

Name of person Interviewed: Toby Lees [TL]

Facts about this person:

Born: 1951

Sex: Male

Occupation: Fisherman

Home port: New Bedford, MA

Hail Port: New Bedford, MA

Residence (Town where lives) Fairhaven, MA

Ethnic background (if known) American

Interviewer: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel [JGF]

Transcriber: Tove E. Bendiksen

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbormaster House

Date and time of interview: September 25, 2004

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## Interview

[00:00] Track 1

JGF: My name is Janice Fleuriel, this is Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup> at the Working Waterfront Festival, I am interviewing Toby Lees, a boatowner and a fisherman. So, maybe you could start Toby, by telling us where and when you were born?

TL: I was born in 1951 in Worcester, Massachusetts...I'm a New England person.

JGF: Ah...but not necessarily coastal from the start.

TL: No...but I do have ancestry back to the long time whaling days in New Bedford.

JGF: Yeah, okay.

TL: Which is on my father's side, and we used to travel down here as kids all the time...and we used to see all the fishing boats. So, I went through high school and I didn't know what to do...I ended up going to college, to URI [University of Rhode Island], I took up Fisheries and in the summer of 1970 I got placed on a boat here- part of a course I took.

JGF: Okay...

TL: Yeah. So, ever since 1970...graduated college in '71, I've been here full-time.

JGF: Yup, okay, so I just have been reading the book Highliners, I don't know if you've read that...the novel by William McClaskey, it's about Alaska...but they talk about this kid who didn't grow up in it and wanted to get in it...he really had to hang around the docks and ask, and ask, and ask to get a boat...but it sounds like your experience was different, for how you got on boats...

TL: Yeah... kind of, kind of, yup...

JGF: What was the course?

TL: Oh, at school?

JGF: Yeah.

TL: It was at the University of Rhode Island...it was Commercial Fisheries and Marine Technology.

JGF: Huh.

TL: And ah, my first experience of going on a boat was spring of 1970...I went back to school, completed- graduated in '71 and then when I got out I found myself a full-time site on a dragger in New Bedford and I've been here ever since.

JGF: Wow, so moved you moved right in...

TL: Yeah, worked my way up...you know.

JGF: What does that mean? To work your way up? Like...what are the positions you have to start with and get up to?

TL: Oh boy...you go like a half share person or a shacker, where the other crew and captain might evaluate what you're worth...and the more you learn, the better you work- and work your way up to maybe getting full share.

JGF: Okay...and what is a half share? Full share?

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TL: It's a percentage of the catch. There is a certain amount of money that's...the way it's divided up...you get a percentage for the boat minus expenses, plus there is a percentage for the crew... and the number of people on the boat- it's divided by it and you end up with the crew share. So you don't know if- it could be a fifty-dollar bill or a thousand dollar bill. It's price related and it's catch related...plus it's expense related, which is a major thing today.

[03:05]

JGF: Yeah, huge thing today...right

TL: Huge...it's horrendous.

JGF: Compared to even when you started?

TL: Oh my God! Exactly.

JGF: What would you say...is it the boat technology, or is it other things?

TL: Oh, the expense right now?

JGF: Yeah

TL: Oh no. You got fuel...funny you say that, I just walked by the fuel company and asked the guy what the price of fuel is and he said \$1.64. That's to the boat...\$1.64 a gallon and most of these boats would burn anywhere from 500 to 1,000 gallons a day at sea.

JGF: Wow...wow

TL: Yeah.

JGF: So on a boat then...they must have to figure out how much fuel you need for the whole trip...and will a gas tank- or fuel tank hold that much? Or do you have like storage of fuel or...

TL: Oh, we got storage tanks in the boat. The boat has uh...I'd say most boats probably hold between five to twelve thousand gallons of fuel, depending on the size of the boat. That dictates how long you can stay at sea...so, then you got a good idea what you're running for expenses when you go on a certain boat.

JGF: Yeah.

TL: You know what you gotta produce and the upsetting thing right now is that the price of seafood and fish to the fishermen is not keeping up with the expense of what we are incurring right now.

JGF: Who sets that price?

TL: How now?

JGF: The price?

TL: The price of fish?

JGF: Does the boat captain have much say over the price or not?

TL: No...most of the boats that try to compete would do it- would go to an auction. There is an auction held here in New Bedford Harbor five days a week. All your fish will go on there and people- buyers, that are already signed or logged into the electronic auction [that] they have in New Bedford here, and they'll bid on it.

JGF: Wow, okay...so the captain may not really know what the price is going to be...

TL: No, they really don't know. I don't think anybody really knows until they feel out what's going on for the current day...what fish is available to them up and down the coast.

JGF: So, you said that your first boat was a dragger?

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TL: Yeah, it was an old side-trawler, an old wooden side-trawler...you'd call it a dinosaur or an antique today, you know...it's probably- I know it's sunk and is gone now.

JGF: Yeah...and what kind of fish was it?

TL: It was all groundfish...cod, haddock, flounder...yeah, the occasional- catch a lobster once in a while.

JF: Yeah...but that's not what you were going for?

TL: It was basically groundfishing.

JGF: So groundfish would be the cod, haddock...what about scallops? Do they count as that?

TL: No, no...scallops is their own- caught with a dredge...this is all done with nets, you know...

JGF: What kind of boat is yours today?

TL: Today. I got my boat back in 1982 and it's a 90 ft. stern trawler and I tie it up right here on the docks of New Bedford and it's in right now and it will be going out again next Tuesday for a seven day trip...and that's what we do, we try to make a trip every two weeks now. Maybe for eight months of the year, 'cause that's the only time we have to use the boat, we are very limited usage of the boat because of the days at sea now- we are allocated.

JGF: That's that TAC thing?

TL: No, it's days-at-sea [DAS] it's ah...oh, it gets a lot involved, but it's basically what the government has handed down to you with this Amendment 13...it's a grandfathered thing and you're allowed X amount of days. You try to use your boat the optimum time, when you think you can catch what you want to catch and the price is high...if you can. You take a chance- you really don't know, but you can take a calculated chance at doing it, when you want to do it.

[07:05]

JGF: Right...I imagine there is some amount of knowledge that you accumulate over the years that helps you figure that out?

TL: Exactly, exactly...like I say, I've been doing this now since '72...uh, 1970, but I'm still learning, but I do have some accumulative knowledge...which is helpful.

JGF: So are you a captain then?

TL: Captain, yup...I'm on the boat every trip myself, Captain...

JGF: And you said it was a stern trawler?

TL: Stern trawler, correct...yup...

JGF: A trawler then is different than a dragger?

TL: Well...you call it a stern dragger or a stern trawler, it's basically just uh, I don't know how to explain this one to you without a picture...really, you kind of need a picture to show it to you...yeah, what we do is, it's a net we drag along the ocean floor.

JGF: Okay.

TL: That's what we do.

JGF: So it's still groundfish?

TL: All groundfish, correct, yeah...

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JGF: What's the net made of?  
TL: The net today, oh, that's a good one! Years ago when I first went fishing, it was a cotton net or a sisal net and now today we are using these plastic materials that are all like- poly...poly-steel...all kinds of synthetic, real strong material- which is a big help.  
JGF: Yeah...because they don't disintegrate?  
TL: Yeah...and back in the day, when I did go fishing on what they call side trawlers here- old, archaic dinosaurs with all mechanical winches, no net drums...all the nets were pulled over the rail by hand. Today is all hydraulic drums, a lot of the boats are equipped with remote controls, where there is a person that runs all the hydraulic machinery from a station...and we have computers on the boats today, we have e-mailers, we have boat track devices...we got satellite radios, a lot of the boats now are getting internet connection through the sea-tell which is a satellite telephone, so you can get hooked up to the internet offshore.  
JGF: Wow...now what would you use that- I mean...I imagine no one's playing computer games too often?  
TL: Oh, no...it's too costly, but you do it for weather...yeah, weather and maps.  
JGF: Would it be like NOAA?  
TL: Yeah, sure...we go into any web site that you can get here or anyplace else. Yeah, we follow the prices, there is a web site in there that carries all the fish prices...which, I believe is a government web site.  
[09:35]  
JGF: Really...Huh.  
TL: Yeah, they track all the...there's an auction in Portland, an auction in Boston, Gloucester and New Bedford.  
JGF: Okay, so they go by the region?  
TL: Yeah, so if they submit it, it comes out on a spreadsheet and we can see what the auction price was up and down the coast.  
JF: Interesting...so, do you think all this technology is for the better? Or is it like a little for the better and a little for worse?  
TL: I think it's for the better...ah, I don't know...It's kind of a hard-  
JGF: It makes it more expensive, right?  
TL: Yeah it does...sometimes too much knowledge is kind of ah... an interference- in a way...where, ah...how much of that do you really need? You know?  
JGF: When is it just too much information?  
TL: Yeah, exactly, you know...but it's nice to have a little indication, so that you're not left out in the cold or blind-sided or something.  
JGF: Is it still...I get the impression at least in the old days, or whatever you want to call them, that there was quite a bit of educational guessing about where the fish would be at a certain time?  
TL: That's still a cumulative knowledge that takes a period of years to find that, like a trial and error...you know, and you learn that...if you are fortunate enough to learn it from an older person or the information is handed down to you through generations...you know, like when I was a young person, I listened to some older people...older fishermen that handed down some information and I added to it.

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It's like any other job...and you kinda have a feel to, ah...for example, what part of George's Bank in the springtime or the fall would you want to go to catch a certain specie of fish...and you kind of go with that, you can feel that one out, you know?

JGF: So, this time of year, does it get you? I mean this is hurricane season, do you just take it as it comes?

TL: Oh, no. We watch, we watch...I was just watching that before I came here today, because it could be coming up the coast here by mid-week, they're talking now...

JGF: I know...so, as well as I understand, generally if you get far enough out to sea it's not as bad, or is that not always the case?

TL: Yeah, well...No, you can't trust a hurricane. Even George's Bank area, you're twelve miles...eighteen to twenty miles away at the maximum, from New Bedford and really when weather is that severe you don't want to take a chance...you know?

JGF: Right.

[12:06]

TL: Years ago, before we had any good technology, I did get caught in the Blizzard of '78...I was a hundred and twenty miles offshore! We rode it out on an old wooden side trawler...we had no idea what this weather was, where it came from or what it was and we rode it out.

JGF: You mean you didn't have radio warnings?

TL: We did, but we didn't know the severity of it and nobody else did...up and down the coast here, when they got hammered with that storm, had no idea that it would ever have been that intense. I and the rest of the people on that boat, it was an old wooden side trawler, which is...they're lower- she's in the graveyard now, boneyard or whatever you want to call it, she's ah...there are some pictures of that around New Bedford too, that old boat...she was an old schooner, wooden side trawler...a hundred and twenty miles offshore.

JGF: Wow...and you still got a-?

TL: Oh! The weather was horrendous, but we just ah...all we could do was ride it out, and we did.

JGF: Wow, interesting.

TL: But, like today, with all the technology...you'd be so fair warned of something that was coming your way today.

JGF: So you just wouldn't go.

TL: No. Or if...you'd have enough time to be fair warned, you know...to get back to port with anything that severe. But they say that was almost like a hurricane in the winter, the Blizzard of '78.

JGF: Yeah...interesting.

TL: I think about that a lot.

JGF: Yeah?

TL: Yeah. That's something you never forget, you know?

JGF: Were you afraid that you could lose the boat?

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TL: No! I wasn't afraid, because I had never experienced anything quite like it in my life, you know...I was just a young-you know...Well, maybe this is what happens...you know.

JGF: Oh that's right! This would have been your second year out to sea...

TL: No, it would have been about my seventh or eighth year...

JGF: Seventh year, okay...wow.

TL: But you learn, you think about that...what it was like, you still can remember.

JGF: How do you ride out a storm like that? Do you go below?

TL: Well, you tie everything down...secure everything down, *everything* –so nothing can break loose, and you just idle...jog into the sea. Put your bow into the sea at a real, real slow speed...go up into the seas and try to damper the motion on the boat as easy as you can...just to keep everything as stable as you can. Then just take turns like a half hour- back at that time there was no automatic pilots, everything was steered by hand. You just jogged into the sea real slow...and it's tiring, let me tell ya...a day, two days go by...it's horrendous.

[14:51]

JGF: You're not fishing, obviously.

TL: You're not fishing and no one's really sleeping, everybody's watching, everybody's concerned...

JGF: Now, would you have had-back then, much ability to have radio contact with family or not?

TL: No, no...we had radio contact with a couple of boats that were in the area that got caught in that storm. No, basically we just...there was three or four boats that stuck together, where we talked another and that was it...it was...yeah, that was something I'll never forget.

JGF: So you've got family? Yeah?

TL: Oh, yeah.

JGF: You have a son in fact, right?

TL: No, I have a brother that's in the industry...

JGF: A brother, okay.

TL: A brother and I got a nephew...and ah, yeah.

JGF: Are they all in it?

TL: All in it, yeah.

JGF: Did they...your brother or nephew grow up- no your brother obviously...

TL: Oh, he was right with me, my brother was right in back of me by a couple of years.

JGF: How long had your grandfather's family been in this area?

TL: Oh my God...

JGF: Do they go way back?

TL: Way back...way back to the whaling days.

JGF: Just wondering...now you said you were on a boat called *Aloha*?

TL: *Aloha*...Yeah, it was an old wooden side trawler, yup...

JGF: Did that have to do with Hawaii and whaling or...

TL: No, that was just the name...it was a beautiful boat in her day, beautiful...and ah, she just became old.

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JGF: What's the name of your boat now?

TL: Today... is *Seel*.

JGF: *Seel*?

TL: Yeah...like I say, I've had it since 1982 and I maintain it pretty good...you know. Even in these tough times, I'm still struggling, but trying to keep my head above water...it's real tricky, it's real- you gotta be careful. The cost of doing business right now is horrendous...such limited time we have to use these boats.

[16:41]

JGF: Do you think that will change again?

TL: I hope so. Really... I think we've got a little problem right now with over kill with the government [regarding] to the fisheries, because, from what I see and a lot of people who have been at it long enough- we are actually catching more fish now than we did back in the early '70s...and we are using a larger mesh net. Back in those days we were using a four and a half inch [4.5"] mesh net, now today we're using a six and a half inch [6.5"].

JGF: So you mean that actual rope itself?

TL: The opening...they're square- like the window. Four and a half inch...back in those days it was like four and a half inch mesh.

JGF: So, technically, it lets more through.

TL: Yeah, you let more of the small juvenile fish through the netting today, because now we're using a six and a half inch mesh.

JGF: Wow...huh. So, when they would have to hand-haul the net, how many crew would it take, verses today with hydraulics?

TL: Oh...back in those days we used to, uh...there would be four people, okay...to haul the gear. Today, you could haul that same gear with two people.

JGF: Wow. So when you go out, how many people?

TL: I have five people...five.

JGF: So, if two people are hauling gear, what are the others doing?

TL: I usually...it's like watch...it was like a shift, eight and four shift. You work eight hours and you're off for four.

JGF: Oh, okay. So is that different than before?

TL: No, we used to do that years ago...but now, we did it years ago with a six-man crew- now, I have a five-man crew, because there's one shift works short-handed...just three men, okay...and ah, try to keep them busy. That's the idea...you got five men, you want to keep them busy...if you keep them busy, usually you're catching some fish and making some money.

JGF: The impression that I get is that they expect to be kept busy while they're out there.

TL: Oh yeah, because they're away from home...you know, they want to make money, they want to catch fish...if you don't catch any fish, I don't care how good the price is- you got nothing to sell! So you have no money, you know...so, you definitely want to catch something and once you catch the fish, you can worry about the price...that's what you do- catch 'em first.

[19:00]

JGF: That's a good point...yeah, is there still a hold, do you fill a hold?

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TL: Hold, yup...ice, yeah they're iced off, yeah.  
JGF: Does that have it's own special technique?  
TL: To ice 'em? Sure.  
JGF: Yeah...  
TL: Oh yeah, the fish are all washed...the cod, haddock, and pollack would be gutted- which the guts would be removed and washed...ah, the flatfish are all washed good, put in baskets, and passed down the hold and iced off in layers...tiers, they call them. Okay...they're laid out nice and straight...you try to keep your old fish separate from your new fish. Like, let's say you're on a seven-day trip...  
JGF: Yeah.  
TL: You know, that pen of fish is the first of the trip...and you have another pen-now a pen, I'm talking, is like a box or the cooler space where the fish are put, so you can keep track of...you know, you have seven day old fish...possibly...compared to a day old fish, and sometimes the buyers will reward you for the fresher fish with price...  
JGF: Huh...Is the idea to keep them cold or frozen?  
TL: No, they're not frozen...because they are iced on fresh water ice.  
JGF: Right...okay.  
TL: Just really cold...which are nice. They are kept pretty good, when you're only doing a seven day trip, the fish are put away right and iced properly, all of it looks beautiful.  
JGF: Yeah...wow, it sounds a little bit like the technique and the trick for building a stonewall or stacking firewood, right?  
TL: It's what it is, and you have to balance it right because you have a port side and starboard side of the boat, you've gotta have equal weight on each side of that boat...it's like a seesaw or a teeter-totter or whatever, you can't have all the weight on one side, you see? There's a lot of things...  
JGF: To think about...  
TL: Sure...just like your fuel tanks, you've gotta watch, and your fresh water...you know, you gotta keep this thing stable and straight...yeah, it's just not going on a boat and going fishing. There is a lot to it...  
JGF: Yeah, there's a huge amount to it.  
TL: You've got to be a mechanic, you've got to be an electrician, because you're so far away, you've got to do a lot of these little jobs yourself...you've got to have a little bit of general knowledge.  
JGF: Right...so is that just about learning on the job?  
TL: Yeah...carry what spare parts, you learn what to have around...you've got to have the tools...you know. I'm not saying that we're gonna do any major fix-up jobs, but a lot of little ones that can keep us going, patch it...put a hot patch.  
JGF: Fixed enough until you can do it back to port...  
TL: Sure...right...get us through the trip and get home and we'll get it done right.  
JGF: Yeah...wow, interesting.  
[21:38]  
JGF: As captain, would you try to sort of delegate a lot of that out? Or because it's your boat are more going to want to...

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TL: Uh...I got a pretty good group of people, myself...and I got a pretty good knowledge, I got people there that got knowledge and I do have some guys who are more mechanically inclined than others...and if one guy is better at that-than he'll do that job. Everybody's got a little specialty...like a balancing act or whatever...everybody's not a good mechanic, everybody's not a good net-mender...so, we kinda balance that out.

JGF: That's great I guess, if you get a crew where everybody's a little bit of something...

TL: Yeah...yeah, there's a guy that cooks for us, you know, he's an older guy...he's not as mobile as a younger guy, so he makes up for [it] by cooking a little something extra...cause we're all basically earning the same pay, we're on an equal share basis...so that's how you try to keep things somewhat fair.

JGF: Yeah...okay...you mentioned the net mending...I was curious what the new materials, is that a harder thing to do than it would have been or just a different technology or...?

TL: No, it's the same thing as years ago...it's the same knot that used to mend it, it's just that the material that we're using today...I'll tell ya, with most of the stuff we use today- we're not mending the net like we did years ago, because the material lasts longer. So, years ago that sisal twine, which is manila, if it sat in the sun for a couple of weeks or a week...it'd be rotten just from the sun.

JGF: Wow...

TL: So, sometimes on the way out to sea in those days, you'd have to put a couple of new sections of netting in the net, because we didn't tear it out-it just rotted away!

JGF: I would think if it had just been in the salt water and then dried out...

TL: It did...that's that natural fiber, sisal manila...yeah. Today, like I say it's all these high tensile plastics...all kinds of- they're always coming up with a lighter material and a stronger material.

JGF: Lighter and stronger...so, it's still pretty easy to work in terms of time...

TL: Yeah...yup.

JGF: That's interesting.

[23:49]

JGF: How big is the net?

TL: Well...the one I use is about a hundred and twenty foot...what they call a "sweep" that's where the bottom of the net touches the ocean floor...which is a pretty good size when you think about it, because years ago when I first went fishing, you might have used something that was only seventy feet, because you didn't have the technology.

JGF: Right...

TL: Now with the technology and the new design work and...you know, we're using bigger...trying to be more efficient.

JGF: Yeah...well, you've got to be.

TL: You've got to be.

JGF: Does it still...well maybe I don't know, I mean, I think those of us on the outside always like to think there is a sense of romance to all of it. Did you ever feel that way? Or was it never really about that...was it more just about the living?

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TL: No...it's not...I don't know, maybe some people think that, but ah... You know how I look at it? If I go through that dyke, I want to come home seven days later, I want something for my effort and I want a paycheck out of this deal...because, I'm not going out for a joyride...you know?

JGF: How would you feel if you had to make the same living...not on the ocean? Would you miss it?

TL: Yeah, kind of...it's really the only job I've ever had in my life...you know? This had really been it...

JGF: True...so it's just who you are, now.

TL: Yeah, and I'm gonna keep doing it. I have a young family and hey, I'm gonna keep doing it as long as I can...you know.

JGF: Yeah...so who's in your family?

TL: Pardon?

JGF: You said you have a young family. Who's in...

TL: I have two young daughters and a wife...you know, I've got a ten year-old and a twelve year-old- two girls at home, one's Paigie [Paige] and the one's Mal [Mali] and ah...yup...they're pretty costly, so I keep working.

JGF: [Laughing] Yeah...so you keep hauling those fish up...yeah. I was listening to some of the women on one the stages and it sounds like...I mean it's hard, but they just sort of expect that, you know...to have you be gone and it sounds like it's easier today with the communications.

[25:52]

TL: Yeah...yeah, I can send home an email, which the kids can do that with me now...you know? We do that, but you know, you're gone for seven days...you know, it's like you leave the family for seven days...okay, and they get used to you being away and now when you come back home, you've got to re-enter...you know? Then you re-enter, okay...you're home again for four or five days...then you leave again...you know? It's a swing- you swing back and forth, you know? It's good and it's bad...It's got its good points and should say it's bad points, but-

JGF: Yeah...challenging points, right?

TL: Yeah...but it's no different than maybe a businessman going on a business trip that travels...you know? So...

JGF: I know one of the women was likening it, a little bit in some ways...well that it's its own culture- but to the military culture and just that it's its own culture that way...But then I was thinking about how military people have to get used to somebody being away and coming home...but, it sounds like with you guys it's happening all through the year kind of thing...

TL: Yeah...all through the year and maybe once or twice a year you might have a month off...like the month of May, I usually take the month of May off.

JGF: Is that just because it's nice weather?

TL: No...It's usually...well, its ah...I'll tell ya what that is; That's usually real cheap prices and it's time to do a little repairs on the boat and ah...that's what we do.

JGF: It's the practical.

TL: Yeah. If you want to take time off, try to take it off in the month of May...Historically, that's the rock bottom of the price for fish, believe it or not,

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we went and did that, but this past year...the month of May was good and the rock bottom was the month of June.

JGF: Oh gee! You just never know, right?

TL: Yeah...It kinda wears on ya, works on ya...

JGF: I bet...I bet.

TL: So the pay scale, you know...when you think, you know, it's time to go- well hey, I've got to make my years pay coming up here and I've already been one month went by and it didn't happen yet...and you gotta keep rolling, going to the next month...it'd better kick in pretty soon, you know?

JGF: Yeah...in the book I was reading, they talked about this guy eventually became captain and the whole different sense of- it wasn't just his own living anymore, that he was sort of responsible for...

[28:09]

TL: Oh, Let me tell ya, exactly. If you don't produce... You've got to make enough money now for that boat and the rest of the people on that boat, you'd better produce something, because you will not get any good help. Without any good help, you're done.

JGF: Right.

TL: Yeah-right. You gotta come home with a catch...

JGF: It's true, I guess...

TL: Yeah, cause if not...they're gonna try to get a job with someone else that's doing better, like a boat that's doing better.

JGF: Right...yeah, that's interesting...

TL: Yeah, it's like any other company.

JGF: True, it's a business, just your own...Is it a challenge then, I imagine you have to be in charge, but not in such a way that people don't enjoy being around you?

TL: Oh yeah, because you gotta live with them...on a small space, right?

JGF: Yeah...

TL: Like, what...on a land job you can go home every night.

JGF: And complain about your boss...

TL: Exactly. So, yeah, you've gotta learn how to live with them...you know? And I do...they know I'm in charge, which is alright and somewhat get along-pretty good...yeah, that's all part of it, getting along with people.

JGF: This image keeps coming into my head...you talk about the net and how big it is, and I'm glad I read this book, because at least I can ask some questions...but, is there a certain way you have to move the boat, so that the net goes out how you want it to go out?

TL: Oh yeah...yeah, there is a certain way you set it out and haul it back.

JGF: Has that technique changed depending on where you are...or what kind of fish?

TL: It could change for the ground gear...which is the cable that cable that goes between the trawl doors and the net, sometimes you can only use maybe a ten fathom piece...of this cable, in between the net and the door, sometimes some of the big boats would use a hundred fathom of cable...it's like a spreader; this is like a hearding affect of the net...certain bottoms that are susceptible- where you

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can tow that kind of gear...compared to some other bottom, where it would be too erratic-

JGF: Rocky...

TL: Rocky...and you cannot get this gear through over the bottom...you'd be stuck.

JGF: Right...yeah.

TL: Yeah. That's a little tricky...to set that gear, see that's how you have to know the ocean- that's all experience.

JGF: Right...I would think you could just know from the top to the bottom of George's Bank what the bottom looks like.

TL: Yup...you've got a good feel for that...Don't think that you just go outside in the ocean here and throwing this net overboard and gonna do it, because you've got wrecks out there, you've got to be very careful where you're going to tow this net...because there is some serious wreckage in certain spots.

JGF: Right...have people ever had to just abandon a net? Or gotten it caught?

TL: Gotten it caught and lost! Some of these set ups [sweep] are twelve to thirty thousand dollars [\$12,000-\$30,000].

JGF: Just the net...

TL: The net...the whole rig that we tow. Some boats on the small side would be about ten thousand [dollars] the larger boats can go as thirty [thousand dollars] or more, so you'd better be careful...you'd better know what you're doing. You'd better have some good cumulative knowledge...wrecks...yeah, oh yeah...and people know that fish like to hang around them, they like obstacles...so guys get brave and try to get closer and closer and closer to it...be careful!

[31:38]

JGF: All it takes is a little too much current

TL: That's what I'm getting at...the tides hit ya and before you know it, you're stuck in it...you know, hopefully you can get out of it.

JGF: Would you have to sort of back up over it?

TL: Back of it and haul it...oh, my god! It's a lot involved.

JGF: So you're going to go out again next week, what would the typical day- how would a typical day work?

TL: Start?

JGF: Yeah.

TL: I'd go down and get everything running, come over to the icehouse, take on about twenty-five ton of ice, the ship chandlery...the food people will come down and bring the food to us for a week. Okay...now I'd get permission to what area I want to fish out there, I have to submit that through a Boatracs™ device...I have to tell them where I'm going fishing before I leave the dock.

JGF: Who is "them" exactly?

TL: National Marine Fisheries Service [NMFS]

JGF: I've got to submit this through an emailer...

JGF: And can they say yes or no?

TL: Yes they can. I've got to make sure I've got enough days-at-sea [DAS] left in the till to do it.

JGF: Oh...okay, so it wouldn't be so much about location as about amount of time?

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TL: Yeah...certain places, you can use certain kind of days-at-sea, which is another story, but...so, yeah, if I get permission, then out I go.

JGF: Yeah...

TL: I try to get to the deck around noontime, head out and probably take me fifteen to sixteen hours to fish where I want to be...be around there and fish for five or six days, and then come home.

JGF: So as soon as you get out there the nets go down regardless of what time of day or night?

TL: Oh yeah...We work around the clock, 24/7, day and night...

JGF: So everyone's doing 8-4, 8-4...

TL: Yeah, yeah...

JGF: And so are the tasks divided among your crew? Or are there some people who are hauling the net while others are cleaning the fish that came in?

TL: No...there's only five people, I got two people sleeping all the time...see, so they're hauling the net, when they get done hauling the net, instead of coming in for a coffee they'll stay out and put that fish away and ice them down...sometimes we work steady, we're catching fish and we don't have a lot of free time, but they might get a chance to sit down for an hour or half-hour before I haul in again...but really, the thing is when your working-if you're sitting down then you're not catching anything. Hopefully you can catch them, catch them fast, and come home. Like I was telling you about expenses, if you catch the same fish in four days, who wants to stay the extra day? And just burn up fuel and all the rest...yeah, so try to catch them as fast as you can and get home.

[34:43]

JGF: So you mentioned the storm of '78 or the blizzard...

TL: Blizzard of '78

JGF: That was the storm that you most remember...

TL: Yeah...that really is, but here's another one though...I was in Nantucket, I was fishing on Nantucket Shoals...we call it the Halloween Storm, okay, now I want to say this was '91...this was the "perfect storm", I was in Nantucket with the boat...I got stuck in Nantucket for four days and five nights, we hit seas—this was when Nantucket Harbor got destroyed.

JGF: Wow.

TL: Yeah, I mean the docks and everything, water was chest deep in the A&P parking lot...it was horrendous, horrendous. It was like the boat was at sea...the seas were hitting that boat tied to the dock, and the whole Nantucket waterfront got ripped apart.

JGF: So you were on the boat?

TL: On the boat, on the boat, but tied to the dock at Nantucket Harbor...

JGF: And hoping the dock would hold?

TL: Yeah, but jeez, it just got ripped apart...

JGF: How did your boat make out? Okay?

TL: Oh good...it got chuffed up a little bit from the- but that was it, sure beat being out at sea though.

JGF: Yeah, really...

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TL: Yeah, that was horrendous.  
JGF: Hmm, perfect is almost a weird word for it.  
TL: Yeah, it really is...the movie's bogus [*Perfect Storm*], please don't...  
JGF: I didn't see the movie.  
TL: The book is great.  
JGF: Yeah, I liked the book.  
TL: I read the book...did you read the *Hungry Ocean*?  
JGF: Yes, I did.  
TL: That's an excellent book.  
JGF: I want to read her [Linda Greenlaw] others too.  
TL: Did you read the one *All Fishermen are Liars*?  
JGF: Not yet, I got it.

[36:19]

*Omit from transcript per request of interviewee*

[36:47]

JGF: The liars thing...I mean, that actually brings up an interesting point. In this book *Highliners*, that I was reading, and how the captains would talk with each other and they'd be supportive of each other, but they certainly wouldn't give it all away...Do you still do that, even with all your technology today?  
TL: I don't know...that's a tricky one. You might have something there...yeah.  
JGF: We can leave that-  
TL: We can leave that out...you never know who's going to listen to this.  
JGF: Probably not...  
TL: You're asking me some good questions here.  
JGF: Oh good...I figure if someone doesn't want to give me a full answer on something, but you know- as a Folklorist, and sort of the culture that goes on between people...some of it's for the public and some of it's not. I get fascinated by how people make their little communities among themselves.  
TL: Oh they do, cliques...You've got to be a part of a certain clique.  
JGF: Right. Now are the cliques divided by whether you actually go out on a boat, or an industry that supports the boats? Who knows who?  
TL: Who knows who...who respects who...everybody's got a certain amount of respect for other people, you know? This guy does that and this guy does that and everybody's got their own little niche...So, hey, this guy knows that and this guy knows that...So, everybody kinda- you don't want to pry open a can that you shouldn't open, you know what I'm saying?  
JGF: Yeah  
TL: Let it be a little bit, you know...If he wants to tell you something, let him tell it to you...  
JGF: Yeah, you don't have to dig for it.  
TL: Yeah, and that's kinda the way it is with that.  
JGF: Well, maybe...I don't know if you found this, moving from Worcester to this kind of a community, but I grew up on Brockton and it was just a big enough city that nobody really knew anybody else either...but now I live in Shelburne Falls,

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Mass., in a small town...and this idea that everybody knows everybody's business, so you have to sometimes just put it away and just get along.

TL: It can happen right here in this fleet. This fleet is like one big family...this waterfront.

JGF: Some people get along and some don't...

TL: Oh definitely, definitely. We got feuds going here, you know...it's like the Hatfields and McCoys, there's a couple of those going on...it's been going on for years, and it comes and it goes, you know? It dies down, it fires up...

JGF: Huh, interesting. One of Laura's questions that intrigues me here is she puts "What kinds of close calls have you had?" Would it be the storms? Or would there be other things that qualify as close calls?

TL: Well...I don't know. I don't know about that...I've had a small collision, a couple of collisions.

JGF: With another boat you mean?

TL: Yeah, one in the fog...to this day, I'd rather take a gale of wind, okay, compared to being festered in fog all the time.

[40:00]

JGF: What would boats have? I know airplanes technically have radar...

TL: We got 'em. We've got two, we got all good stuff...but, hey, when the fish are in a spot, everybody's like buzzing around a beehive, okay? And everybody's just thriving to catch that fish in that area, in that group and it's just like...you're watching the screen, boy, but...you've got to watch these targets and all it takes- you're counting six or seven targets on the screen and all of a sudden, one's not going with the flow...Uh-oh, what's this guy doing right now? You watch and you watch...

JGF: Can you establish radio contact with them right away?

TL: You try...but you've got a little problem with language.

JGF: Oh right...you can't always- interesting. Is there some kind of etiquette involved? Like if somebody else is there, you don't get more than a certain amount close or not really?

TL: Not really...at one time it was like that.

JGF: So that's changed...it's just too competitive.

TL: Too competitive, too cutthroat and yeah...they're looking at dollars, you know? You really don't go fishing for fish; the bottom line is you go fishing for a dollar bill...I should [say] dollars. Everybody knows time is money, oh yeah...everybody's on a different page, there's a lot of different boats, boat sizes, everybody has a different sized net compared to horsepower...not everybody is equal. It could be a four-hundred horse power boat, six-hundred, eight-hundred or a thousand horse power boat, and the bigger the horse power boat- tows a bigger net. Now, their expense is going to be a lot greater, but their catch rate is probably ten fold.

JGF: Other questions that occur to me...as far as the most memorable incidents or events, sounds like the storms would be some...but are there any really good times that you remember?

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[42:10]

TL: Yeah...I did have a record catch, at one time, in New Bedford here, I want to say it was 1984...it was the highest dollar valued catch at the time for a boat and it was my boat, but that didn't last long...it's been broken. I think it was broke a month after that or...I got a little bit of a write up about it.

JGF: That's cool...would you like to get that record back or it's not really that important?

TL: Oh yeah...it was a value, you know? It was a good amount of fish and it brought a certain dollar value at the time, which was great- it was mega, even in today's standards it is considered a big trip. So you're talking twenty years ago...

JGF: Yeah, wow that's great...did you have all kinds of people wanting to be on your crew after that?

TL: Oh, I've always had...yeah, yeah, I've always had people asking me. It was kinda neat, kinda neat...the strange thing about that, is that I almost didn't sell my fish that day.

JGF: Why?

TL: We had an auction right here at the old auction house, and there was a few other boats in...I said [to myself] *maybe I'll wait one more day*, I had just got to the dock and in the last minute I says, *naw*, so I walked up to the auctioneer over here and said "Put it on the board, I'll take my chance today" and it happened...and I think about that.

JGF: So even that part takes some education and guessing...

TL: Yeah, yeah...so, that was the New Year's trip, which would have landed the first auction day in 1984.

JGF: Wow...Happy New Year, huh?

TL: Yeah, we were out over New Years...we used to leave after Christmas.

JGF: So did you celebrate when you got back?

TL: Eh...I got my money and I had other things going in my life, and everybody was happy, you know? Yeah...three days later we went out and did it- another trip.

JGF: One other question, I don't want to keep you forever, but um...I know historically it seems like there was a lot of beliefs and things around how to have good luck or prevent bad luck on boats and all that. Do people today do much of that? Like not leaving on Fridays, kind of things...or

TL: Ah...I don't know today, but I can remember when I first started at this, there was a lot of that...but I think this generation now is not aware of what's good and bad, you know? Like I say, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, ah...what's another one?

JGF: Well, I know supposedly it wasn't good to have virgins on the boat...

TL: Yeah...I'm trying to think of another one...the hatch cover! The hatch cover turned upside down...that was always- oh boy! If someone did that...what's gonna happen here now? I watch that, that's one thing- of all of them [superstitions] I watch that hatch cover all the time...

[45:23]

JGF: Interesting, huh...why take your chances? I know that book I read there we had things that went culturally a little bit too, like Norwegian people-this was up in Alaska, so they had people of different cultures and somebody was like-you

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couldn't whistle on the boat, and there was some kind of food- and you weren't supposed to bring any plants on the boat because the boat would try to find the dirt...

TL: Really...

JGF: So you haven't heard of those?

TL: No idea of that one.

JGF: So there was some and the hatch cover sort of remained?

TL: Oh yes, still to this day that's one that I watch for.

JGF: Yeah, huh...so, I have a few more questions, but if you need to go-you tell me, before I start.

TL: You got many more here?

JGF: Okay-I have about four or five...

TL: Well, you've got to be almost done...this has already been about twenty-five minutes.

JGF: Actually, according to this tape it's been forty-five...

TL: You've got to be kidding me! Wow...

JGF: So there is sort of a language...I know there's the "mayday" kinds of things that you have to know how to communicate, but is there certain terms and language that fishermen use among each other another way...that people on land just wouldn't understand?

TL: Well, the talk they use isn't the best talk...tradesmen talk, you know? Maybe swearing and the mouth...I don't know, you know...you're not around mixed people so I guess you can get kinda gross or whatever... I don't know if it's gross or just rough and tough talk...you know?

JGF: So then in terms of radio codes, or something...is that just all official? Like "mayday" sort of thing or if you were trying to communicate for help with the Coast Guard or something, is there special words or...

TL: Like talking boat to boat through a code system?

JGF: Yeah.

TL: Yeah, ya wanna know something? Today we've got these emailers, you don't have to that anymore, just send the guy an email...boat-to-boat message. I got my computer on the boat hooked up to the internet too, right through that satellite telephone.

JGF: Neat...your family must like that.

TL: Yeah, but see...everybody in this harbor here now, just about, has Boatracs™- this tracking device, which is ah...well, the government is watching where these boats are all the time, they're watching what area, what spot...they're putting a fix on you anywhere between a half-hour to forty-five minutes, they're putting a fix on you so they're watching just what you're doing, where you are...Through that whole thing you can send an email, you can send it through a fax machine- if you want.

JGF: So it works for you and maybe not always...

TL: It works great, it works great...you know, you're paying for it...it's not a free service.

JGF: You pay directly for that?

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TL: Yeah, you pay every transmission on that thing. I wanna say they get so much, a flat fee for every time you send a message, okay? Plus, they're getting .25 of one cent for every character on the keyboard...pretty good huh? So a period, a-b-c, each one of the individual keys...so we try to do a short- you know...a U for you, instead of y-o-u, 4 instead of for, you know?

JGF: Same kind of email lingo that other people use, just because it's faster...

TL: Faster, sure, yeah...the kids do that too, don't they?

JGF: Yeah, this whole email language...the abbreviated things for "laugh a lot" or...

TL: See, I'm not really in touch with that, but I'm learning.

JGF: You probably are more than you know...

TL: Yeah, I'm learning...forever learning, right?

[49:34]

JGF: Right, which is good. So... how much longer, until your kids are grown, or you can't take it anymore?

TL: I don't know...maybe five more years...might be ten more years.

JGF: What advice would you give someone starting out today?

TL: Starting out today...Well, you need to be a hard worker, you've got to have some skills...you've got to learn something more than just being an able-body to lift something or move something or shovel...you've got to have a skill. If you are gifted in mechanics, net mending, rigging, something like that. You have to go into the job with something other than just a strong body and a desire to learn, you know? That's it right there...and work for a goal, some kids today are missing it-everything is for now and nothing for later.

JGF: And everything should come easy...

TL: Yeah...I don't want it now, I wanted it yesterday...right?

JGF: Right...I shouldn't have to sweat for it, I don't know if that's the case with kids raised in fishing families...I get the impression they have a sense of-

TL: I hope you're right...I don't know, I think that's the whole generation today.

JGF: Well, with all the technology life starts out so easy...well, thank you very much.

TL: You're welcome.

JGF: Unless there is anything you think I left out...

[51:25]