That's May. Let's see what happened after that? Oh, September. September we had a hurricane. Don't forget what time, this is no good surveys, I mean you'd get something on the set but it was on you before you knew it. There were a lot of boats out there. What happened was one boat, the Theresa R got lost. She had eleven men on her and the last message they got from her was that the boat was sinking. She was like a hundred miles east of Nantucket and the men were getting into the dories. In those days, they didn't have good life rafts or anything else. They had two dories out behind the wheelhouse. Right? Now those dories were often dried out. They weren't taken care of very well. There were no rules back then. The plug was out of the thing so it wouldn't hold rain water. Everything you didn't need you stuck in the dory. So there's the two dories up there. They didn't have long davits so that the dory could swing out and put in the water. You had the davit, you had block and tackle, but you pulled it out and then tried to get the dory down into the water. The tackles were always right in the way of the exhaust would corrode the hell out of the rope, so these were accidents looking for a place to happen. And understand there were no marine inspections or anything else. It was every man for themselves. Those were the wild west of the ocean. And the last message they got from the Theresa R was that the men, all of the men were getting into two ten foot dories. Two ten foot dories. Impossible. There was a hearing afterward and one fisherman who I respected very much, a guy named Shirley Mitchell who was skipper and owner of the Lubin Ray, said your only chance would have been if two men had been in a dory by themselves with a sea anchor so that she'd just ride like this. But the idea of putting all of them, the men were never found. A body turned up off Maine somewhere. In that same storm, another vessel, the Mary Ellen Russel got driven ashore by Chatham. Luckily the Coast Guard was able to drop a couple of rafts to them, because they were in shoal water and couldn't get in. And they used the rafts to make their way to shore and so they survived. The vessel was totally wiped out. Now let's sea Mary Ellen Russel, who happened, what happened after that? Fred Henry, there was one before that. Fred Henry. Oh, a sharker, two man boat lookin' for sharks in those days. And they started to sink off No Man's and managed to get in on the beach. Their boat was wrecked. But they got to the beach and they were on No Man's Island for five days before anyone knew they were missin' and picked them up. Last day of the year. Last day of the year. December 31st. A boat named the Fred Henry, four men, dragger starts sinking for no reason. And they got it to No Man's and the men, one guy swam in with the line, a hundred yards, and the other three guys managed to get so they were on the

island. And they all got, they all survived. Now on all those boats that I mentioned, and I'm thinking is there one other? The net total was 60 men involved, one more. The other boat was the Alice M. Hathaway. She was the biggest one of the lot but she'd been built in 1916, she was old. They just put a new engine in her. There were twelve men aboard her. She caught fire in the engine room. Now understand they didn't have what they have today they can use use ? into the engine room and kill the fire. The boat was burning furiously, the twelve guys were gonna lose it. Okay, they were gonna die. Two fishing boats come alongside him, hard weather, the Mary Cannis and the Ulva. And they met. These guys jumped into the water. The guys on these fishing boats tied a line around themselves and got into the water to grab these guys and help 'em get aboard. They saved all twelve men. Okay? And then we have the last one which was the last day of the year. Oh, that one sank in December too, early December. The last day of the year, the Fred Henry starts leaking, goes aground on, the put her aground on No Man's Land same place the sharkers guys ended up and they got, they get in on the beach and they start a fire. They managed, somebody got ashore with something they could light a fire with and they were picked up the same day. Okay? Now stop and figure out, that's eight boats in one freakin' year!

MP What year was this again?

SC 1950. Eight boats in one year and the total, some total of men were 60 men. Thirty were lost and thirty were saved. That's one freakin' year. Now when you go down here and look at all this gaity goin' on, there are spectors out here of missing boats and missing men. You lose thirty men, ok, now these thirty men didn't exist in a vacuum. They all had families. So think of the tragedy and total disruption and nobody ever talks about. So you look at a cenotaph and there's a bunch of names on it, you don't hear the tears. Those stories I told you are just a few. I can tell you others.

MP Yeah. I mean that's part of I think this aspect of I think with the festival going on right now it's maybe for the sake of everyone they don't want to necessarily always publish the dark side of the thing

SC But nobody even knows this happened.

MP Yeah but part of the, I think part of the reason is, we're doing this interviews is to definitely document it 'cause some of the questions that we ask to probe what are the close call people had on boats, what are the, what's the down side of this whole thing and we're talking not only just who you work with, or experiences you had but the people you know.

SC Sure

MP So that is something that I think people are definitely trying to document because it is not publicized a lot for sure. They want to focus on a lot of the other aspects of this.

SC No question the business is much safer now.

MP Yeah

SC Much safer, but in those days there were no regulations. Now some regulations are good for safety and everything else. But now the fishing fleet has been managed in such a way by the government that you can't get, for example, suppose you wanted to get into the scalloping business. You gotta, this guy had to spend three million dollars just to get the papers, the boat, pst, nothing! He'd probably give it away any way he can. And yet the same thing goes for dragging. This sector thing is killing this dragger fleet.

MP What's the sector thing, let's talk about this.

SC The sector thing is that boat now are grouped into sectors of fishing effort. And that limits the number of days that they can fish. And if they want to fish more than the days they have which is based on their past history, they have to buy them from somebody else who has more days. Now one guy in particular has bought up a great many boats that were doing poorly and blah, blah, blah. Paid good money for 'em, perfectly fair and square. No disrespect to him for doing anything wrong. But now he's a day merchant. You got forty fishing days. It's not enough days for a dragger. I mean this is a crap shoot business. So you need days. So you purchase ten days from him or twelve days or whatever. He charges you so much a day for those days. And the crew pays for the days by the way. The crew, that comes out of their piece of the action. You understand how the thing works? It's a share system. The crew pays for the ice, the fuel, the grub and so forth, right? And now they pay for the days too. So this business is, it's being run by the regulations will be straightened out eventually due to Brian Rothschild down here, because they're starting now to get more accurate scientifically based research which shows what the resource actually can stand. Up until now, most of the regulations have come from people who have very little knowledge of what's going on out there. And as a result, our draggers are taking a whipping. They're taking a hell of a whippin'. I mean they're just not, the rules are such that if you have a limited number of fishing days, and they're not enough you gotta buy some and hopefully you get on fish and you end up making a profit. But the thing about the whole business is it's being managed over managed by our government. And it's only recently that the fishing industry has gotten itself together and started to use lawyers and lobbyists to fight back. But up until recently, the scallopers are doing famously, they are making more money than they ever made. But the draggers, the draggers are starting to come back some, but another thing is consolidation of the fleet. Eventually, it looks to me like three or four, there'll be three or four companies that own all the boats. At one time, if a man owned one boat, that was it. Or two boats, that was it. Or Captain John Hurley back in the old days owned about six boats and he was considered to be a big industry power. Now you've gotta accumulate boats and that's the only way it's gonna be viable so you've got about three different groups, three different people, or three different organizations that are going to eventually end up owning the majority of the fleet. And it's like the automobile industry back in the 1920s there were like 20 automobile companies and slowly but surely got picked off boom, boom, boom. And you ended up with the big three. Same thing's gonna happen here. And I liked it better the old way. The old way was a guy could come in and make

enough money to buy a piece of a boat and then maybe he bought his partner out or whatever and then he owned the boat. And on that one boat he could make a living for the rest of his life and employ a number of other men. So it doesn't work that way any more 'cause you just can't get in. In the old days you could change over, any time you wanted. If you were scalloping and things weren't going well, you could switch over to dragging. You didn't have to get any permits. Or if you were dragging and you thought scalloping would be a good idea, you switched over. Nobody said you could or you couldn't you just did it. And the freedom that this industry had, made it very attractive to people who are individualistic. Now you stop and think about who got into the fishing industry to begin with. The Newfoundlanders came here, the Portuguese came here in two different waves, the Norwegians came here and a bunch of Latvians came here. Now what is there in common about all these people? One thing. They were all individual who are willing to take a chance. The ones who wanted to be safe and secure stayed in the old country and put up with Salazar, the dictator of Portugal or put up with whatever. They all came when their countries were doing poorly and they said the Latvians came because the Russians took over. Some of 'em sailed over here. Anyway the point is they were all risk takers. They were all individualistic and they were all the kind of take a chance and let's go for it. The fishing fleet was, Jesus! Just what I was made to do. Right? Take a chance. Go for it. And they did and they prospered. It was the American dream all over again. It was like the west before they started fencing it in. And this is what happened. And now slowly but surely they're being, they're being tamed. They're being tamed. Slowly but surely and eventually it's my prediction, I may not live to see it, but they will become, they will work for wages. The share system will go. The share system will go and it worked crazily. You take, you got ten boats or twelve boats and you say ok I'm going to pay the skippers so much and say look, I'm going to give you 90,000 dollars a year. You just go when I tell you to go, come when I tell you come. Alright? I'll take care of your insurance and everything else. Now you go to another fire eater that's got possibilities and you say, Manny or Tony or whatever, you're gonna go mate with him. And you're gonna make 75,000 dollars a year. That's guaranteed. Security. I pay your insurance, da, dee dee, da, da, da, da. Ok. Now you pay the crew, what guarantee 'em fifty grand a year maybe, all insurance taken care of. And that's it. That's the way it used to be with the beam trawlers in Boston. When they got radios the owners were very happy because the owners could look at the market and say hey come home. Well I'll only have to come home because they knew what the market was gonna do and they didn't care so much about the volume. So they did what they were told. And that's what's gonna happen eventually with this industry. The share system will disappear. And something else is already happening. Guys like me are gonna disappear. I'm a free agent. So are the other divers. So my son, a welder, he's a free agent. At one time, the entire waterfront had a group of carpenters, welders, riggers, divers, painters and so forth. All little outfits. But today if you go up here to Eastern Fishery, that's Roy Enoksen, he has not only got a slew of boats, mostly scallopers, and a tremendously well run organization, he tremendously successful, has his own ice plant, has his own welders, he has his own everything. So they expanded horizontally and vertically and that's what's going to happen because it's happening right now. If you go down here and look at Carlos Rafael. Very successful man, very bright, bright man. These guys are all smart, they didn't get there by accident. He has his own welding crew. Now I know what kind

of money they're making and it ain't great. But he doesn't bust 'em too hard. My son has to work like a bastard to make it because he's working for a guy at a higher rate per hour and the guy is standing there watching him. My son has a guy working for him and the guy turns out to be standing around lightin' cigarettes instead of burnin' rod. The owner or the skipper will be over and say get that man off my boat. I ain't payin' you. So it used to be fishing on the shares and it used to be that they were a lot of small operators doing all kinds of different things. And this made the port very flexible. It made it a great port because if you had credit or money, you could pick up the phone and call me at three o'clock in the mornin' and my ass would be down there like that. Same thing for my son, same thing for everybody else. Because we were flexible. We would do it, whatever we had, and of course there was competition. If I didn't get down there, somebody else was gonna. That's gonna go. What's gonna happen is, you're gonna end up with three or four big outfits that have expanded vertically and horizontally and the individual diver is gonna be gone, the individual welder is gonna be gone. The individual rigger is gonna be gone. Everybody's gonna have their own people working for wages. And from an efficient point of view, from the point of view of the corporation, that make sense and that's what's gonna happen. This is kind of like, this is like the end of the wild west. What you're lookin' at now, you come back ten years from now, it's not gonna look like this. Not a chance. It's the American way. Right? The American way.

MP Yeah so, so in terms of the share system, what are the, aside from flexibility, and kind of that competition, what are the benefits of being part of a system where the share system comes into play as opposed to wage systems for people who don't know and can't figure it out?

SC Profit. It's, when a boat goes out of here, they have to put the product in the hold and if you don't do that, you don't make anything. Or you make very little. I mean, when I was a single guy and I was making in those days about two hundred bucks a trip, for a single guy they were big dollars, big donuts. Eight days fishing, day coming, day going, four days ashore, bingo. Now the way the system works is, it still works the same way, if you don't get the product, your, I can remember makin' a trip, I made a hundred and twenty eight dollars for like I don't know fourteen days or somethin' like that. I can't remember, but, I mean you, sometimes, you're out and let's say you get a hurricane warning comin' up the coast. So in those days if you had a hundred bags in the hold, that was the break even point. You were allowed to take eleven thousand gallons, forty pound bags. A hundred bags meant in those days that the expenses that you paid and the boat paid, were paid for. Now you started to make money. So if you're out there on a four days and you had a hundred bags for example in the hold and you got a bad storm warning and you decide to go home, that was a broker, and that's exactly what you called it, a broker. Or if the boat broke down, had to get towed in. That's a broker. Nobody even gets, you don't get a dime. So it's based upon the share system is based upon workin' your butt off. And havin' a good efficient boat that doesn't break down, that doesn't have trouble and a smart skipper who knows what he's doin'. So it's an incentive, it's a meritocracy. It's the best kind of meritocracy in a way that there is. Because if you cannot do it successfully, you're, you're phased out. And that's the way it works. Now the other way is you get security. You're makin' so much a year and that's it. And your

insurance is taken care of and so on and so forth. And you lose part of your initiative in that the owner tells you where he wants you to go and when he wants you to go and come. But the point is, maybe it's better to have security. But this is like it used to be when the country was first being settled. Every man was out there for himself. And it worked. We didn't get the west settled by a bunch of stay at home sitting on their butts sayin' it's too cold out or anything else. We, I mean these guys were risk takers. Same thing here. And this is one of the last kind of operations...incidentally, I'm sure you realize that this is the most dangerous job statistically in the country. Fishing has more casualties than any other business, the next business in mining. Look it up and you'll find out fishing is the most dangerous business which is why the insurance rates on personal indemnity are so high.

MP For some reason in mining, God forbid when there is an accident it receives national and international news.

SC This doesn't.

MP Yeah, it's really as you say, these, the aspects of the danger are often, for whatever reason, hidden from plain sight. They're not

SC That's 'cause it happens out there. However, if you look at the Standard Times and go back and look at the articles back when the Standard--See one of the problems is the newspaper industry is disappearin'. The Standard Times used to have twice the staff that it has now. They used to have a waterfront reporter. He or she we had a great one named Diane White, he or she was on the waterfront constantly. They got to know everybody and everybody got to know them. And it worked if they were good at what they did they gained the confidence of the people. When they wanted some information about what's happening they could pick up the phone and say hey Lars what's goin' on? Or hey Tony what's happening? And because they were discrete and sensible and they understood what was goin' on, the articles in the Standard Times, the column inches are like this! Today, hmmm. But you got one guy. You got just one guy. His name is Cuddy. And he's an excellent reporter, there's only one problem. The problem is that he's got, he's doubling in brass. They all have six different jobs. The newspaper is thin and you're getting boiler plate and columns off the wire and the local news has diminished tremendously because you can't get local news about the waterfront unless you go down here and know what the hell is goin' on. This guy does. I've talked to him a few times and he's tryin' but there's only so many hours in the day. One time this was a total beat by itself. They went to every meeting of everything concerning the fishing industry. They knew everybody. They knew everything. And you could talk to them. And they understood what you were sayin'. And they got your confidence. And we don't have that today. The Standard Times now is a shriveling newspaper. And I get two newspapers. I get the Boston Globe and I get the Standard Times. The Times occasionally when stuff appears in Boston paper out of the wire that actually concerns New Bedford and doesn't even show up in this paper. So what are you gonna do. This stuff is being lost. And the history of the port is being lost. Not that anybody cares. I mean these guys are all dead, who gives a damn. There are other stories I can tell you about individual boats that

actually happened on a boat I was on and boats, friends of mine guy--a lot of these people I knew. I mean they're just not names to me. I knew them. And to me it's kind of poignant because when I think about it I think Jesus Christ, Sonny Correia's been dead sixty one years. It seems like yesterday to me, you know? And somebody, somebody with talent ought to write a book before this is all lost. Because I'll be eighty five in March and who knows. Maybe a year or two years, who knows, whatever. The point is, almost everybody's gonna be gone that remembers anything about when this fleet was all wood. When I started diving here, there were no steel boats. Not a single one. They were all wood. And the first steel boats started coming down, the Barbara C Angel was one, I can't remember the others. And they, once they went to steel, they had problems. First of all they had problems with electrolysis at first. They had problems with paint and condensation and everything else, but they were, like everything else they worked their way through it. And now there are no wooden boats. There are some wooden lobster boats and so on and so forth. Even those are being glassed. So everything has changed. I used to do a lot of caulking under water. And I got good at it. When you say, you can caulk a seam underwater, yeah with the right caulkin' irons, yeah I could caulk a seam underwater. And when I got through you wouldn't leak. But that came from practice. A lot of practice. Jackie Ryan who died couple years ago of Alzheimer's, he was my competition. He was a good caulker too. All that stuff is slowly, the wooden stuff is disappearing. Good carpenters, there are only about one or two. Everything is changing. And I've lived long enough to see the change and I feel like saying, hey, find out about this stuff before it's all gone because in a very few years, this is gonna be something you might say existed, but you'll never realize what it was really like. For example, when you're cutting scallops, that's opening scallops, you had two things you can get, one is called the grip. Constantly opening scallop like this, the tendons in your wrist get inflamed. And you can actually go like this and you can here 'em squeak. Now when you get, when that happens, when you get the grip, you're screwed. You might get through that trip and hopefully you get it squared away in the next three or four days. 'Cause we used to go in four days. That isn't like that any more. And the other thing you can get is something called pigeons. What happens is the slime and the sand in the scallop, you're wearing rubber gloves with cloth cups and what happens is, if you're not careful, the gloves get all gooked up with slime from the scallops and sand and so forth and it'll irritate a hair follicle or several and then it's look like you got a pimple, but it will actually be an infection in the hair follicle and if you don't get it cured it can turn into blood poisoning and you'll end up with a line goin' up your arm. And how do you beat that? Well I had wristers, I had the, that happened to me and the answer was, cut the cuffs off the gloves and my mother used to knit me out of unbleached wool, oily wool, wristers, and I had about five or six pair of wristers and when I changed gloves I always put a clean pair of wristers on, never got another pigeon. But that's one of the things that can happen. That's just one of the things that can happen. Fishing is a dangerous business. How about, in the old days, you're rolling like this and you're gonna hook up the dredge right and the block gets away from you. It's night. And the block swings four part tackle with a big wooden block and hook on it swings out of the light. You got deck lights like this shining down on the deck. But now the block swings out of the light like this right? And you better duck 'cause that block is coming in on the dock and if it hits you in the head, it's gonna knock you down and brain you. That actually happened to

guys. Things like that happen. Like I told you the guy falling in the between the dock and the, between the boat and the side and getting nailed, Jerry Bishop, gettin' nailed. Go ahead, I'm talkin 'too much.

MP No not at all. Let's talk about diving, because I've only done, this is only the third or fourth interview I've ever done through this festival and you're the first diver that has come through that I've talked to. So let's talk about the gear involved. You said you had to go out and buy stuff?

SC Yeah

MP Let's talk about that and then let's see if we can just talk about what you did diving. Let's just pretend like no one knows anything about this. I mean. And we'll see the kind of stuff you did. You said you were out there you were a free agent and let's talk about the dangers of diving and then, I mean here you are almost eighty five years old having worked in a very dangerous industry doing a dangerous part of it and here you are, you survived obviously but I'm sure you've had situations and

SC Not to many.

MP No?

SC No. Because. I don't know because. First of all, I did not taking any diving course. I literally taught myself to dive. However, as soon as I got goin' and was goin' pretty good, I had a party at my house. A birthday party for my then brother-in-law and he was on the Maritime Academy training ship Baystate. And he'd invited a friend of his who was Bosun on the Baystate who had been a navy diver. That's this guy here, [shows photo] Robert Douglas Ripley. I, we got talking and I realized the guy was good and he knew what he was talking about so we got half bombed and he lived on Scoticut Neck and we went down to look at his diving gear in his garage near the beach and we decided were gonna go into business together. Now you think three o'clock in the mornin' two young guys half in the bag, this sounds like a recipe for disaster. It wasn't. This man knew a lot. And I, I am the kind of person that if you know something I want to know it, my ego doesn't get in the way of me saying, how did you do that? And then after you tell me I'll say, I still didn't get it. Tell me again. So I picked his brain and I worked with him. And he taught me an awful lot. I bought him out in '67 because he was still on the Baystate. His responsibilities were increasing. He was away every winter when the Baystate went on it's cruise. And I was alone. So I bought him out. And then after that, I had the good fortune to run into another diver, the guy who recovered the statue from the Andrea Doria. He was a deep diver in the navy. And he made the mistake of being hired away by a guy called Dan Turner to come up here and work on the Doria to get all the goodies. Turns out there were no real goodies. But he was a navy deep diver and he was excellent with demolition among other things and I picked his brain. He was workin' for me, but I was pickin' his brain. I was payin' him sixty five dollars a day which is money back in those days and George would always be, and George was divorced, living in a room and he was a free agent. He was after every Tessy True?? that was on the waterfront

successfully. I would, we'd come in and we'd go to the bar, the National Club, Dr. Forenti Franky Bent the bartender would make out a check for George for sixty five dollars which we'd cash. The next morning George would be broke. It was a daily thing. It was a daily thing. And then I'd call my wife and she'd come a pick me up. George says to me one day he says, Steve, don't call your wife when you first get in. Have a couple of beers and then call her. I said no, no. I don't think so. I think I like it this way. Because I'll be here, I'll be like you. So then after that, I ran into another guy who was a navy diver named Clarey Edwards, just died last year. Clarey Edwards was a diver who worked on the last submarine sunk in World War II right off here, off Block Island. This German sub got in here and sank a collier which is a coal carrier. And the dummer, course this is near the end of the war. And the Germans were running out of talent. The whole crew was green. They sent a sub all the way over here and he sinks a collier right in a hundred, maybe a hundred and eighty feet of water. And he's, he can't get away from there fast enough. And he's right close to Quonset which was where the navy hunter killer set up in Newport was set up. Quonset was the naval air base and the destroyers were right there. So as soon as this collier got hit, they got off a radio message and that was like, they got him. They got him in a few hours. He couldn't get into deep water and they sunk him right there. And Clarey, was the guy that dove on the sub. And they got the body of the young skipper out, dressed in a complete leather suit and he was like 22 years old. And those guys, fifty guys on the sub, German sub. So I developed my diving expertise by having the sense to hire good people and pick their brains and pay attention. And I got, I got reasonably confident. We did all the diving on the hurricane barrier, all of it. Clarey did the diving when they put the coffer dams in to dewater the area that they were gonna put the gates in. And I went over there and gave them my card and we were just more or less starting out. And they looked at it like this, ok yeah. And that was when I was with Ripley. And their diver screwed up somehow and they were desperate and they called us and we went in there and did a great job and we gave them our bill and they paid it and kept us workin'. And the reason they did, they told us, a couple of years later when the job was done, that they could not believe how cheap we were. We were a couple of hillbillies right out of the woods. We charged them fifteen dollars an hour, diving, and ten dollars an hour standby time. And fifty dollars a day for the tug. They got the bill and they thought, huh? Pay these guys. And so they kept using us. And we, we were young, we were just raisin' families and we were willin' to do anything. I mean you want it done, sure ok. We'll do it. We'd tackle anything. Anything at all. And they thought, they thought we were the greatest thing since the white bread. You know? And we didn't realize that. But we made good money. I bought my first house out of that. Sometimes you dive for three hours let's say, and then all of a sudden there'd be a break. They needed something. Somethin' had to be done so they'd pull you out of the water, but they wouldn't let you go because they knew they'd need you in an hour or two or three so sometimes you'd do an hour, two hours diving and then sit for three. Now in your gear with your tank outfit on and you'd just sit there and you'd say I'm makin' ten dollars an hour! Course in those days we thought that was good money. And so you so we worked for them right to the completion of the dike and then I bought Ripley out and I stayed workin' on the dike, the core of engineers inherited me. And so I'd go after that on the dike. And it was, some of the work was hard. We had to clear out thirty six inch mains which ran into all the mills. See the mills were originally set up for steam, all

steam power. And what they had were condensers which caused the exhaust of steam from the collar steam engine to go through a heat exchanger and be condensed back into water and then be pumped through again. It was a rotary system. But the coolant was salt water that came into the heat exchanger from a device set out here like a circular copper damn and a big pipe that ran into the mill. But when they built the dike, every one of those had to be sealed up because what was the good of closin' the gates if all the water was gonna go in through these and flood the mills and you know. So every one of those had to be closed up. And the hairiest part of the job was cleaning out those old cast iron pipes which were thirty six inches in inside diameter and you put in a weird device called the bloopy they used in the gas fields. It's about six feet long and it's heavy but flexible rubber hose going through it. It looks like a gigantic condom. And so what you do is you get into this iron clad vagina and you clean out all of the crap that's in there ok. Now you gotta get in there because you can't do it from outside. We developed a hole that was cut to the circumference, the inner circumference of the pipe. And then you work your way in there and, no visibility. No visibility. 'Cause your body is in there. You're obstructing it. And you carefully feel around and rake and rake and get it clear and hope it was, when you thought it was clear enough, then you laid the deflated bloopy in and carefully slid out by it like this then you got clear and then they'd pump it. And when they pumped it, if you'd done a good job, it would seal up against the inner walls of the pipe. That meant that now they could do all their dry work inside. They'd pump it out and now they'd pour concrete in forms and they'd make a gate. It worked on a screw device. So that when you wanted to close the gate, you just dropped it down or you'd pick it up like this. And that's what they put on all those. And if you go down on the dike now, you go around you can see these things. That was part of the job. It got pretty hairy sometimes. But we didn't know any better. I mean we thought we'd died and gone to heaven. We were workin' for the marine corporation. And we did pretty good. We did pretty good. And the rest of it was primarily workin' on wrecks. We worked on the wreck of the DINAH FUEL (?) when she sank out here. We recovered the chain and anchor from the FERNSTROM when she ran aground. We worked on several wrecks of some boats that were actually sunk here in the harbor. And we did whatever was, whatever came up. But I wouldn't say any of it was a Gee Wiz type of thing. It was all, it was all commercial work at fairly shallow depths. And the primarily problem was visibility. It still is in this harbor. I mean it isn't like diving in the Caribbean or something like that where you can actually see things. I wear a light, a repel light, right on top of my hood like that. And I've even sometimes had another light over here because if you get in a situation where the visibility is like this and the rest of the stuff in here is what--when the boats originally, before they developed stern trawlers all of the wooden boats were side trawlers. They'd bring the net in over the side. And the trouble was that that brings the net right by the propeller. And one way or another, they'd get the net in the wheel and wind it up. And that meant they had to be towed in and pick 'em up at the tow boat and then they'd have to cut the net off. And what else did we do? Sometimes a boat, originally they did not have keel coolers. They pumped water from outside the boat through a sea strainer and used it to cool a heat exchanger on the engine. So sometimes the cook would come up on deck for example and throw over a bag of garbage and the God Damned stuff would be sucked in. Or they'd pick up somethin' else. Now when that, when that, when they lost their suction, alright, go home...And they'd

tow 'em home and you'd take to clean it out whatever it was and that was it. The other thing we did was put zincs on. We put zincs on, not so much until we had steel vessels. Then we had to put the zincs on because you needed the protection. And that was one job that is diminishing now because there's a guy named Coen developed a device that is a little zinc rectangle and is fastened on the outside of the boat and insulated from the plastic and either on the ways or underwater you can drill a hole, block it off and you put, there's a stud coming out from it, and you seal it by tightening up a screw on the inside and then you attach a wire to it, and now you've got a connection between the zinc outside which is insulated and the hull. And that will show you the differential and tell you what your zinc is doing and it's no power going to it. And when that thing is in the green, that means your zincs are all good, and you've got plenty of zinc and it's doing what it should do. When the zincs are all worn, now you got a problem. It'll go into the red now it means time to change, time to put more zincs on or change 'em. So what jobs do you do? They're basically, anybody could do 'em. I mean they're not hard jobs. The conditions may be bad. The visibility, the chances of boats--that's another thing too, be very careful. You have three or four boats here, three or four boats here, three or four boats here. You're workin' on this boat here. Make damn sure you stay right there and don't move around. Because this guy may not even know you're there. And start his engine and put his wheel in gear. Ok. It can be, you've gotta be very damn careful that everybody knows what's goin' on 'cause you could, nobody's been killed yet, but there've been a couple of close calls. I use a ladder and I put the ladder in the water, the top of the ladder is painted with orange and I check everybody around and I go down that ladder, I go to the boat I'm workin' on and I never go anywhere else. I come back to the ladder. If I've got another job three boats down, out comes the ladder and I go over there. Now I know guys who don't do that. Oh Jesus I was workin' on the boat right there, I just swam down and did the other boat. Who the hell knew you were there? Idiot! And some day, somethin' will happen because it, I mean, everybody isn't payin' attention. There's a language barrier here too to some extent. I don't speak Portuguese. But I make very clear I no how to say, "helice" in Portual, which means "propeller". And I know a few other words, but you're gonna say, you gonna move the ladder just to go over there? Yeah, I'm chicken. I'm afraid. And that's what's kept me and will keep any diver alive. Watch out for heros. Heros will get you killed. Oh, that doesn't bother me! No. It bothers me. 'Cause guess what, you probably survive and I'll get killed. And so that's the kind of, this is donkey work. This is no big thing. I mean I've done riskier dives and deeper dives by far sport diving. I mean my wife and I when we were off Sabre Island in the clearest water you have ever seen, it's right off Saint Martin's. It's a twelve minute flight. And the flight is scarier than the divin' because Sabre is just like a rock, a loaf of bread stickin' out of the ocean, belongs to the Dutch, very clever people. And the diving there, you can be down a hundred and thirty, hundred and thirty or a hundred and thirty-five feet, and you can look up and see the bottom of the boat as you could reach up and touch it. The water is the most crystalline blue. You think you're in a Jacques Cousteau spectacular. They don't keep the, the dive master goes in with you. Nobody is in the boat. They, you're working in pinnacles and they put buoys fastened, they put a bar down that they fasten in, drill in. And then they put a mooring out. So you're divin' off the beach, maybe oh, a couple hundred feet and bingo, she drops off like Wow! And some of that diving I would say was in some ways riskier because the thing you gotta worry about

in deep water especially is an uncontrolled ascent. That's the most dangerous thing there is. An uncontrolled ascent. Now when I'm workin' down here, I never where a BC. A BC is bulky and cumbersome and so forth. 'Cause I'm only workin' in twenty feet of water. I don't worry about my dive time. Occasionally, but not much. And when I was workin' in the dike, the dike is only thirty-five feet to inside of the sill. So, I mean you don't worry about those things. But you can go on a dive, on a sport dive, and you can be in a greater risk. And I've seen a few people get themselves in trouble because you never know the quality of the people you're diving with. The dive master is like one person, right, and he's leading this group of people you never met before and there's you and your wife and six other people right, and you don't know how much experience they have. We always bring our own gear. We take everything but weights and tanks. That way I know my stuff is good. Where you're goin' any other place, you're usin' their equipment. Well it's gotta be alright. Oh yeah? And you've got them, they change tanks for you. One time I seen 'em change a tank and they didn't get the tank fastened tightly and guy was in the water and the tank was slidin' out of the harness. And another time, the diver, they turn on the air and you automatically assume, aluminum tanks by the way, you automatically assume you've got three thousand pounds. But some people are like this is valet diving, he's doing everything and ok, you're ready. So now you wanna, you don't wanna hold people up 'cause they wanna get you in the water fast. And so you're goin' in the water and you look at the gauge and it says three thousand pounds. But what happened is, the guy who turned the tank on didn't open the valve all the way. But when you start breathing you start breathing hard. And you can't figure out what the hell is wrong. Because, and then, if you notice, you see the needle oscillate. Because the tank can't keep up, the aperture is too small to ge the air to you. And now the guy panics and we gotta big scene. Diving at night is another thing. People get disoriented diving at night. And diving in cenotes is crazy. A cenote is a, you know what carstopography is? It's when you have a layer of limestone and rainwater has a carbon dioxide in it and it slowly but surely erodes the stone, limestone. And when it does that it, if the cover above it isn't limestone, then what happens is all this limestone gets melted and dissolved away and you've got caverns. And eventually the top caves in. The Yucatan is full of these cenotes. So you go to the cenote and you dive in the cenote and you dive through passages. And you then you may come up in a blow hole where you can see light above and air comes in there and you can take you're mouth piece out, bah, bah, bah. But the cenotes are just, if you get in trouble, there's no goin' up. And so I've seen people who decided they didn't wanna dive in the cenote when they got all ready to dive. They didn't like the idea of if I get in trouble can I come up, no. Ooh. So we dove in cenotes and I found it a complete waste of time because it's, you don't see fancy stalactites and stalagmites that are different colors. They're all grey. It's like somebody flooded a quarry and you're swimmin' through it. There's nothin' to it. You know what it is? People who swim in cenotes and do shit like this so they can go home and tell their neighbors, I swam in a cenote! It's the old, I can piss further across the street than you can. Ok? Good. I'm happy for you. There's a lot of that that goes on in sport diving. How many dives can you do a day? Well when we were on Sabre we did three dives. You always do the deep dive first. Then you have about a forty minute period where you off gas the nitrogen. And usually they're takin' you to another spot. Then you get in, but this dive is usually at shallower depth for a shorter time because you're not totally clear. And then if you do a

third dive you go in and have lunch and blah, blah, blah, couple of hours then you a third dive which is the dive which is the least deep and that's how you do it to not get a decompression problem. But the one thing you don't do afterwards if you've done intensive diving is fly the next day at any altitude. Now we did that at Sabre but because it's Sabre it was only a twelve minute flight and the guy flew at about 800 feet. So there was no problem. But if you ever got to Sabre and you take the plane, it's the shortest commercial airport in the world I believe, you fly in and you're flying right at a cliff and it's a two passenger plane with about eight or twelve people. And all of a sudden you get so here and he does the wing over like this and lines up like that and drops. And when he does it, you look out over the wing and the wing looks as close as that wall, closer in fact, and you're goin' down like a shot and you don't know what's goin' on 'cause nobody told you and you're sayin' Oh Jesus what's this! Bingo, hits the end of the runway, beautiful. Goin' out, they go out the other way. But it's, diving's interesting, but you can only have so much fun. And then it's, mmm, ok. Here we are. We go St. Martin's, we go Sabre and then we go down to another island called St. Eustacius. We dove there. It's pretty interesting. And we've been all over the place, spent a lot of money, but we had a lot of fun. Drank the wine of the country, ate well, had a hell of a time, you know? But we're goin' to Cabo St. Lucas for Christmas. My wife says "you goin' back to work?" I says "yes." MMMMRRRMM. Hey look I'll tell you

MP I do wanna talk to you really quick as the last question about how, about how you, what's goin' on now. So you're, two months ago you decided that you'd

SC Go back to work. So first of all I've been retired 18 months. All my customers know. I'm done. I said I was done, I'm done. What do I do now? Put the ladders on top of the vehicle, drove down the pier and I see people lookin' at me, like what? And then I went over to a few of them and I said, "I was tired of being retired. I'm back workin' ." And "Oh yeah, Ok." Some said, "Hey I don't have you're number, you got your card?" And I give 'em my card. But I never asked for work. I never asked anybody for work. And what happened was I got a couple of jobs and then a couple of brothers called me, they've got four good scallopers and they wanted me to do quite a bit of work. They've been tied up for months. So I had to clean all the keel coolers, loaded with barnacles, pain in the ass. And the propellers, loaded, looked like stucco houses. So I did that. And then I got a job here and a job here. Everybody has got somebody else now. And I am not going to go and kiss butt, 'cause frankly I don't need the money. I'm in good shape. I'm in very good shape. I'm doin' this for my head. Now if I went around and said to anybody, I'm doin' it because...they'd think I was nuts. So all I say is, hey, I'm tired of bein' retired. And they look at me as if I'm crazy. This guy is retired. He's in good shape financially. What is wrong with that man? I just, I'm an odd duck I guess. So I've started to get work. I picked up about twelve different boats. Everybody's satisfied. And now slowly but surely, I will edge my way back in. And I will not bad mouth anybody. 'Cause everybody's ok. And I will not ask. I will just drive around and look. And if somebody says, Jesus Christ I need a diver, hey Steve, you wanna do it? Ok. 'Cause I'm not, I'm not hustlin'. I don't have to hustle. And you know somethin'? It gives me somethin' to do. I come down. I drive around the dock. I make my tour, see guys I know. They wave, I wave. They don't wave, too bad. And I go over here to the Royal where the

good beer is, and I have a bottle of beer with somebody I know and we talk about fishin' and blah, blah, blah. And so it's, I could be givin' the money to a psychiatrist but I enjoy this much better. And my, of course people think I'm nuts. And probably I am. But this works for me. It works for me. And is it possible that I will drop dead in the water? Yeah it's possible. What's your choice? You're gonna die anyway, you wanna be in the hospital with seven tubes stickin' out of you? No thank you. I would prefer to break even and die in my sleep as the gambler said. But failing that, if this happens to me, that's ok. I mean everybody dies. And when I got to be my age, and all my friends are dead anyway, all the guys I dove with are dead, most of the guys that I had anything to do with are dead. I don't have a single close friend left alive. And I don't have a real fierce enemy left alive either. So I'm kind of adrift. But what the hell is wrong with that? I mean you make the best of what you got. And what I got is, I got a healthy body, for whatever reason and this is therapy for me. I wouldn't say that to anybody else. Scratch that word please. Ok. But that's it. That's what it's all about. And as far as this work is concerned, this is donkey work. Any damn fool could do this. It's, for example, I don't know if you've seen a keel cooler, a keel cooler is made of bronze and it looks like a radiator, just like a radiator. It's rectangular, long and it may have anywhere from six I'd call 'em barrels, but they're not, they're rectangular with spaces in between. Sometimes it will have six, or they might have as many as sixteen. And they're long and they're about that wide, with equal amounts of space between and they're about so big in the other dimension. So what you're lookin' at looks like an upside down radiator. Now what happens to these things is when the boats sit for three months at a time they get loaded with barnacles. And the barnacles and sometimes muscles get in these apertures between, right? So now the keel cooler becomes ineffective because it doesn't have surface area for the water to circulate. So they have to be cleaned. And so cleaning them means you scrape all the barnacles off and then you take a bar that fits in there that you have made specially, or I have one, and then you stick it in and then you run it all the way along until you've got it clean. And then you do the next one. Some boats have two keel coolers. Some boats, I had one boat that has five. So this is what you wanted the jobs you have to do. And while you're under it like this and the crap is fallin' down, but it's a job. You have light on your hat. The other jobs you do at the same time is usually when the boat ties up for three months she loads up with barnacles on the propellers. So the propeller is like maybe so thick and both sides of it are covered with barnacles, look like a stucco house, so it's all gotta be scraped off. And they have four blades usually and they're inside what's called a Kort nozzle. Now a Kort is named for the guy who developed it, K O R T. The nozzle is, it looks like an open ring, like a wedding ring if you like. And if you look at it in cross section, it has an airplane shape to it. In other words it looks like a cross-section of an airfoil. Now propeller is set inside the nozzle, now as a result, this nozzle, directs the stream of water over the propeller in such a way that you get more thrust from it. The blades are cut to the circumference so the blade passes within three eighths or half an inch of the inside of the nozzle. So you got this big fan, so to speak, inside this tunnel like nozzle. Now sometimes on the front of it, they'll have struts. Sometimes not, but mostly they do. So when you're behind it, right behind it, you've got the rudder. So you have to clean all those blades off. Cleaning the back side is easy because you have easy access to the blades. You have to move around from one side to another, to get 'em. But when you go around to the front and come in this

way, if you were a much bigger man than I am, you wouldn't be able to get in there very clearly. And if you've got claustrophobia, you might not like it too much because when you come in there in some cases, you've gotta get by that strut I told you about. And you gotta get in there and now you can't turn the wheel, the boat's not runnin' it's motionless. So you gotta get in there one way or another and do one of these things and they you gotta get over here and it's a pain in the ass. But it's, it's donkey work. I mean it doesn't take any brains. All it takes is persistence. And so you do that. Those are the jobs you do. And other than that, I did a job last week to check on a rudder that they guy said the skipper said he thought there was somethin' in the rudder. So I go down and they get in the wheelhouse and they start the hydraulic system and then they turn the rudder. Now a rudder normally turns thirty five degrees off the centerline, 70 degrees total. So you ride the rudder back and forth and you look and see if there's anything wrong. Sometimes a bearin's gone, sometimes it's nothin'. In this case it turned out to be nothin'. You change transducers. That's another thing you can do underwater. A transducer, you know is a device which simply tells you the depth at the bottom. Or they have transducers now on draggers that face backward and these transducers have to be cleaned they get barnacles on them because those transducers can actually see the net. Some of these boats have these now. They can actually see the net and how it's deployed underwater which makes for a very efficient rig. And that's about it. Shit in the wheel, cleaning stuff, but its donkey, it's basically donkey work.

MP I think we gotta wrap it up right now 'cause I gotta got to this other stage.

SC Sure.

1:14 End of interview