

Sharleen Davis Interview
Transcribed by Amy Wilson Sanger
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START TRACK 1001

PPDS Ok, turn that down... I'm just checking to see...how this volume is working out for us and make sure that it will be recording today....all right, I'm testing this out. Today's October 21st?

? Right.

PPDS And I'm just going to see if this thing is picking up both our voices.

? Good.

PPDS And... recording. OK. So let's—

END TRACK 1001

START TRACK 1002

PPDS All right, I think we're all set.

SD Okay.

PPDS So, why don't we just start at the beginning. Just talk a little bit about where you're from and what it might have been like growing up in that place, Family and stuff.

SD Well, I was born in Chatham. And...born and raised. I was born, actually, in a hospital, but. My parents—my dad's from Maine, my mom was born and raised here. She's a daughter of a fisherman. We go back. We're a family that goes back to the founding family of Chatham; the Nickerson family. And I grew up living in Chatham, and my mom worked various jobs. My dad worked construction. And often times they would work in a – often times they would go fishing in a ...often times my Dad would go fishing if there wasn't work to be had in what he was doing for a living, with my grandfather. My mom, we'd all basically, you know, like do things at was supportive of the fishing industry to make money, as a side thing. I have two brothers and two sisters. And I am the second oldest. The first oldest of my dad. My mom was married before, and my older brother's my half brother. And we grew up—we primarily lived in Chatham most of our lives. But never in one place. Often—we probably moved twenty-one times but the time I was seventeen. As a child we rented homes and often lived in, you know, it was—we were a probably fairly struggling family. Large family, struggling. During the 50's, 60's, 70's and high school here. And... so, I kind of grew up in the 60's, as a reference point. Most of my memories are not of fishing. My grandfather—I do... if they were , they were of my grandfather. And what he did for a living. My brother, my oldest

brother, was totally involved in everything in the sea. With my grandfather, grew up—he went fishing for the first time when he was ten, eleven years old. The message I would get as a kid was “girls do not belong around the shore.” You know, it was pretty much what I was told, so I didn’t even know that the primary place where I do business with my husband now existed, only half a block down the road from me, when I was a little girl. That was the place where my grandfather...my grandfather fished out of for a long time. Stage Harbor is the primary residence of my grandfather XX’s (00:2:59) family. And we often times lived with them if we didn’t have a place to live. And so...I pretty much, you know, I would go down around the water but never go down to what was called the trap docks, which is actually what my husband and I own now. I actually own what my grandfather, and my ancestor-grandfather, uncles, did for a living. I own the company now, with my husband.

So, basically, Chatham’s a small community and most of my friends and kids I grew up with, they weren’t part of fishing. You know, I didn’t have a big awareness of it. As, except for probably scallop season. Bay scallop season. Which everybody in town was—it started October 1st. People would get in small skiffs and they would dredge the harbors and inlets for bay scallops, and then, most families would get involved in opening those scallops, in shanties behind their houses, or in their houses, so that was a big deal, and most of us would be involved in some way, around opening scallops during that season. And—

PPDS Was that for commercial?

SD It was for commercial purposes. There was such an abundance that it would take like, several members of a family to open scallops every day that were caught. You know, that day or the day before. It was seasonal kind of fishing that occurred, and you pretty much all get together and it was a camaraderie thing, pretty much, in the family effort. And I remember doing it a little bit. As learning to do it a little bit, when I was a little kid with a stick. You know, practice the art of opening a scallop. When in fact, you didn’t. But you know, you had this scallop to like, do the hand gestures or whatever. And the shanties were always filled with, you know, people laughing and joking and drinking and smoking and you know, we were all just kids running around, a little crazy, around that kind of thing. But it was also, I remember it as the opportunity to make extra money. For my parents. For my mom. She was fairly—she was probably the primary worrier of bills in our house. My dad was a little more crazy and gone. Often times he had a different kind of agenda. And...but, we would, I remember that my grandmother and my grandfather always strongly influenced my mother in helping her financially. Often times in giving her those kind of opportunities, and that kind of trickled down to my brother.

PPDS That’s your mother’s father, is the one with the Wier business?

SD He didn’t have a Wier business; he worked for the Wiers.

PPDS Oh, he worked for the Wiers.

SD His grandfather had a Wier business. His father had a Wier business, his brother had a Wier business.

PPDS But it's through the mother's side of the family.

SD The mother's side of the family, yeah. So it was my maternal grandfather. And so, my Dad, who was in construction, would often times find those opportunities with my grandfather Cobby. Cobby was his name. Cobby Nickerson. He had like a...um... he was kind of a mean-spirited person. Rough around the edges kind of guy. Buy he certainly was supportive of his family—of his daughters and grandsons. And they went fishing. His sons went fishing. And his daughters worked. Other jobs.

Um, so, scalloping was a big deal. Opportunities for my dad, often times came through that kind of thing. When there was offshore scalloping, my dad bought a boat. Ran a boat. Did that, as an opportunity. As far as—my uncles and my grandfathers, they worked trawlers. They did that kind of thing. And my grandfather fished out of Stage Harbor, which was kind of a different thing to do. He did fish out of the fish pier when it was first open but lost his brother going over the bar. The, um, they were coming in from fishing. He, he was behind his brother. They had two boats coming in over the bar. And—
X The sand bar?

SD The bar, yeah. The break, at the lights. We call it the bar. And a rogue wave flipped the boat over, and he was lost. I think it was like the early 50's. So my grandfather didn't really fish out of the fish pier after that, or over the bar much. He actually fished out of Stage Harbor, instead, so. But that was his homeport, no matter what. Because it was just where our family had homes. The Nickerson family actually was Stage Neck. So that was pretty much the home port in the small community of Chatham.

I remembered going fro recreational purposes with my mom to dig clams for dinner and things like that, that was always—or going to get mussels with my dad, and having those for dinner, kind of thing. I remember doing those things as being around the shore line, but...

X Do you think that was, was it just recreational or was it also a way to get good fish without having to pay cash for it. Do you think there was any economic benefits?

SD I think there was totally—I mean, it was our dinner. It was that sometimes or Cheerios, you know, so... so I mean. There wasn't much choice, when you're a large family not making a lot of money. And so, I mean, to have the natural resources to be able to feed your family I think is probably one of the most endearing qualities to living in Chatham that I can say. Some of the most important. Even though you could be starving, you still could go to the sea, which was right there, and catch, get food. And I think it's the life blood of , or was, of this community for a long time like that.

PPDS Was it something that you did fairly frequently? I mean, enough to say that that was something that, I don't know, complemented the income of other sources coming in?

SD Oh, totally. Yeah.

PPDS But not enough for other people to consider you fishermen.

SD Right. Or my dad. Because he was a builder. He was a carpenter, he was a construction worker. That's what he did. He was actually a farmer. I mean, he grew up in Maine in a boy's school. A home for boys. In Hinkley, Maine. His grandfather was a doctor. In Sanford, Maine. And his mother and father had moved on, I don't know if they abandoned him or what. But his brothers lived with their uncle—their grandfather—and he, you know, he put them in this wayward school. It was the 30's, 40's you know. Divorced family kind of thing. He grew up like that, so, he was a farmer. A cultivator. You know? Potatoes. So. But what goes better with potatoes than fish? And he moved here when he was a teenager and he met my mom, and they were married, so. So, fish and potatoes were—

PPDS A good combination.

SD It was a good combination. And we often times had that.

PPDS You said that your mom, or your grandmother, played an important role in the finances, the house finances.

SD My mom was probably the more steady breadwinner in my family than my dad was. My dad, without saying it in a bad way, he had a – he drank a lot. So, he had issues, and...my mom took on the role of being the stronger of the two adults in our family. So, she pretty much... she had the opportunities through her father to be able to subsidize our family income by finding those almost natural opportunities that come with living on the coast line.

PPDS That he wouldn't have known, necessarily known... [voices overlap 00:12:00]

SD Well, he probably--

PPDS that the daughter had the access....

SD --would have known but not had the opportunities to access them...though I think back in probably the 50's or 60's that was...it was a cultural, natural given that this was, this was the life blood of this community. That there was scallop season. You could go dig steamers. So you could quahog, scratch for quahogs, or get on a fishing boat. I think that those were opportunities that are less now than they were, you know.

PPDS Do you think there was any stigma attached to it? I mean, because—

SD Being a fisherman?

PPDS Not just being a fisherman—yes, but also clamming. People today, you know, we go clamming we think it's just the greatest thing that ever was. But perhaps at some point it was thought of, "oh, they're clamming .therefore they are...lacking something? They can't go out and buy them? Or...or not.

SD I don't know.

PPDS No?

SD I don't know...I don't think I ever got that sense. I don't think fishermen were wealthy around here. I think that if you ate fish versus steak: yeah. I would have to say there probably was some sort of ...idea around that. You know, to have salt cod, or some thing like that for dinner. Or, or...yeah.

PPDS So salt cod might have been seen as a lesser...

SD The cheap buy.

PPDS The cheap buy at the grocery store.

SD ...Yeah, that, that, yeah. If you're having salted cod, or—my dad would always pick up tripe in the ...I hate that stuff. Yeah.

PPDS So steak dinner,sort of, that's the big...

SD That's the big deal, yeah.

PPDS That was the big meal...

SD That was the big meal. If you had you know, like a steak dinner that would be ...definitely, fish was not a delicacy. That you see, that it is today. Maybe lobsters were. But no, I mean, it was—it was... it was a harvest dinner. There was no grand appreciation that you were going to sit down and have a load of steamers for dinner. It was, that was what you were having for dinner. It wasn't anything grand or great like Thanksgiving, or a gift. It wasn't held up to any high expectations. It was just something you could cultivate and eat. Have.

PPSD So Thanksgiving dinner, or Christmas dinner might have more of a roast, or..lamb.

SD A turkey.

PPSD A turkey, or....

SD Or a duck.

PPSD You wouldn't have a big cod for Christmas.

SD I don't think so, no.

PPSD Or Christmas.

SD No. No. We're not Sicilians. (laughter) I know that the Italians have a lot of seafood around the holidays. But we would have bay scallops, at Thanksgiving. That would, you know, that would be a treat, or...

PPSD And that coincided with the season.

SD Yeah.

PPSD . Huh. That's neat. So it was a harvest.

SD Yeah. And we carry, we carry that tradition today, in my family. Between Ernie and I. We have them at Thanks giving, and then at Christmas. Even if we can't find enough to sell, we'll go get them, to continue to do that kind of ...kind of essence. Actually the first day of scallop season was ...Monday. And Ernie went out to get, as he'd say, a mess for dinner. You know, and we had them. Because we haven't ever not had them the first day of scallop season. Except for one year. Since we've known each other. That's just a...

PPSD So, now you have to--- your sense is that to maintain tradition sometimes, you'll have to sort of subsidize tradition if ...

SD . Yes. It's probably that, it means it's a symbolic something to both of us, both of us growing up in Chatham, both of us having that as a , you know, a harvesting season. We do it with the Weirs, when we get our first squid. We do the same thing. Our family, our kids, we have, you know, the first squid. We smoke the first mackerel. We, you know, we do this all around as a celebratory tradition of what we caught. As a meal. And it means more and more every year, than it did when we just, "I'm bringing a mackerel home for dinner. " "Oh, Okay." You know. Because that's what you did.

PPSD That sound s like a lot of ritual, and culture....

SD There probably is some, some sense of holding on to some sort of culture that's probably just based within our own little subculture of Chatham. Or you know, the Weir fishermen. Or in our—Ernie's an Eldridge. Long time family of the Cape. I'm a Nickerson; long time family of the Cape. In some essence of our cultural, you know. Like, Cape Cod traditions.

PPSD Yeah.

SD Boy, it always comes around food, doesn't it?

PPDS Yeah! What better for it to come around? So, in a sense—who defines what's going to be served for dinner, growing up, would be...what might be accessible?

SD it was economics.

PPDS Economics.

SD Yeah. I mean, we had a fairly chaotic childhood. And so I can't say we had a traditional family that would have, you know, structured meals all the time. I think that was, you know, whatever my mom could pick up at the grocery store. If not, then—if there was a fish left from my grandfather or you know. Or, you know, if it was the middle of the summer and she took her cousin and their—her cousin had seven kids and my mother had four and we'd all go down to the shore and dig clams for dinner. You know, something like that.

PPDS And what about the family...you mentioned that sometimes you'd get fish from your father's...

SD My grandfather.

PPSD Your grandfather's work. What about sort of other family networks or friendship networks? Was there a lot of trading?

SD Sharing?

PPSD Trading or sharing or any of that?

SD No. No. I think was whatever was caught. It was a surplus, or.. you know, if somebody went eeling. You know, like my dad would go eeling. Or my grandfather. It was within the family structure. I don't remember anybody bringing baskets of food over—

PPSD ...and saying "want some ...eel?"

SD Yeah.

PPSD And where you lived physically...oh—you were saying that you moved. You were constantly moving.

SD Yeah. We did. But I would probably consider my primary residence to be in and around the area of Stage Harbor. Because we moved in and out of Stage Harbor area a lot, because that's where my grandmother and grandfather were. And we, my parents at one time actually did own a house there, that they bought from my grandparents but they consequently lost it to the bank. So, in, there was always this essence from my mother that she never wanted to leave Chatham. So, we'd—we might move to Harwich for six months and she'd sneak us into the Chatham school system until she could find another house to live in Chatham. So, it was chaotic. But I would have to say that we did end up

living with my grandparents and ultimately my grandparents ended up giving their home to my mother. And so we had—and she lives there to this day. With my grandmother.

PPDS So, your grandparents, sounds like they were sort of the anchor of the family a little bit. Like the matriarch and the patriarch.

SD Well...I...yeah. I think it was of my mother's relationship with her father. Versus her relationship with her mother. I think she did turn to her father for that—that stability. My grandmother worked hard. She was, since her kids were young she was out in the workforce in the 40's, 50's, 60's. She worked up until the early '80's. And she worked, you know, as a laundress. She worked in a ...um, she worked in a—I guess at the time they were pharmacies that had, like, coffee shops in them? She worked there. She worked in the laundry. And then she worked as bookkeeper for construction, a large construction company. And she retired when she – I always thought of her as being a very hard worker. She was the one that was always ...stability even for my grandfather, when he couldn't get out fishing. She was the one...

PPDS ...who had that constant, steady income.

SD Yeah.

PPDS That you could sort of count on.

SD Yeah. She made Christmas. You know. It's like...and she had—I consider her to be on par as a mother to me as my own mother is. You know, more than a grandmother. YOU know. And...

PPDS And did she participate at all, even informally, in the fishery?

SD Um-hm. Yeah. With scalloping. With baiting. I mean, she'd get home from work often times she would do that kind...open scallops, or bait, or you know, help make trawl line or mend nets.

PPDS That was for your uncles?

SD For your grandfather.

PPDS For your grandfather. Oh, 'cause he was tub trawling?

SD He was tub trawling. Or he'd go scalloping. Or, you know, he'd be on the Weir's. He'd fish the Weir's, too.

PPDS But in terms of financial management, or the business side of the ...of the, I don't know...

SD Of the business of their fisheries?

PPDS Business of their fisheries or even just household financial management.

SD I think my grandmother did the household financial management. I think my grandfather, when he ended up as, as he got older he became a shell fisherman, being the nature of his age and whatnot. He liked to horde his own little cache of money, I think. And I think—he started out as...he started out as a , he'd fish and he was a rum runner in Chatham. So he, you know, I think cash –cash, and they grew up in the Depression. It was, they really had to really...squander their money away. So they were fairly good at it. My grandparents were.

PPSD So shell fish—you said your grandfather turned in, or became, a shell fisherman later in life. Would you say that that's something that...is that common?

SD I think that...what you have to understand about Chatham and the nature of the fisheries here is that you can't identify a fisherman as doing only one thing. So it was always about opportunity and the diversity of the opportunities that Chatham has, or had. I think that they're slowly shrinking, and being more specific but, in the winter it might be, you know, going out trawling. And in the spring you get on a boat that works the Weir's. And then you might finish that up and go back jigging. And then maybe go scalloping. And then maybe scratch quahogs, if you can't make it out because of wind and weather, or whatever. So I think that there's always, any given day, and opportunity to jump from one thing to the other.

PPDS But with age there were certain opportunities that were more ...appropriate, or more accessible to an elderly person? I'm just thinking of shell fishing kind of as the lender of last resort. You know, a family that needs something for dinner....

SD Or the opportunity for first resort. I mean, it could be-- a lot of young folks in Chatham are clammers. Like my daughter. She's making her way through school digging steamers on Monomoit.

PPDS And is that because they don't necessarily... why is that?

SD The abundance of the resource. The opportunity to not have to work in a tourist community. The freedom of being outside.

PPDS Perhaps the fact that the initial costs aren't necessarily very high?

SD They are. The initial, I mean, well—I think the bigger bang for the buck, yeah. You can get a license for two hundred dollars. You can go with somebody; you might not necessarily have to buy a boat. You can do it shore side without having to actually own a boat. So, yeah. The initial investment—but, I think it's because of the ...of several factors. One of them being that.

PPDS How about organizational life, or the community. When you were growing up did you feel that...or, how was your family linked to the wider community, in terms of groups, or...

SD We weren't. My parents were...their community was...well, was family, if it was linked. I did go to church, as a little kid. Not – my mother didn't go but she sent me and my brother. Which I always thought was a ...you know....how do you put it? Contradictory. You know? [laughter]

PPDS “Send them. At least they'll go to heaven.”

SD so they um...I did have a structure around the church, Sunday school, things like that. My family—um, my dad hung out at the local VFW... His socialization was bars. And my mom followed him a lot, so. I had a responsibility. Um, family responsibilities. So I was the one that kinda...like, oversaw my brothers and sisters as they were little. But, um...

PPDS Because you were the oldest?

SD I was the oldest daughter. My brother didn't have to deal with it. He was four years older than I was. So.

PPDS So your roles were quite different in the house.

SD Absolutely.

PPDS He fished.

SD He had more opportunities. I couldn't go to work in the construction business with my father. And I couldn't go, you know—there was definitely that...gender distinction, on what kind of work I should—or opportunities I should have. So I, you know....probably just...missed those...

PPDS And not men's...what were , what were the sort of opp—where were you channeled? Into more...working at home, and tending...

SD Well, I took care of the kids, yeah. I worked waitressing, babysitting, through high school. That's how I worked. And I worked for a lot less than my brothers did. And had a lot less opportunities financially than they did. Like buying a car, as teenager. They could do that. When I was, you know, I mean, I was like a buck twenty an hour as a waitress plus tips, they were making five, ten dollars an hour. You know, not ten dollars an hour but five dollars an hour. You know, and they would—so they had other opportunities, though we were both, we were all able physically to do the same kind of work. We just—it was very, very -- gender distinctions. Between me and my older brother David, and me and my younger brother, Ansel. Which, I'm in the middle of them.

PPDS And did you feel that you....at what point, or did you feel that ...there were moments that you pushed the envelope? In terms of, these people sort of expected you to do this, and you kind ofdiverged a little bit?

SD Yeah... I don't know if it was ...Yeah, I have to say a lot of it was , you know, I always felt... you know, it was like the late '60's, early '70's. All the women's lib stuff was coming to the forefront. Getting the opportunity to vote at eighteen was right there. Um.... So I think I kind of pushed the envelope a little bit in, in high school, as a teenager. I wanted to be on the ice hockey team. You know. I didn't push it as a rebel, because I didn't really feel that I had that kind of support. But I said, OK, there's no women at ice hockey team. Why aren't there any women in ice hockey team. I wanted it to happen. You know, that kind of thing. So I because... I think it transferred into more about my voice, as a woman. That I didn't..." nobody's going to tell me I can't have a voice." That's how I felt. More than "Tell me I can't do something." I'm not sure I had a lot of support around that, and I had a lot of personal insecurities around that, but I was always considered a very outspoken, radical kid in school. I would have no problem walking into the principle's office and asking why they were expelling somebody for some infraction that I thought was unfair. Or that they were telling a kid that he couldn't graduate, you know, they weren't going to give a kid a diploma because he didn't have enough of something. You know? And just ...I was always advocating for somebody, in some capacity.

PPDS So, fairness and equity was a thing...

SD Was a driving force for me. Yeah. So when I shaped around this, I actually went through—I went through some very hard um...hard emotional times as a late , in my late teens. Based upon chaos in my family. And I really didn't think I had a voice in what ended up happening to me. And it, in that whole thing, without getting into it, it was—I ended up, I ended up going to school. I ended up, you know, trying to make my own way. Nobody had any money for me. I didn't have any guidance on scholarships or even opportunities, though...though my parents were told that I was very bright, and that I could have skipped a grade in school and gone to college early. They never really—they didn't really quite understand how I... you know. So I ended up going to the local community college for a while and promptly quitting. But, you know, I just really didn't feel I had emotional support around an issue that had happened. So, I ended up coming back here, waitressing , I ended up meeting my husband in the coffee shop, I ended up that winter opening up scallops in – there was a big off-shore sea scallop industry during the late 70's, early '80's. I ended up working in that industry in town.

PPDS So, that was sort of the first switch to being formally a fisherman?

SD Um-hm. And Ernie and I got married. And so, a lot of, a lot of what we did was around his seasons of fishing. But I also went back and got my real estate license; continued with some part time college. Though, when we were first married, Ernie's a very traditional male. That would say, you know, I would say like" I want to go back to

school” and he would say “I don’t think that you really need to.” You know, that kind of thing.

PPDS Do you think he would say that now?

Knows SD No. No, because right now, I mean, he knows, no. He actually has a daughter that, who’s a feminist and the head a the feminist collective in her college ,so. I don’t think that would really go well. You know? He learned. He came through a very traditional family. I mean, he’s learning. He’s a work in progress, I’d say. But it was the culture of the time, too. Those of us that were here, doing that kind of thing, working together as husband-wife teams were often times you know, working side by side, you know. Though I never got paid. That was always one of the things that really...one of those things. I never got paid for my work.

PPDS He would. But you wouldn’t.

DS Yeah.

PPDS It sort of went to the family....

SD Right. I, if we’d ever went—I always go back to the bay scallops, it seems to be the symbolic thing of studying the culture of my family—I’d be on the boat with him, and I’d have the license to catch equal amount, and the reason why I was on the boat was to double our economic opportunity, yet when he sold the scallops to the fish buyer it would never be split. And it – the check would always come back in his name.

PPDS And he would cash it...

SD I’d run the family business.

PPDS Right.

SD You know, the family finances. And pay the bills or something. But ...

PPDS But he would have that opportunity to use some of it on per—on things he might want to...

SD Yeah, like he would, he might—a portion of the money would go into the business part of running, or having, yeah. Yeah. I never really had a check that said, OK, here is a thousand dollars for your week. Go do whatever you want with it. You know, it always went towards the family bills. So I really didn’t have that economic opportunity to move forward in something that I might want to do. Like, my photography, or my art. So, that really was.....an issue. Not really there, but it was always there. In some capacity.

PPDS You said that, you know, it sounded like there were a number of folks that worked in couple-partners in the industry. Was that a common thing? For fishermen to have their wives work with them?

SD Yeah. If it was seasonal businesses and also for those wives to maintain other jobs as well.

PPDS So, even if—

SD There are women right now in town, I mean even for me, with what I do with Ernie. If I, I do bookkeeping. I make nothing. I make maybe a hundred dollars a week maintaining the books of three businesses that are part of our businesses. You know, that kind of thing. I know that there's other women in this town, they're still only making, or getting a check, of two hundred dollars a week. Though they've built humungous businesses with their husbands.

PPDS Right.

SD So, I mean, that is still there. And the rationale behind that, often times, is “Well, you know, it's our money together.” You know. So—you know. But it's just—you know.

PPDS There's “our money” and then they've got a little bit of their money.

SD Yeah. Or—yeah. Yeah. It's very bizarre. It's very archaic. And it still exists.

PPDS But you feel that it exists—or, this is something that exists, you see, in fishing families.

SD Probably in fishing/farming ...

PPDS Farming.

SD Small Mom and Pop operations.

PPDS Right.

SD Anything that is a small business, I think it totally exists. I don't think it's just generic. I don't think it's just to the fishing industry. I think it goes across the board.

PPDS But it would potentially happen less, you think, if the woman is working for a company and the check is made out to her, she might have more control over what happens to that check afterwards. Whereas with the way that—

SD The way the structure, yeah.

PPDS the structure of it, it's easier to sort of—

SD Right. To justify that it's "for the family". Versus having it as an individual paycheck too do with it what you want. It just.... It's....yeah. And I think it's...I think women, in themselves, across the board have been, you know, within the industry—I know my grandmother never got paid to open scallops after she had a forty hour work week. Standing, you know, standing in the laundry. Doing people's laundry, you know, on cement floors and then come home and have to open scallops 'til midnight for my grandfather. I know she never got paid to do that. You know, I know my mom would mend nets for cigarettes when she was sixteen. But that was it. Now, you know that a pack of cigarettes was not , you know.

PPDS People might still be mending nets for cigarettes given the price of them!

SD Yeah, I don't know. I quit smoking a while ago. You want some more coffee?

PPDS Sure, that would be great. [00:36:30]

SD That's so funny. I just—the economic situation is, yeah.

PPSD Sounds almost like a hidden harvest. You know, it's something that, that's not on your ledgers, is those...

SD The equity of women in the fisheries?

PPDS Well, the, the value of their work. If you, you know, do the ledgers and it says, you know, you paid so-and-so to do this, and you paid so-and-so to do that, that value's just not there. It's just assumed. So, the full costs of the business don't take into account the role that women are playing in that process.

SD Totally. Totally. You're absolutely right.

PPDS Yeah.

SD The value of the business of off--- cause most people do set the structure of their fishing industries into a business. The value of that business is placed upon the owner the owner of the business. Now, the owner of the business could be Mister and Missus. You know, or... and, and you never see that that business is split down the middle as far as profit sharing. But if was Mr. Fishing Vessel, and Mr. Fishing Vessel then you totally see that happen.

SD Right.

PPDS You know. And I think that—

PPDS Two males owning a business, you would see that they were partners.

SD Right.

PPDS Whereas, a family business, the male is seen as the owner...

SD Right

PPDS And the family is seen as the beneficiaries...

SD Right.

PPDS ...even though the...

SD They're partnered together.

PPSD partnered together. Wow. And legally, I mean, was there sort of a... did you feel that even though, formally—even though—

SD Just thinking of names as I'm talking to you.

PPSD --even though informally they weren't taken into, women—women, or yourself, wasn't so much considered or , or valued, legally—was there legal support? If for some reason you were to separate that the—

SD I did. I separated and divorced my husband. And the one thing I held onto was the fact that I wasn't going to split up his businesses. But I was definitely going to maintain the ownership. And I was going to work as a fair and equitable partner, within—with a share. I went through—

PPSD So you had to divorce your husband to become a partner!

SD Yes. Well, I was a partner on paper. But I...know that this was nothing to do with my lack of love of this man. But. In some weird, bizarre statement of my own self-worth... Not bizarre. I shouldn't say that. because it is a total, I mean, I did that. To everybody. It was symbolic to everybody. From my grandfather to my father to ...any patriarch within my...world. To say—

PPSD "I am an individual"...

SD I have worth.

PPSD Right.

SD And it came as an opportunity when I started to get a voice. And I... and I love Ernie to death. And he doesn't mean these things in bad ways, but I just, it's just the culture of how he grew up. He had a very traditional mother, who didn't work outside the

home at all, and just totally supported her family. Caught reruns and watched game shows. And, you know, shucked scallops or did things she needed to do. But I remember when Madison Stevens and all that stuff that was going on about the two hundred mile limit, it was like, late '70's or whatever, and there was a guy in town that—he was a very strong voice going up to the council meetings and stuff and activating the community, and I'd often talk to him about things. Just try to understand, I always liked revolutions and fights, you know? And, I remember saying to Ernie, and this was like first and foremost, "I really want to be part of this. I really want to make a difference." And he said to me, "Nobody's going to take you seriously around the shore." Cut off at the knees, you know, kind of thing. And I just remember, I—I just don't like to be told I can't do something. It almost drives me to death to do it. You know. And so, that was the understanding of—though not through a very cognitive way, but just that it kind of drove a lot of my purposeness. I became the first ever, only woman, that ever joined the Chatham Fisherman's association. And went to one of their group dinners. And promptly got told, you know. You know, I just stood up to the president and I said I want to become a member of the Chatham Fisherman's Association. And this was like, the late '70's, and he was, they are all having dinner, all the fishermen, you know. And he looks at me, like, "Huh?" And Ernie said "Yeah, she wants to become a member." Almost—I don't—you know. He wasn't being vicious, he was being supportive. And I sat down and they promptly called it—you know, called the meeting and talking, and, and—

PPDS What year was that?

SD Late '70's? Hey, I was working in the industry, I might as well become a part of it. Makes perfect sense, right.

PPDS Not to them, apparently.

SD And the president said, "You know, well this isn't really a social club where husbands bring their wives for dinner; we need to talk about serious things." And, you know.

PPDS And, did you stay? Were you allowed?

SD I stayed. I stayed. I was dismissed, and ignored, but I stayed.

PPDS For a—for years or...just for dinner?

SD No...

PPDS [laughter] Just for dinner...

SD But I continued to not really—cause Ernie not really being in the cod, ground fishery—fishing, it wasn't really, you know, all the two hundred mile limit were there for us, but they weren't part of our lives. And that we had this geographical distinction that I was really unaware of. You have the fish pier, and then you have the south side. Which

is the Stage Harbor. And we were Stage Harbor fishermen. And the fish pier was a whole other animal of fishermen. The ground fishing stuff. The Weirs fish out of Stage. And I never knew that until...the '80's? No, late '90's. When the Army Corps of Engineers weren't going to dredge out in Lydia's Cove and the outfall pipeline was going in at the Cape Cod Bay and a group of people started to get activated around getting our harbor dredged. And we were working on putting a monument, a fisheries monument, in town, that happened to end up at the fish pier. And I remember being called "Southside Shareen" by these fishermen that fished out of Chatham fish pier, and I said "What are you talking about?" She goes, "Had this meeting, where we were moving the Army Corps of Engineers, you know, trying to question some of their rationale behind the economic viability of our fishing industry, and why they wouldn't dredge it, and I remember this fisherman from, who fished out of the fish pier, looked at me and said "What are you doing here?" And I said, "Well, what do you mean what am I doing here?" And he said, "You guys fish out of Stage Harbor." And I said, "Yeah?" He goes, "But I don't understand why some body from the South side would care about what's going on ...here." Which, if you look at is about a mile and half away.

PPDS I was going to ask you, what sort of physical distance are we talking about?

SD And I said –

PPDS Sound s like the Mason-Dixon line.

SD It is. It was. I think it still is. I said, "Isn't this a Chatham issue? Isn't fishing community—aren't we a fishing community?" " And that was my first experience with the divisiveness of this community. As far as—I always thought of us as all one big, you know, fishing community. I never really heard the competition end of fishing, or what was going on.

PPDS Is that because you were sort of sheltered from it in Stage Harbor? Or—

SD Both.

PPDS --disassociated with it 'cause it was more of a man's world—

SD I was both. I think it was both. 'Cause if you talk to somebody else it probably was quite in the forefront as a woman. Down to the fish pier. She would have known totally about that. And I wouldn't've. I mean, Ernie just wasn't—didn't—I mean he fished out of the fish pier when his brother had a boat, and they went cod fishing, for some time, and sea scalloping, for some time, but – and he even fishes out now, with, with his friend, they Scottish seine. But he never, never, um—I never really knew the diversity, I mean the division of the two harbors.

PPDS So, you said, got a couple of things..

SD Um-hm.

PPSD You talked about this monument, that I definitely want to find out more about. I'm definitely hearing that this voice that began to emerge in high school that I'm sure has since said a lot, but I wanted to...ask if you felt that there were other divisions in terms of –was it more geographic? Or was it by...by fishing type? I mean, was it that it was sort of like, little clams? Or was it rather—

SD I think it was around the competition of the fish. Of, of fishing. I think it was more about the business competition than...than anything, territorial stuff, about fishing areas. Fishing types started to emerge, when the gill net industry started here, in the '80's...

PPDS So, people sort of transferred from the jack-of-all-trades to the beginnings of focus on certain fisheries more?

SD Perhaps. But still diverse. Because you still, up until probably the middle of the '90's, saw the diversity. Or, yeah. Up until the emergence of the Hook Fishermen's Association. I think you saw a lot of diversity. Up until, and not just because of that organization, but the nature of the politics of why that organization had to form, and also the nature of the amendments that were coming down on the ground fishing. That those opportunities—people needed to fine-tune and be more, fight for—

PPDS Identify themselves.

SD Whether they knew it or not, I think that they were. And I think it was also the nature of how much fish were around. At the time.

PPDS Hm. So, political, organizational, and...natural...regulatory...

SD And the resource. The natural resource itself. And other opportunities not presenting themselves because I mean, sometimes there's be fish, sometimes there's not. So, I mean, we all—I, like I'm a firm believer of the cyclical nature of...of, of fish, of everything in nature. And you know, what happens within one season might not be the same as what happens in another. And that does drive, I think, in the forefront. The, um.. the whole idea of what you're going to be doing in your fisheries, or in other fisheries.

PPDS You said that there was this point that you started shell—I think it was shell-fishing more commercially and became a fisherman. How did that then turn into working with the Weir—when did you take over the Weir business?

SD Well, we, I think it came about getting a voice within the fishing industry itself. I think it comes in some sort of innate, natural ability to me, to—I don't know. I love the water. I love—it calms me. It visually—there's a beauty and an essence around doing that. It's—and it's—there's also the economic opportunities that I didn't see within this community, not having a college education. I mean, aside from – during the '80's-- I got married in the late '70's, I worked in retail, I worked as a waitress, I worked in real estate. I had my children. I worked as a teaching assistant. And then I started to become a

little more active within community development, you know, like the fisherman's monument and then activated on the dredging issue, and then felt I had a voice a little more...um...was having personal issues with my—with Ernie, and ended up leaving him and going clamming.

PPDS [laughter] That sounds so funny. "I left him and went clamming."

SD Well, it a big deal because it was three women that went together and that was not heard of really, even in the 90's, early '90's. For us to go . We didn't know our way down to Monomoit. We didn't know where the clams were. And nobody was going to tell us. But we definitely were three women who clammed together. Um... And we made—it was probably one of the more contentious times in my life but probably one of the more lovelier times. The nature of getting on a boat and living, breathing on the tides. And trying to figure out my own life. And my kids, and really thinking, as a woman on my own without thinking about something else, was ... it was very enlightening time.

PPDS That connection with...nature. You saw nature as sort of a healing—something...

SD Oh, it, it, it, it, it, opened me up as a person, as an artist—you know, just having, you know, as a mother. So many other things, you know, that, that occurred, that—I just needed to be a person, to grow on my own, by myself, for a period of time. I never really had that as I was younger. Getting married when I was nineteen and then, but just living in this whole, like, male put-down kind of family unit that I was actually in. You know. If I think about it, my father, yeah. And so, we'd go clamming and it would be great. I mean, we'd, we made up songs...the shellfish constable, you know, he called us—you know, we were in a league of our own. We were these three women, you know, battling the world. Oh, it was great. We just had a good time. And got ourselves into some nasty shit in the Sound a couple of times? Because we didn't know what the hell we were doing. But, you know, all in all, you know, worked hard, and worked as a team, and supported each other. And ended up doing it only for a year but ended up...definitely loved it. You know. Definitely it was hard work, but definitely... we were called the Clam Bitch From Hell. But I always worked, you know, like I always, always when the fish were here, any given time, during my, you know.... From the day I met her and, you know, during the season of, Weir season, I mean, that was our time to make money, so I was always down on the dock. After work. Bringing food to the crews. Bringing beer to the crews. Cause we'd pack our fish out.

PPDS What season is—sorry, what time of year is that?

SD Uh, May. May, June. Everything's always motivated around, around that time of year. And so, and you know, packing fish. You know. Always doing the shore-side support stuff. Making out the settlement. Picking up the check. That kind of thing.

PPDS But not getting paid for it.

SD No. No. And then when I decided to go fishing for the season, after I went clamming, I never ran a boat. I didn't know how to run a boat. And I got a boat. When I was clamming I got a boat. It was given to me. I painted it purple. I called it Alberta. It was a seventeen-foot Montagna skiff. I had a 55-horse power engine on it. And the thing would dolphin if I didn't get it like, up on the dock water. And to go to Monomoit, and that was way out of control. Um... so I got to learn how to run a boat. My Weir fishing, my brothers worked for us. It's almost like they were a bit... you know, they would, they—my older brother worked the Weirs. Um...

PPDS You said they worked for you. That's mean that...you, why was it your business and not theirs? If they were your brothers? If you had inherited it, or...

SD No, I didn't inherit it. No. Ernie—Ernie actually owned a Weir business. His father is a Weir fisherman.

PPDS OK.

SD He, actually, his father died. And his brother and him ran the company for their mother, up until the '90's. In the 1980's, the company that my grandfather used to work in, and that was owned as [XX? 00:54:26] ..some of the Weirs were only [XX? 00:54:29] my great-grandfather, and some of my great-uncles. It was owned by a man who was retiring, and he sold it to Ernie and I. So, Ernie and I had--

PPDS Two Weir companies.

SD Two Weir companies. Right. So. Ernie had it with his brother—well, he didn't really own it until the '90's, and then we had Monomoy Track Company.

PPDS And they're the only two down there.

SD No, and then Mar—um, Kurtz. [Curt's?]

PPDS Kurtz.

SD It's Nantucket Sound Fisheries. And then there's one up in Harwitch. Track and bait. So, um, it ended up my brothers were actually working for me.

PPDS That's a, that's ironic a little bit after all of that.

SD Yeah, it was. It was.

PPDS Was that a little...

SD It was hard on my older brother. We really—he didn't like the idea, I don't think, that I actually became part of the crew. I don't think he felt I could pull my weight. And I don't think he, you know, I don't think he really liked the idea of women being on a boat

unless they had to be. You know. His wife would go with him. And do things when needed, but I think he really had a definite—he didn't want his little sister. I've always been a pain in the ass to him. Now all of a sudden—

PPDS You're his boss.

SD But I never, I mean, I always deferred to Ernie. As far as, you know, dealing with that stuff. I mean, I dealt with all the other crap. So, when I crewed on the boat, and I say crew because I didn't have the experience to run a company myself, my other brother, my younger brother, actually ran it. You know, with me. And he would, he was the captain of the boat. And there was total sabotage going on the entire time I crewed on the boat with my brothers. Because I really, really don't think they thought I belonged on the boat. They don't think I—I think they truly believed I couldn't physically carry my own weight.

PPDS So they, you feel that they would make it more difficult for you?

SD I was told by one of my crew guys that um...actually, my younger brother would make a point of trying to make it difficult for me.

PPDS Right.

SD You know. Just to—

PPDS You didn't feel as though they were sort of looking out for you, making life a little easier, or...

SD No. I didn't.

PPDS ...taking care of little sister...

SD I don't think so. You know, but I don't—you know. It was also a time when I was split up with Ernie, so you know, I think that there was a lot of other things—

PPDS Going on.

SD Going on. Besides that. Which you know, makes it totally dysfunctional. But...

PPDS Certainly complicated...

SD Dysfunctional and complicated. I'll say that up front. You know. That's not an issue for me now. I've come a long way from that, but. I think that um...I think that it was—the funniest moment that I had in the whole thing was—and I had—I have to put some faith in Ernie. He always trusts that I could do what I needed, you know. He always trusted and he always knew that I could make a decision or do what had to be done. I

don't think he really, you know, he never really gave me the impression that he didn't think I could do it.

PPDS Wow. Yeah.

SD He had faith in me.

PPDS Which was different from when you said, than when you had asked—

SD Yeah. Than when I was younger.

PPSD Yeah.

SD I think he changed his attitude. I wonder why.

PPDS That's kind of neat too, that people—

SD But it did it did.

PPDS ...change...

SD And it was a wonderful...um...

PPSD That your experience as a woman has changed throughout your life.

SD Um-hm. Um-hm. And he, he, actually, I think, grew as a person too.

PPDS At this point were you married?

SD No. No. No.

PPDS And you're still not...

SD We're married again.

PPDS You're married again! Oh, I didn't know all of this.

SD Yeah. I know. I think actually documenting this is a little foolish... [laughter] convoluted story but I guess it's the nature of growing up in a chaotic family environment and not having good structure and stuff, I mean...

PPDS But do you feel that one of the positive outcomes of divorcing your husband is somehow remarrying him on terms that were better for both of you?

SD I think we all needed to take a step back and grow a little bit. Both he and I. Emotionally. And I think that that was part of it. Yeah. I think the outcome has been that

it's a little, a little—different. More, uh...we're stronger together. I don't think we ever didn't—not love each other. I think we had a lot of things in the way. But—one of the funniest things that happened to me once was that we were—we had three boats up in, off of Kilpond Bar, which is just south of Dennis. South of Dennis. And we, there was a load of fish there. And—

PPDS Three boats , three...

SD Three trap boats. At the Weirs. At the Weir—Weir Kilpond Bar. It's a double header. Two traps that are within this sandbar system off of Dennis. One of the traditional fishing grounds that we fish. We had a lot of mackerel. And so the boats are the Lillian A., named after Ernie's mother, the Lester F., which is named after Ernie's father—
[phone rings]

PPDS Do you want me to pause?

SD No.

PPDS OK.

SD We'll let the machine pick it up. And the Morgan and Shan—the Morgan E., which is named after my daughter. And I think it was at probably at that time maybe even the Shannon E. but that boat is long gone. And I remember the boat was full of fish that-- two of the boats, we were full of scup and mackerel, and my brother-in-law had the Lillian E. and Ernie said "Go back to Stage Harbor, start unloading." And then he looked at me and said "Take the Lester." [answering machine begins in background. 00:59:54]

PPDS I'll just pause it for a second.

RECORDING PAUSED

PPDS You were saying he turned to you and--

SD So, I'm in the Lester and it's full of mackerel, and I've never done this before. And this was like Dennis to Chatham, is, I don't know. How many miles is that. Ten, fifteen miles? He said "Take the Lester back. Just follow John." And I ...I go, "OK..." and he goes "You can do it. You can do it. Just do it. Just follow John." And I said "All right." You know, and I know it's just—you're heading one way, so. Beautiful, clear day. There's no obstructions anywhere. Or you know, it's not like you're gonna get lost. There's no big tide running, you know. It's just a big, outboard skiff. You know? It's a thirty-two foot boat, but that's OK. And I said, "OK." My brother-in-law just promptly just—he laid it down and he took off. He didn't wait for me. And so I—I started out and I started to feel really panicky, 'cause every time I tried to [X? hook? Put? 00:60:56] the boat up, put the RPMs up, the stern would go down and I was rub—the rails would just, you know, thousands of pounds of mackerel in the boat. And I just, I remember I just

started to get a little panicky. And I said, “You know what? I guess it’s going to take me a little longer to get back to Stage Harbor...”

PPDS Yeah.

SD “...than usual. I’m just gonna just go back” and not, you know, ‘cause I knew that once I got it up it would be fine. And I wasn’t going to sink, but. I really hadn’t run the boat except when it had been empty, you know, or , or you know, moving it around the harbor to the mooring. Not a, not going from point A to point B. So. I get into the harbor, and make a turn to the—to dock the boat, and I look up and there’s Three retired fishermen, old guys, sixties, seventies—in their seventies, and my brother John is yelling at me to, you know, back the boat down, you know, and stuff. And I’m, you know. The dock’s up high—it’s low water. So I look up and they’ve all got their hands crossed, shaking their hands, and this Mr. Powell, who my grandfather worked for, for many years, and was the owner of the Weir Fishing Company, next to us, and he goes “Cobby Nickerson’s probably rolling over in his grave right now.” And they all just stood there and they shook their heads. And it was like, these three old die-hard, old-guy fishermen couldn’t believe I’d brought a load of mackerel into Stage Harbor. And not one of them threw me one of the fishing lines, a-- dock lines, to dock the boat.

PPDS So, you don’t think it was sort of disbelief and a smile on their face. Like “Wow, times are changing.”?

SD It was disbelief with a smile on their face, but also...

PPDS I’m not sure if I like these

SD And there hadn’t been a woman that ever really fished the Weirs before, so. I, I guess, you know, that it really took them aback a little bit. To see, see, see that. When, when it, all they’d had to do was open their eyes a little further they would have seen it all over the place.

PPDS Right.

SD But they just, you know, the fact that it was... I guess, one connection to my grandfather, that, you know no other woman had actually fished the Weirs so maybe that was part of it.

PPDS That it was in your blood. You, you know—

SD Yeah. That—

PPDS It was natural.

SD Yeah.

PPSD It wasn't, why you did it—

SD yeah. So, not one of them threw me a dock line. And, you know? And I just got up and I said, “Well you know I am sure he is rolling over in his grave, but. You know? He always shook his head at me anyway. “

PPSD But it's—so, in a sense, for women to get involved in the fisheries and to work in, in many of these fisheries, you had to work harder than the next guy.

SD Well, I think it's, to step back from that, perception is reality. My perception about it is different. So therefore, my reality is different. Than somebody else, another counterpart, another female might have a wholly different experience than I did. But based on my family experience, and my personality, then yeah. I had to work a little harder to prove myself. And I, you know. And I have the spirit of always wanting to try something different anyway. I never liked to stick to anything too long. I've never had a life long job except in considering the fact that I've worked with the fisheries, yes.

PPDS It's had themes.

SD It's had themes. Definitely has had themes. It's always around something, so. So that, you know, that...um...and at that same time, people were starting to come here looking, like you are right now, for information around things. They were often times grant opportunities for non-profits to come into communities and to look at...and I remember the Quebec Labrador Foundation—well, the first one was Greenpeace. Nias Dory [?? 01:04:57] coming to sit and talk to me. She came, you know, knocking at my door, after – after I did that whole dredging thing. And we got that moved forward. I think that people recognized me as something within the community. A voice. I was cofounder of the Chatham Fishermen's Wives Coalition. And the only reason we named it that was because the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives had had such a loud voice. We weren't all fishermen's wives—

PPDS Right.

SD But we just—identified it quick [snap of fingers] to move it forward.

PPDS It branded you.

SD Branded us. So we did a lot advocacy to get that dredging project through. And then consequently moved a few things within the community politic—politically. In our town government. And um...and that promptly fell by the wayside. Because it was organized as a one-issue thing, get dredging done. And then [X? 1:05:54] move forward.

PPDS But why did the Greenpeace woman come?

SD Oh, well, because of knowing that we were doing activism within the town I think we were identified in some capacity in the press or whatever as you know, women leaders or whatever. So, she came and talked to me about some of the issues around the herring fisheries. And ITQs. Then after her came QLS. Quebec Labrador Foundation were here. Julie Early. And she came. And it was pretty interesting 'cause I think what she was trying to do was move women in the maritime a little bit along the East coast. So, she was providing opportunities to get women together through, I think, Conservation Law Foundation. Might have had something to do with them, I'm not sure. But she—I had the opportunity to go with other women, um, from Fairhaven, from Gloucester, from here and from... from Canada, to come together on PEI, Prince Edward Island to talk about women in the maritime.

PPDS Oh, neat.

SD It was great. Except for, it was driving somebody's agenda. That wasn't our own.

PPSD What agenda was that?

SD I don't know.

PPSD Oh. That's the worst.

SD I think it was around some of the...um, some of the agendas that Conservation Law Foundation had, you know, um.. some of the agendas of grants written for community based whatever. I think that, um, nobody really wanted to come out and say "This is what we had to hear. We want you to start doing this." I think that they wanted to see an evolution. And I ended up getting- advocating for the women in the group, saying "These organizers came together. These non-profits, these NGOs that have their own political agendas came together and brought these women together, and started to like, put us into rooms and talk to us about community-based, organizations and stuff. And I went up to Julie Early and I said, "you know, you got a group of women in here, you know, that are socially and economically tapped out." And I said, "You're asking them to do more. For your own agenda." And she said "Well..." There was this one woman that was just, she was from Arcadia, and she had, you know—these women in Canada, they have lost their fisheries. Losing their communities. And people should be coming to their communities and assisting them, not by creating—I just get all, like, I hate how—I always feel that a community should drive their own agenda. When it comes to non-profit programs. You know. Like, getting a grant. You figure out what your community needs and then you go forth. I really get pissed off when other non-profits come into the community and say "This is what we can do for you." So, it was the difference—

PPDS Or, rather, it was "what you should do."

SD "Should do." Right. So, that was what was happening and I was getting pissed. So, I ended up saying, "You know, back off of these women. They're tapped out emotionally. They're trying to keep their families together. Their communities are going down the

pits. And this is what you're doing?" It's not, you know, you know. It was to satisfy somebody's...grant. But. What did come out of it was an opportunity for me to work with somebody at CLF. I mean QLF.

PPDS What's QLF?

SD Quebec Labrador Foundation?

PPDS Oh, right. Of course. 'Cause just CLF is so different.

SD Yes, it is.

PPDS Make sure that we caught that, so—

SD But they worked together, and...um, Julie Early, the director at that time, you know, she came here and she was like, "Ok, what would you like to be doing?" And I said, "Well, I—I'm not sure", you know? You know, I've just gone through this whole, like, emotional roller coaster with Ernie, and, you know, gone through this whole fishing stuff, and you know, I said "I'd really like to start doing like, community ba— you know, we need to bring this community together. Information. To, you know, give people opportunities and stuff." And... and she was like "No, what would you really like to be doing?"

PPDS As an individual.

SD As an individual. Um, and so we talked a little bit about my photography. And so she brought—she did it. She provided an opportunity for me by having Candace Cochran, who actually is a photographer, come to Chatham. Teach me how to work in a darkroom, fine-tune my darkroom skills, so that I was able to produce some work.

PPDS All right.

SD And I ended up having a show of my photography. So, so actually I took up, I took up a community opportunity and turned it into a personal opportunity. And from that, have grown, with my photography. And um—

PPDS Is your photography related to – is it—

SD Well, the relationship is that I have this, this, I have been photographing people within the fishing community. And I have always done environmental portrait work. Black and white. And they saw that I had all this stuff. And they said, why don't you pick twelve or fifteen of your images and we'll be happy to put a show together for you. In Ipswich. So, I transitioned [XX? 0011:15]. I transitioned from—I've always had this conflict of art, work. You know, like how, how do I get my photography to work for me. You know, that kind of thing. So, that happened. And I, and I got to establish myself in a different way. And...from that...oh, wow.

PPDS Was there anything—do you feel political in the photographs? Or was it just a different dimension of how your, was just a different interpretation, a different way of expressing what you saw around you. I mean, did you use the photos to send any political message, or...

SD Often. Yeah. Some of the imagery was like that. Some of that was just to, I guess maybe come out of what I was starting to see as the start of the loss of a community. To identify and document those folks that were actually doing something that my town wasn't seeing done anymore. That wasn't as important, it seemed to be more of a documentation of a way of life, so. That turned into, I don't know, that turned into a sort of period of time where, I don't know, I did some photography, didn't really know what I was going to be doing with it, was working with the businesses, just doing bookkeeping. Working, you know, I really went into this whole like, after going through this whole transitional phase and kind of fighting my through all this stuff, I kind of went dormant for a few years. And became involved with, again, another group of women. Um, the XX [1:13:06] Network. That came out of all kinds of things. Trying to advocate for community based fishing. Trying to advocate for our community. Trying to find a commonality. Seeing—seeing, seeing this...seeing agenda driven fishing. Politics. You know? Just trying to con—I don't know. Trying to connect. Community, I guess. Through women. And, um, tapped into some wonderful, different, eclectic across the board, women within the community of fishing. From scientists, to you know, advocates, to writers, to teachers to... people that fish, people that do shore-side support. And then, then we came out with "Well, what are we going to do? What are we trying to do?"

PPDS What was the relationship the [Myriads? 1:14:09] and the, the Fisherman's Wives? You had mentioned that the Fishermen's Wives came together for that, for—

SD For a cause.

PPDS For a cause but then didn't manage to –

SD Maintain.

PPDS Maintain it?

SD It kind of fell by the wayside.

PPDS Was this a reinvention of that, or—

SD I would have to say it was a reinvention to some degree, but some of the players weren't the same. Definitely weren't the same. Where Chatham Fishermen's Wives were Chatham, this was more, you know, eclectic. And, and diverse geographically. Initially. Geographically. And you know, we ended up, you know, going through several different, you know, "What are we going to do? Are we, you know, what are some of our goals? What do we see ourselves doing? " And then when we started [out? To doubt?

1:15:03] well, we need to raise some funding. We were trying to get our nonprofit. And that's when we decided to do the Fisherman's Calendar. Cape Cod Fishermen's Calendar.

PPDS That's right.

SD Which I photographed.

PPSD That's right! It's all coming together.

SD And to advocate, you know, and educate about the styles of fishing and the different fish caught. Through recipes in the calendar.

PPDS And the beauty and strength and—

SD I totally forgot one thing. Oh, I know. I totally forgot one thing.

PPDS What?

SD I did this thing...I have to find it. This is what brought attention I think, to me with—oh, no, no, no. I did a poster called...In Cod We Trusted. I started to use my art as a social statement. I only have the raw, but. It's upstairs. But I started to use—I should go upstairs and get it, if you want to stop that, or pause it.

PPDS Sure. I will.

SD SO you can see this. Just had to go back a step, so that you can understand the transition. Because of my voice, for the community, with the Fishermen's wives Coalition, and the whole thing with QLS, um...I was working—I guess the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives wrote a grant. They wanted to...um, do some sort of product marketing opportunity. And then decided to bring somebody down to the Cape and put together this program of, develop a recipe. Put it together. Market it. And I remember, I was really pissed, because in the need, on, on the grant it was written, and Julie Early initially presented it to me. For me to work on it. And to organize it. And I said, no, I don't have the time to do it. Um, it said "Ten fishermen's wives have requested that the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives do this." You know. So. I know we didn't. But that's OK, Angela. And so—yeah. It was pretty funny. So, I ended up—I was just working, and, and, and Mike—when I was living with my kids and not with Ernie, I had a—we lived in an apartment in North Chatham, and somebody drove by our house and shot a bullet through the window of my house. And it went o—beside the ear of my daughter, Morgan, and then into the wall above my daughter Shannon's head. So, um—

PPDS And this wasn't a coincidence?

SD No. Well, we didn't know. We didn't know who. I mean, anybody—

PPDS But you suspected that it was—somebody knew you lived there.

SD Well, no. We didn't. We didn't, no. We didn't know what happened and it was really—it was speculations, that I had—I had pissed off the New Bedford Fleet so they had come to get me. You know, shit like—because of all the contention amongst the, the politics of the fisheries at the time. And I, I had zero to do with it, you know?

PPDS Right.

SD And that was one speculation, from a cop in town, that went to my brother and said “It's probably some out of town fishing people.” You know, blah-blah-blah. And um... I had just bought this house. And so, for—just to explain what was going on with me, and why, for several years in the early '90's til the later '90's, I was dealing emotionally with my children and what was going on with that. And that kind of forefronts everything. And, uh—consequently, it was a random act. The guy was a drug dealer that was all messed up and got the wrong place.

PPDS Thank goodness.

SD Thank goodness he didn't kill my children—

PPDS Of course.

SD --and so we went through the whole court process. But it was three years before he was caught, so it was three very emotional years with my daughters.

PPDS Of unknown and.

SD Of unknown.

PPDS Uncertainty; was somebody—

SD And--right.

PPDS And did somebody have a personal vendetta.

SD But my main forefront was to emotionally get my kids back to where they would be OK. And one of the things was to use art, for my younger daughter, as a way to heal her. So, this whole, like, messaging through art started to evolve. In the '90's. And part of that was, you know, social statements can be made through art, or whatever. You know what? You're a big fat kitty cat. Yes, you are. He's blind. So, anyway. So we went through that whole thing. But I started to work – I ended up starting to work on this project for, in developing a, you know, a seafood product. But again, it was somebody else's agenda, and they wanted us to market it and stuff, and work with a couple women out of P Town, and nobody was really driving the process to do it. And I just didn't really want to be the leader in doing it. And—it was a good idea, and it went through its program. The guy promptly moved on to something else. But from that became an opportunity through the

Lower Cape Economic Development Corps. Who was trying to promote seafood on [and? 01:20:36] the Cape. And they had a grant, so I would sit in on meetings with them and they put together the Cape Cod Seafood Journal. Recipes, and articles about the fishing industry. And they had a year-long grant opportunity to do a journal, for four journals. So, I worked for nothing—

PPDS Again.

SD Again. With an editor who was paid. And wrote articles. And though I'm not a good writer he edited. But the essence of them were there. And did my photographs, for this, for this journal and got recipes, and you know, just went around promoting it a little bit. And, so, out of it came this—when the whole, I think it was Amendment Nine started to happen, the days at sea issue was really coming to the forefront. I remember, we were doing, we were gonna do something around the ground fish and protests, for one of the editions, but not really getting into it, but, but just showing some sort of social protest. So, all right, well I'll drive to Province Town. We'll see if there's, anybody's got any signs up on their boats. And of course, I knew they didn't. And I started to visualize this picture. S, I called the editor and I said, um—now this is a little out there for this, cause I know this is a fluff piece. But, what if—it was, it totally was—but, what if, what if we, um...I'm going to submit you some pictures I did. Now this is real symbolic too. And he goes, OK. So, I, I gave him my contact sheets. I had taken them of my husband Ernie, in his oil gear. I had tied his hands together. And I had shot him from here to here. As a social protest piece, for the, for, you know—

PPDS Clearly a fisherman...

SD With his hands tied.

PPDS Torso, with his hands tied.

SD OK. So, it went in the magazine like that on the Amendment Nine issue, which, well, somebody wrote. And from that, I was starting to go in the darkroom and do some other work. And, working on some processed stuff. And from that I started to—I was printing out that picture cause I wanted to do a fine art picture of this picture. And I started to like, rhyme words together about—about fishing days. And from it, I through the winter made this poster. Which I actually...did.

PPDS “In cod we trusted.”

SD And so, it starts here and it goes around.

PPDS “Fishing rules and codfish blues. Days of dogs and fishing logs. Calling call out. Blocked in, blocked out. Family strife, way of life, regulated. Inundated. Locked out. What next? Phase out. Won't take no. Dole won't sell my soul. “

PPDS and SD in unison: “Won't take no dole.”

PPDS “Won’t sell my soul. Days of doom from algae bloom. No days at sea. No fishery.
“ It’s a very powerful picture.

SD Hmm... so, from that, came the of evolution of working within fisheries with social statements and then getting to know...getting to know, you know, some of the people that had moved into town and worked with the Hook people, and getting to know other—coming together on different issues. And, and stuff. And being at meetings with women on different, you know, the healthcare issue, you know, the MFP, Mass Fisherman’s Partnership coming into town. Wanting to talk about the healthcare insurance and stuff. Seeing all this group of women that were, were at different meetings at different times. We’d all kind of get together and say “Hey...let’s, let’s, let’s put something together.” And, basically, Jen Viato and Asher Westwood from the hooks started to initially put this together, and were going to present it to the community as , you know, women getting to women in the maritime. And I Said, “You know—who do you think you are doing that? There are women in the maritime that have worked and have had voices. You need to become part of us.”

PPDS Right.

SD So, I wrote them this scathing letter. And emailed—sent it as an email. And, and so we probably got together to try them [X? 01:25:19] [laughter] “Don’t you think you can do this in my community without me!” I know, it’s bad.

PPDS ...Thank you so much. That’s how friendships are formed sometimes...

SD So, anyway, so we started the Myriad network, and based it upon, you know, trying to find some specific goals. And it really came out like gangbusters. And what ended up happening is when we created the Fisherman’s Calender, we created such a media stir over it that it totally usurped everything that we were trying to do. Again doing stuff for nothing. Again working, you know, all this time and energy on this. And consequently not having an infrastructure set up because Jen had left and Asher was moving on and stuff, that a lot of the ideas and opportunities we had, I really felt, started to get usurped by a more organized association in town. And so I really, we went through raising money—we raised, we raised—we have given away twenty thousand dollars in scholarships to kids around Cape Cod, over the last three years. More than that, probably, by now. We—yeah. But we were being identified as a part of the Hook Fishermen’s Association. And what ended up happening was a lot of things in good faith ended up, I believe, in their hands, and not ours. Their Hookers Ball was a mixed message, I think, for a lot of people, ‘cause we were riding the high tide of the Myriads and the whole idea of the mermaid, and they came out with that and we started to hear—and I was on the board of the Hook Fishermen’s Association at the time, trying to advocate to create them into a community-based organization, and out of that a lot of people felt that when they were giving to the Hook they were giving to us. And then—there was this mixed messaging and I just got really, really, really devastated by it. And I ended up not seeing them moving toward community-based, moving towards a fishing association that

actually represents all of our community. And I left. I left. And I—you know, I just, and let the Myriads kind of fall down and take a little break. Because I really felt that if we were going to come back and organize again it's going to come back on our own terms, with our own messaging. And again, I just felt again like they were taking, you know, something. Taking something away from me. And I don't want to cry about that, but it really, really, really troubled me. And, but I've had an opportunity to have my voice being heard very well. Um, in that, um, I'm part of my family. Ernie. And the girls. They're part of a documentary being done. By PBS.

PPDS All right. On fishing?

SD On, on fishing. And it's me—it's based upon the effects of the, you know, environmental regulations. The regulations on small fishing communities. And, um, Angela San Felipo from Gloucester's family, and Shareen Davis' family, from Chatham, are the two featured families.

PPDS Wow...

SD It should come out, um...next spring, I believe.

PPDS Wow. Do you know who the contact for this, to find out...?

SD Yeah. Sure. It's Kim Gallegher and Courtney Hayes. They're Sta[XX? 01:28:53] Street Films, and they're based out of Roxbury. And they've pretty much become part of my family now, cause they've been with us for like, three or five years. Three or four years.

PPDS Oh....That's amazing.

SD Yeah.

PPDS That's really useful.

SD Yeah. So, they, they have—yeah.

PPDS They've spent some time?

SD They've spent a lot of time.

PPDS Yeah.

SD With us. And I got to really, really say what I felt about...relations, impact on the wiers, impact on the community, you know? All—a lot of things. And to actually have our story told, about the kind of fishing we do. As a—you know, a traditional fishing.

PPDS And in a way that a lot of people will hear it.

SD Right.

PPDS Whereas, uh...yeah... You know, something you said a little earlier, it sounded like there was a period in Chatham, where all of a sudden Chatham got organized. You had, you know, the sort of traditional fishermen's group that had been there for a long time—

SD Yeah.

PPDS And then all of a sudden you got the Myriads—

SD Yeah.

PPDS Previous to that, you've got the Fisherman's Wives, and then the Cape Cod Hook Fishermen—why do you think all of a sudden that, that happened?

SD Well, I think that everybody was looking for their voice to be heard. Everybody was looking at how to protect their industry. I think there were—I don't think that this community was organized as—on that level, as they were when, I mean, there's even a shellfish association in this town—

PPDS That's right.

SD That could organized because of the...it was the government's impact on communities that were organizing the communities. But it was based on the agenda that was driving their loss of a way of life. It was never, Oh, let's be one big happy family. The way it used to be." 'Cause there was a fishermen's association in town.

PPDS Right.

SD It was very social. And it was very much a whole different thing. We used to have fishermen's dances.

PPDS It wasn't just a survival thing, or—

SD No. No. It wasn't based on politics, or, or...that whole thing. It was—

PPDS Sharing information.

SD Right.

PPDS Networking

SD Right.

PPDS Networking socially, as well.

SD Right. And I think that other things that are coming to the forefront are that our communities are changing. And More and more as, because the coastlines are becoming more of a real estate value, and... that we're, even though we are one of the driving, I think, economic forces within our community, probably most stable economic force even though there's a lot going on, because of our shell fishing industry, I'd say that. Um.... And even above tourism. I believe, strongly believe we are. But because of the increase in real estate values and the more, we're seeing more of an element of wealth moving into the community, of people moving out of the community because they can't afford it, that you're seeing a shift and change of how people understand what the fishing industry is. And how—and shifting change in what the needs are. And so, therefore, voices are that we're not only battling a federal [XX 01:36:06] regulations or state, we're having to battle our own home towns now. In zoning—

PPDS Right...

SD In infrastructure laws, at, so, you know, we're on all levels.

PPSD Have you engaged-- have you ever been a selectwoman or—

SD No. But we got an XX [01:32:02] to be a selectwoman.

PPDS You did get a—what's her name?

SD Debbie. Connors.

PPDS Connors.

SD Well, actually, we didn't get her. She on her own true volition—

PPDS Right.

SD You know, got-- got that.

PPDS But felt that that sort of was an—it seems like you're ...seems almost like you're—

SD We've gotten dredging, yeah. We've gotten dredging, we've gotten, um, renovation monies. We've gotten, you know, we've moved some town politics and right now we're gunning and going another battle because, you know, there's going to be some major zoning changes, and we have retired people, non-working people that actually attend all these meetings. And really the working voice is not heard. Basically, what they're doing is they're building this social society.

PPDS Yeah...

SD Around fishing communities and working people, to say, you know, we're going to revolt and come out at ya. So. But. Not so much come out at you but, it's politicized a—it really has politicized the...the working community. The harvesting community. And that's a hard thing, because it's just not... I think, a lot of people used to say that, well, women are more organized. Because they're—you know, not that they're more communitive, but they're not off-shore. You know? This was before cell phones and computers. That they came—attend meetings. And rallies. And you know, stand up and have their voice heard because they don't have to go out. On the boat.

PPDS Oh, right.

SD You know. That kind of thing. And that was always the story told about the Chatham Fishermen's Wives Coalition. Was that, we're the voice of the men because they can't be here today.

PPDS As opposed to being the voice of the women that were the—

SD Of the community.

PPDS Of the women, or of the community that—

SD Right. Yeah. And I always used to kind of play, like, I would accept that, you know. Some how that was justifying us. Which would, in retrospect, it should have fucking pissed me off. And it didn't. But you know, it was still that whole mentality. Or transitioning through that whole, like, let your voice be heard. So, ultimately, what did the Myriads end up doing? Photographing naked fishermen Beautiful!

PPDS The irony of your story just keeps coming out again and again.

SD So, that's the funny part. I always have to laugh.

PPDS And then you're in a network—do you feel it will all regroup? Or it's...

SD I would like to.

PPDS ...or reinvent itself into something else, or...

SD I would like it to reinvent itself into something else on its own terms. I think we had some div—some division amongst us. I think people, I mean, we're still there, though I had made it a choice to make or break, you know, asking everyone to please take some time and see how it evolves itself. Because we were getting some driving agendas from outside sources, which I didn't think we necessarily needed to do. I would ultimately like to see it come out in... I would like to see it have a voice again in the next few years but I think its, right now, for me, because I'm working, doing outreach and—grassroots for the

Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, and the issue around the wind farm The wind power plant I should say, in Nantucket Sound. Pretty much have to look to—to work on that issue, so I could help save the weir fishing industry from—

PPDS Is there—I don't even know what the connection is.

SD Well, there's a proposal for a hundred and thirty wind turbines on Horseshoe Shoals—

PPDS Right. I knew that.

SD And a few years ago... it started to come to the forefront that this was a proposal out there, and...I know, I was doing the Myriad stuff, and using the resource from the Hook, hearing that the Hook guys had a grant from the developer to assess the, you know, fishing community and what they, you know, what they think, would it be a good idea or not, and they had some young girl doing that. And you know, I said to—and then they invited the developers there to talk to fishermen and stuff, and I said to Paul, I said “Who knows how this is going to effect the habitat of Horseshoe Shoals? We don't know what it's going to do to the squid fisheries.”

PPDS Right.

SD You know, and so we had a meeting with the developer, and the developer couldn't answer some of the questions the lobster guys had and stuff. And, and what ended up happening is they started to do more public, you know, PR pieces. And Ernie and I were saying, wait a minute. This.... This is.... Why do we have to have this tradeoff of, you know, disrupting this ecosystem and you know, and building this power plant, and you know, is there, what's the tradeoff? And why is there a tradeoff? And can it be done in another way or why are we giving this wealthy developer, you know--

PPDS Right.

SD --public property?

PPDS Right.

SD So, we ended up—Paul knew was my position was on it. And I apparently....um....he got, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, which is the opposing group, had met with the Hook guys. And he says, and really not going to work on this issue anymore but I know some folks in town that are really, really upset about this and have some issues with it. So the alliance talked to Ernie and I, and we became part of the lawsuit challenging the jurisdiction of the cable that will go from the power plant to the state.

PPDS Right.

SD Because it's federal waters to state waters? And also that they were putting a data tower up on federal land without having jurisdiction of it. You know. The permit was coming from the state but, you know, the Army Corps was permitting the data tower, and the Army Corps shouldn't be permitting this kind of thing. So, we ended up becoming opponents on the lawsuit. We also ended up doing some volunteering, Ernie and I, with the alliance. And then it kind of evolved into me actually doing some more volunteering. With um, letting some opinion—doing some fishing, you know, industry, getting people to sign on to petitions, creating public awareness. And then last year their directors changed hands, and they realized they needed a connection to the fisheries, I think, and they offered me the job to work part time, and doing grassroots with them. And outreach. And working with the fishing industry. And so, consequently, we've been able to ask some hard questions, and educate the public on the impact that this may have and some of the, you know, some of the things about it that are just totally flawed. And basically worked on—that it's not so much about a project, but it's as much about the process. The permitting process, and the siting [siding? 01:39:28] and this kind of goes into the US Oceans Commission's—

PPDS About privatization of the oceans....

SD Right. And, you know, calling for federal guidelines and stuff.

PPDS Absolutely.

SD And I know that the alliance is probably working towards mooring [more? 01:39:25] protected status for the Sound, and I want to be, I want to be—

PPDS Oh, that's interesting....

SD --keeping the fisheries aware that this movement's going forward, as to be able to keep that, you know—

PPDS Keeping them involved....

SD Keeping them involved—

PPDS Yeah....

SD Because I really, you know....

PPDS Keep them participating....

SD Keep them participating in that. And that's not a –

PPDS 'Cause it sort of sounds like it could be dangerous for the fishery on both sides.

SD Oh, totally.

PPDS You could fight to protect the Sound and then all of a sudden it becomes a no-fishing zone, and you're like, what? There's somebody else's agenda again.

SD Right. Right. So I'm with them, I'm with them for a period of time and I, I've not signed a long-term contract with them, but it also has provided me an opportunity to work within the infrastructure of a nonprofit and to learn a little bit more about the components of running a nonprofit, and to see where that might go.

PPDS So, where do you think you might go from here?

SD I don't know. Because I'm also involved in a gallery in town and I have opportunities in my photography. Um...that, it's a question of which one I cultivate the more. And so it's always been like that.

PPDS This battle...between the...

SD Yeah.

PPDS Well, it sounds like you've managed to marry them....

SD Right now. Working...

PPDS And divorced them and remarried them...

SD Right. Right now, I mean, I, I work at the alliance three-quarters of the work week. I'm in my gallery, well, I say "my gallery" a couple days a week. I'm trying to create, photographically, you know—continue. And there's some interest in New York City. Some people in New York City looked at my work and would like to see a little more of it. And I also still do bookkeeping, and shoreside support stuff for the businesses. And over see the, the operation of the weirs in the spring. So, I haven't really had a day off, too much, since I started working with the alliance. I've had probably three or four days off.

PPDS So in a sense, it sounds like you're...

SD I threw it up in the air to see where it all landed. Would land. That's pretty much what I ended up doing this summer. And, and this started last spring, all these opportunities came at me at once. The alliance being the paycheck and that we really need to fight for this, and that's an important thing. It wasn't just about the money, but it helped?

PPDS Of course.

SD And um... you know, to fight to protect the weirs, you know, to continue to see that their not as impacted, you know, as they have been. And the opportunity came up wit the

gallery. They all came at once. And I couldn't say to either one of them. So, I just kind of threw it up in the air and we'll see where it lands.

PPDS Well, this sounds, it sounds like what you were saying before about, I don't know, fishermen in the past being—diversifying and having their hands in a lot of different baskets, in a sense.

SD That's what I...

PPDS That's what you're doing.

SD Totally what I'm doing.

PPDS And perhaps in a place like Chatham, where things are potentially uncertain there's a stability in doing multiple activities.

SD Yeah. I mean, right now it's totally, you know, it's the first time I've really made money that I feel, that I'm making of my own value. You know, of my own worth. Which is interesting, you know? And I'm making very good money. And right now, Ernie's fishing has been bad for two years. And it's fortuitous that it's happened. If, I think right now, because of the nature of what's going on in the fisheries. Its—he hasn't any good, you know, he hasn't had a very good fish year, so. And I work with all women in the alliance. It's amazing. Some very, very interesting, bright, forward thinking women. And its really quite a – it's quite interesting that I am working with all women. In this, in this non-profit.

PPDS It's seems like that's been yet another theme.

SD Right. But that it was deliberate, that it happened.

PPDS Yeah.

SD Yeah.

PPDS Thank you so much, Shareen.

SD You're welcome.

PPDS I really appreciate it. I'm just going to put the date on it. November fourth, ten o'clock. I'm going to turn it X again.

END OF TRACK 1002 01:44:04

START TRACK 1003

PPDS Oh, actually it's not going to work, because—

END TRACK 1003