

Name of person Interviewed: Fred Mattera [FM]

Facts about this person:

Age: 53

Sex: Male

Occupation: Boat owner; past fisherman; Safety Training; Point Club
Insurance

Residence (Town where lives): Point Judith, Rhode Island

Ethnic background (if known): Italian decent

Interviewer: Janice Fleuriel [JF]

Transcriber: Azure Dee Westwood

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INDEX / KEYWORDS

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- Challenge and competition of fishing
- Safety training
- Safety practices at sea
- mutual insurance – Point Club
- Partnerships
- Highliner
- Squid
- Management involvement
- Married with children
- Businessman
- Italy and Italian decent
- Son is in military

TRANSCRIPT

[00:00]

JF: My name is Janice Fleuriel and I am interviewing Fred Mattera. And today is September 23 at the Working Waterfront Festival. Thank you for coming. If we could get a little bit about your personal history, when and where you were born?

FM: Yes. I was born in Rhode Island; I am from Rhode Island, Providence, RI. I was born October 9, 1951. I've lived in Cranston right up until 1969 when I went to the University of Rhode Island.

JF: So you're a Rhode Island born and raised.

FM: Born and bred, yes.

JF: Has your family been there a long time? Or when did they come?

FM: Yes, parts of my family... my grandparents migrated here at the turn of the century from Italy. I'm Italian decent. My grandfather had come here I think in 1917; First World War started, went back to Italy, fought in the War, met my grandmother; they both came back in 1920 and settled here. My father and his brothers they were born, in and around... I think he was born in Pennsylvania, but then they raised the family in Cranston, RI also.

JF: So when they came from Italy, was it specifically to be near the water in Rhode Island? Was it to get away from the War? What was the main reason?

FM: It was to hopefully... they lived on an island. In Italy, they are from an island next to Capri and its called Ischia. It's right off the coast of Naples like Capri is. A beautiful, beautiful island, I've been there. It was just remote, and they wanted bigger and better things and they took the opportunity and came here. None of them were mariners. They were tailors, cobblers, and just hard working people.

JF: So how did you get involved with the fishing industry? What was that story?

FM: I was going to school; went to the University of Rhode Island. I had completed my three years; I was a Poli Sci major. I was getting ready to finish my last year and go on to Law School. And some people, the people I was living with, had some friends, one of whom was a fisherman; he used to come over and we would just converse about fishing. I was so intrigued. I think when your 19-20 years old, things can be very romantic in your life. I was always a pioneer, wanting to strike out and do something different elsewhere. And I was also broke. And fishing always seemed to have money, a way, yeah, go fishing in the spring and summer, make some money and get back in school. So I did. He had an opportunity; we called it a transit site. I took the site, went out; was seasick as all can be, goodness, was very seasick. But still was strong enough, worked hard. The ride back and all of that I thought, "Wow, this was OK, no I was seasick but..." I was intrigued. Well, about a month and a half later, I was totally intrigued and I just seemed to be caught up in it. I think a lot of it was... I was an athlete; I played a lot of sports growing up. Pre-high school, in high school and a bit in college. And fishing afforded me that same opportunity, meaning that it was very challenging, there was this competitiveness between fishermen and vessels, you know, who's going to be the highliner for the week or the trip or whatever. It was you with Mother Nature, or Mother Nature could be another team, so I always felt that competitive urge and it was something that drove me. I wouldn't say unfortunately... but I never went back to school. The unfortunate part is that it's

the only thing in my life that I never completed. If I was to do it tomorrow, I'd go back and be a fisherman, I'd do it again. It was a tremendous life; I've been fishing 33 years and it's a very character-building... there's some remarkable people around the ocean, the waterfront.

[04:39]

JF: Were there some that you remember as really influencing you along the way?

FM: Yes. I started fishing, so I worked as a crewman. In less than two years, myself and another fellow from Texas, we bought a boat together; we were partners in a boat. When we bought this boat, we were a different looking lot. This was in 1972-73, 1974 we bought the boat. We were the long-haired, that hippy look, but we worked really hard. We had the real good work ethics. We were trying to be accepted in a community, in a waterfront in Point Judith, RI, which was saturated in swamp-Yankee's. That mentality. Great people, great people, very quite, very much to themselves. Most of the time they'd be twiddling their thumbs or looking at their toes when they talked to you, if they even did speak to you. And so you never knew, do you really fit in... you have your few friends, but for the most part you didn't know. And we were fortunate enough, there was a cooperative there, which was the longest-standing fishing cooperative of its type... we were accepted into that cooperative. We just felt, wow, this is a tremendous hurdle for us to be accepted as young, youthful, up and coming fishermen, and so we sort of changed our life style and out look and appeal a little bit. And that's when we bought the vessel. We bought this old boat that had been fishing in Point Judith and then was up in Maine and we brought it down from Maine, and did an awful lot of work on it. It was very difficult because it had been neglected. But while we did this work, all these people that I talked about, that said very little to us, started coming out of the wood work. And one would come over, an owner of another vessel... these were guys that we thought were the highliners, really top notch fishermen... and they would come over and say, "hey, you're going to need a collar for that gaff, here's a collar, it's been in my backyard, just take it." And somebody else would have a tow post – back then we towed off of a single gallast frame on your starboard side. And in order to tow straight, you had this post that you bolted to the deck in the stern, right in the center. And the wires would come out of that, and they've V-out of that instead of two gallast frames. So this other fellow, he just bought another boat, had a tow post and he says: "Do you want this?" And we said, "well, we don't have much money..." and he said: "I didn't ask you if you wanted to pay for it, I said do you want this?" And we said: "Yeah, we'll take it!" So he gave us that. I mean, all sorts of things were given to us. It was just remarkable. It was very difficult to put two months in, and no pay, and dwindling the funds, but they spurred us on, because they constantly were giving things to us.

[07:47]

FM: In the middle of this, one of the real true gentlemen fishermen is this fellow named John Dikestra (sp?). Just an incredible individual, I still think he walks on water. He's just incredible what he can catch, what he can do; very soft-spoken, big giant of a man – just different type. Most big, giant men on the waterfront are boisterous; this man was the complete antithesis of that. He was an incredible individual. And he stopped by the boat one day – he didn't really speak to many people – and he said: "Boys, when you get ready to go fishing, come over to the

house, I have a little something for you.” So, I think it was the last week, we were finally putting gear on and getting ready, so we said, well, lets go see what John’s got. So we drove over to John’s – and John was infamous for the field, the barn and the field – John had things strewn all over the field – wenches, stainless pipe, gear, nets, cod ends... you name it, he had it all in the field. So he came and he answered the door and we said: “John, you said to stop over...” And he said, “Oh yeah, shhh, don’t say anything, don’t let my wife know, come on, we’ll go out to the barn.” So we went out to the barn and he said, “Oh yeah, just go up in the loft, right on that pallet, right up there, that’s yours, you just take that, boys, you take that.” So up we went, we look over on the pallet and it’s a brand new net, brand new net. We said, “This is a brand new net?!” He said, “I know.” We said, “John, we don’t have any money...” Again, “did I say you had to pay me or anything?” “Well we’ll pay you; it’s just going to take us...” He said, “Boys, look: Everybody needs a little help at the beginning. And you’re going to need a new net to catch some fish; you’re going to learn. I know the horsepower, I know the boat, and I had this built for you. You just take it and you go fishing.” So he bought us that new net. And all he ever said to us was, “Hey, if you ever get on some fish, just give me a call; put me on some fish one day.”

JF: I was going to say, what you were saying about everybody being so giving, these are the same people that in a sense, you’d be out there competing with, so it’s both sides.

[10:02]

FM: Oh yeah, it’s both sides. You’re absolutely right. I mean, when you’re on the grounds catching fish, oh man... but if you were to break down and you needed a tow, the most cantankerous guy in the fleet would be the first one to call you. There’s this brotherhood that exists in certain elements and certain things in fishing that are there and not there when it’s time to go nose to nose. But this man was just remarkable. And that story... I was fortunate in 1991 to receive the Highliner Reward, one of the recipients here on the east coast, to get the Highliner Reward from National Fishermen. To this day, I don’t know why I received it when I see so many remarkable people out here who haven’t and I think deserved it much more than I did, but... I did receive it. When they asked me, what is it that motivated you to do the work that you do, and I told that story. That’s easy. You can reflect back on that... you have to give something back. When somebody does something like that, and if you have that kind of personality, that’s what you need to do in reciprocation.

JF: Clearly they saw in you somebody worth investing in.

FM: I guess so; maybe they saw something... the crystal ball was pretty bright that day for them because at times I wondered myself.

[11:34] [stopped recording; tested a new mic]

JF: I know that before I turned on the recorder you mentioned you’ve been fishing for 33 years. What year in school were you? Was it your freshmen year that you never went back from?

FM: No, no. I had completed my junior year; I only had one more year. I think I had 30-something credits left. Like I say, the ocean called and I stepped in that direction.

JF: And what kind of fishing? Have you always been dragging?

FM: Yes, I’ve been on trawlers, dragging... I did a little bit of lobstering offshore, I did some lobstering inshore... it’s just not appealing, it’s just too boring, too

monotonous, the same thing. I think if I stayed lobstering, for me, I would have had to have a lobotomy or something to continue. Fishing is... see there's different types of fishermen. I think there are always two types of fishermen: there's what I call draggermen and fishermen. And to me a draggerman is someone who goes out to the grounds, finds some fish, and just beats on it, just back and forth until he depletes that, then moves a few mics or miles and depletes that; and that's all he does for 2,3,4,10 days, whatever. And then there are fishermen. I think that's the guy that likes to go out there and hunt; he's not happy – well he's got 1,000 pounds, well now he wants 1,200 or 1,500 or 2,000. Or he doesn't find anything – he's chasing that species that's real high priced – a sea bass, a scup, back years ago when scup were high priced – fluke or he's chasing it in the summer time when it's on the rocks or inshore – it's real hard to get to. And that's why they are high priced because the supply isn't there. So he's willing to go maybe a couple days and not have 2,000 lbs of fish in the hold, until he gets that pop and bingo. Now he's got 10-20,000 lbs at a dollar or a dollar-something a pound and makes his trip. So that's the difference, and I always aspired to chase, and hunt. Don't get me wrong; there were times when I went back and I drilled and drilled to make a trip because I needed to make some trips. And there were other times when I could afford to experiment and try it, and be different and chase something, and learn something different. Do something that someone else just wasn't doing.

[14:18]

JF: Now was this all to in the days before Fish Finders and such?

FM: Some of it. I remember we were talking the other day, Rodney Avila and me and Laura, went up and had an interview with the radio station on the Cape. On the way up we were talking about storms, because of the hurricanes, and how devastating they are. Rodney and I were reminiscing about being caught in some hellacious weather in the 1970's. In 1969 he got caught in a storm, and I got caught in '73; how we got blown off the chart. How the Loran's that we used back then weren't automatic. You had two numbers that were consistent. Like if you were on the 14 bearing, you had the 14. But the 358 wasn't there. And same thing with the 43; those are the type of TD's that we use in reference. The 43 was there but the 43702 wasn't there. So what we needed to do was we had to get humps on this screen lined up, and then little square houses, and then automatically those numbers, once lined up, the numbers would come up. It's hard to visualize when you speak about it; but fishermen hear this and they'll remember and they'll know what we're talking about on the Loran; you didn't have things automatic; you had to line everything up with dials. And you were bringing, actually doing, is bringing the ranges in, the signals in from the towers, and you were narrowing that beam and making the humps actually, one hump over the other hump. That meant that the three towers were finally lined up and the signal was just right; bingo! You hit the button and the numbers came exactly where you were.

JF: So this is like pre-cursor to GPS?

FM: Yes, definitely pre-cursor to GPS and Loran C. So it was quite interesting. We had paper machines for recorders. We didn't have plotters. We didn't have color chromoscopes, fish finders and things like that. I remember in that storm, it took us almost two days just to get back on the chart. We were blown so far offshore, it took

us two days of steaming back to get back on the chart because we were in such hellacious weather, and it blew 80-90 miles an hour. So this is what pre-technology of what we have today, we definitely experienced it. We fished in Alaska; and we really didn't have much of anything when we were gillnetting up there. Little scopes and things for depth but no radars, no anything. You're fishing around the mountains and islands; when the fog set in it was scary.

[17:18]

JF: Did you ever have close calls where you were concerned about not coming back?

FM: That one trip there. I was young, I was getting married two weeks later, and the weather just came up out of no where; the front just got stronger. We were all the way to the southeast parts, and there wasn't much we could do. We would have had to beat ourselves into it. It was an incredible low pressure. I hadn't really experienced wind as strong as this. We were on an eastern rig, with the wheelhouse aft and the focsle forward. There were four of us; fortunately, the other three crew men were salty old dogs. I was just the young whippersnapper then. They were fine. The one fellow I was with, I think he was about 60 years old. What we did was two on, two off. We had to change watched, we had two lines that we clipped ourselves in, and we walked from the focsle to the pilot house. We help the watch for four hours. I would hold it for tow hours and then he would hold it for two hours. And we just talk to each other. I thought: "Oh my god, I'm never going to make it through this, please get me through this so I can go home and get married and maybe I won't go fishing anymore." And he was like, "Oh, look at this, isn't this great, look at these big seas going to crash on us..." And he actually had me laughing sometimes, this old timer. I should be sitting here not crying but thinking oh my god. He was incredible; he was absolutely so upbeat. And it's what I needed.

JF: Was he just doing it for your benefit do you think?

FM: He was always that way. He'd probably been in it before. I think a lot was probably for my benefit. My eyes probably looked like a deer in the headlights. But he was great, the rest of the crew, they were great. We got back, went fishing, and had a great trip. That's one of them. We've blown some windows out at times, that was a little hairy. I've had a fire years ago I think in 1991 or '91. We had a fire and fortunately we had gone through safety training 2 months prior and we new exactly what to do and fortunately we were able to get it out. It was a dismal tow home but...

JF: Was it the Coast Guard towed you?

FM: Yep, Coast Guard towed us back. But we survived, again, we survived. That's essentially... there's been some foggy... I remember the night that the tug and the barge ran aground off of Matunuck, just north of Block Island and they had their Cape, Cape something... barge ran aground and spilled some of their fuel. That was a hairy night. We were trying to get up close to them to help. The boat was on fire and it was very windy and extremely foggy, you couldn't see, which is strange; you don't usually get wind and fog. It was windy and the seas were unbelievable, incredible seas. One of those nights where I thought: "Everything is wrong tonight." You get those feelings, this is happening, that is happening. But everything was wrong and you knew something bad was going to happen and it did. We couldn't get to him. But another boat was close enough to get them off. But myself, that's the extent of it. I've been very fortunate to have weathered the storms.

[21:24]

JF: Now, you're fiancé, was she from a fishing family or was this her first experience of having to worry about you coming back.

FM: Oh no, she was from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, came up to school here. I met her at URI. All she knew was it was taking me away; it wasn't that easy at that time. At that time, I think a lot of people were feeling that I would grow out of what I was doing, fishing, and I would aspire to go on and maybe get my law degree or do something else. I know my father, I think until I was about 35, he continued to ask me if I was finally going to leave this dumb business and go do something like a real person. He had a hard time accepting that I went to college and here I am, a fisherman. And he just couldn't relate to it; my father had no experience fishing wise. In fact he would get seasick walking down a dock to see me.

JF: So he could not understand.

FM: No. HE could not relate. The only thing he could relate to was he just saw me working so hard, hardworking, not always so clean, and he just thought, "Why are you doing this to yourself?" He just didn't understand. He was the one who always told me: no matter what you do in life, you have to love it, because you're going to have to work for the rest of your life, you have to have something to motivate you, to put your feet on the floor every morning to get up and go to work. I kept telling you him, "Dad, this is it." And he kept saying, "It can't be."

JF: That's not what I meant!

FM: That's not what I meant, that's probably more like it. It was interesting in that sense.

[23:11]

JF: So I know you've been fishing for 33 years, but you also do safety training, Laura said. Hopefully we can get into that too. But before we do, can you give me like an overview of what kind of boat was your first boat and did you become captain at a certain time, how did work your way up.

FM: I think it's '74 we bought that as partners, went back and forth. My partner actually ran the boat that initial year because he had much more experience and we just needed to catch fish. So I said, I'll relegate myself to deck hand, I don't care, let's catch fish, let's make it and move on. Then I started to run the boat more and more.

JF: And was this a wooden boat?

FM: Yes, it was a wooden 48-foot Palmer Brother built out of Connecticut. It was the old *Papoose*, originally called the *Papoose*. It was built for Clarence Vanderwho, who was a Martha's Vineyard Indian. He used to fish with it and he used to go harpoon swordfishing in the summer months with her. Then numerous other people bought it. So I had that vessel for about 3, into the 3rd year. At that point I needed a change; we had paid things off, we didn't have any more debt and I said I was going to move on from the partnership. So I went off to Alaska... I actually took a little time off from fishing... then I went to Alaska and fished in AK... some drift netting, some crab fishing. I did two trips crab fishing and then a realized I wanted to live so I got out of that.

JF: I read the *Highliners* or whatever by McClosky, that's a dangerous job!

FM: A dangerous job, the *Deadliest Catch* is on right now on PBS and that's the same thing we did back in '77, the big traps. Then I came back, I think I went for a few

years where I was crewman on some vessels, then in 1980, this fellow that owns an engine shop down there asked me if I wanted to run a small boat that he had just bought and I said O.K. I ran that for a year; I did very well; I was very fortunate, especially being a new boat, it's pretty odd not to. He went ahead and bought another 68-foot boat. He said, "Well, I've got a 68, you're going to run that." I said I didn't have much experience offshore and he said I didn't have much experience inshore and did fine. "Don't worry about it." So I went offshore in the 68-foot boat and in about 3 years I finally said, that was the *Barbara Joe*, I finally said, "You know, I finally have enough of a track record now, I've got enough money put away, I'm going to go for it, I'm going to buy my own boat, I'll buy a used boat and go off on my own. He said, "Well, O.K.". A couple days later he said, "Look; you can go out and buy your 20-year old used boat and this is where you'll be. Why don't we go as partners, we'll buy a brand new boat, with more horsepower, brand new steel boat, and then you can buy me out at some point." So I said, "Ok. The only way we do it though is I own 51 and you own 49. And he agreed. He agreed and 4 years later, we built the *Travis & Natalie*, brand new in Bayou LaBatterie, Alabama, designed it exactly like we wanted it; 4 years later, I bought him out and I've owned the *Travis & Natalie* ever since.

JF: *Travis & Natalie*?

FM: Yes, my children.

JF: I always think the names are fascinating.

FM: Yes, they are.

[27:01]

JF: So is Bayou LaBatterie the place these days; I remember from last year someone mentioned that?

FM: Bayou LeBatterie is like a Detroit for cars. In the south. There are so many yards in the Bayou there; there are so many workers, welder, and really talented people. It's this hub of where they build vessels. They build a ton of shrimper, because shrimping is big down there. I have a shrimper's style. And they build raised focsles, they build whatever you want. I think I was a second one to have Frank LaForce build us a boat. I think within 4 years he had built 15 in Point Judith. Because it was such a well-designed, beautiful boat. It wasn't a Cadillac but it was a goof Ford, and we put some real Cadillac equipment on it. And I still have the *Travis & Natalie* to this day.

JF: So you still fish today?

FM: I have stopped fishing now in the last 9 months. I stopped fishing because I do this safety training now. So the boat still continues to fish. I am fortunate enough to have my brother; I have a younger brother whose 14 years younger and he runs the boat for me. We converted the boat about 10 years ago into a freezer vessel. SO we can freeze: we freeze squid, *loligo*, and *illex* squid in the summer, butterfish or any other products. We can do both. We catch fresh, we go groundfish in and catch a lot of groundfish, but we can also freeze product.

JF: So you're catching the frozen ones for sale, they are not bait that you're bringing out?

FM: Right. What we're actually catching for right now: there's *illex* squid in the summer, is actually a bait, bait for longliners in Alaska, all over the world. We'll start probably at the end of this month, we'll catch *loligo*, it will be consumable, it will be

the calamari you have in the restaurant. We catch quite a few; we catch a million or a million and a half of both squid a year.

JF: Does that allow you, the whole days at sea issue, does that apply to squid as well?

FM: What works with squid is a quota, we have a hard TAC. We have an overall quota of 17,000 metric tons in the *loligo* fishery and it works on a quarterly basis. They have hard quotas for each quarter and they are different based on the past history. So the first quarter, being January to March was always the most prolific, so that has the highest quota. The second two quarters are lower and the third is just below the first quarter in quota. You can fish it until you reach 80 percent of the quota. So if there was 10 million, once you hit 8 million, the quota reverts to a 2,500 pounds per trip so that you don't go over. So that there are no overages, you avoid that. Although this year, we were 3 million pounds or more over in the first quarter.

JF: And then what happens?

FM: Well, that comes out of the third quarter and anything that's over comes out of the last quarter. So what I don't like about it is that it creates what I call a derby style fishing. We know it's going to shut down, so it's this race of the fish. So here we are racing to catch as much as we can; January 1st, it will probably get shut down in February or beginning of March, so I think some people disregard the elements, the icing and create unsafe situations, and I think we are all guilty at times. It's the driving, the need, the necessity of paying the bills. So I think it's a terrible, terrible way to manage fish. Like I say, derby style fishing does not promote safety. Which is one of the 10 Standards in the Magnuson Act, actually its number 10. That their supposed to manage for, to promote safety and they don't. So it's concerning in a sense that they don't. I've been involved with the Councils and the regulatory process for 20 plus years, on Committee's, Chairman of Fishing Associations, and Vice Chairman... so there's always been this political battle that we wage. And because I'm not afraid to articulate or speak up, I usually get pushes. "Go ahead, go get them, Fred." That's another thing that we go through, that I go through and have been involved in for a good many years.

[32:16]

FM: And then, to the safety aspect of it, I don't fish any longer. I'm also fortunate. We have what's called a mutual insurance group. It's called the Point Club. The Point Club started in '86. We still exist today, and there's about 85-90 vessels. It's cream of the crop vessels; we have vessels from Connecticut to Maine. Most are in Point Judith; there are vessels herein this harbor, New Bedford, which we insure. You are a member of it because it's a mutual, so you buy into it. It's for us, by us, from us, and everything. I've been the President of that since 1997. I was Vice President prior to that. The underwriter is a company called Sunderland Marine Mutual Insurance Company. They are from Sunderland, now Durham England. They insure over 2,000 vessels in the United States. Shy 14,000 vessels globally. I serve on their Board. I'm a Board of Director for Sunderland representing the United States. The relationship started back in '86 with some local brokers, Frank Ostra (sp?) being one who passed away just several months ago, from Ocean Marine Insurance Agency. Their underwriter at the time, Barry Griswood, we were the first book of business Sunderland ever did in the United States. And it was successful, which prompted them to expand and like I said, now insure over 2,000 vessels. We're constantly

aware of safety. If you minimize injury, loss of life, loss of property, etc. you can keep your premiums down. It's like anything, if you don't get into a car accident or traffic violations for years, your premium comes down. You're in a good rate, or you're with a meeker who gives you a dividend back or something like that. Well this is the same type of thing. But as boats get older, crews get newer, change and transients, and everything changes, the nature of the fishery changes, all of a sudden, claims start to go up. So we need to heighten the awareness of safety. Sunderland is not just this token insurance company 3,000 miles away that just says send me a premium and we'll deal with claims. They are a company that forms a partnership with the industry, really works with the industry and invest in it. They'll even put their money into it. So they started this program last year, that for the Point Club, we are doing drills, safety drills which are mandatory under the Fishing Vessel Safety Act, it's mandatory to do monthly drills and instructions with the crew on your vessel, as long as your operational, by a U.S. Coast Guard-certified drill conductor. Well, I'm a certified drill conductor, three times, and a marine safety trainer instructor, meaning I can teach people to be drill conductors. So we started this, and what they said was, we want to buy into a program. We want to make it mandatory for all our boats in the Point Club. We're going to pay for 60 percent of this. You're only going to pay for 40 percent, and we want several individuals to do the drill conducting and I'm one of them. So this is how it started and I've obviously branched off from there, worked in New Bedford with the Mayors Task Force, Basic Safety training that we do at SMAST. I've been training with them. I train some of the vessels here; I do observers. I've gone to other ports and have done training for as many as 10-30 fishermen. And it's an on-going thing. I also do drill conductors; we just certified five people for yesterday and today, a day and a half course to be drill conductors. It's on-going and the beauty of it is we're trying... what I like, and the reason I'm passionate about it like I was fishing, we need to change a culture. And that culture is as fishermen, we're really good at working as a team catching fish, sorting it, washing it, getting it in the fish hold, icing it and getting it out for a real good product. But when it comes to safety we sort of stick our heads in the sand like ostriches. We don't really pay as much attention, or we don't talk about... "What do you mean we might die out there, we might drown, the boat might do down, we might get burned" or any of those things. There's this machismo, bravado that exists in us as cowboys on the ocean. We sort of don't go to a certain side of it. And we need to recognize that and realize that guys, as proficient as we are at handling fish, we have to just as proficient on the safety aspect of things and making certain out equipment is up to date and that we know how to use our equipment and we know how to conduct the drills or go through whatever it is, flooding, fire, man over board, or abandon ship, as proficiently as a team, to save our lives.

[38:06]

JF: So, with the drill, you're on board, the crews on board, and you present them with a situation?

FM: Yes, absolutely right. Or I'll ask the captain, you may be the skipper. What do you want to do for flooding? He may say, ok. I have a pipe burst in the engine room on the suction side of the pump, my high water alarm is going off in the engine room, I'm going to call these guys and we're going to go from there. He'll call his

engineers, they'll go down, they'll know what to do, they'll shut the C-caulk, they'll start pumping the bilge and then they'll repair it. Someone will be on the stairs and he'll relay to the skipper, hey this is what's going wrong, they have it under control, they are pumping everything down, we'll have it repaired in half an hour, everything is fine, keep towing. So that there is this whole team effort and chain of communication, the right things to do to isolate it. Same with a fire, man over board, there's other steps we'll do, and abandon ship, obviously which is the most important in essence, because you're seeking alternate shelter. That raft. If everything goes right; hopefully you recognize it in time and you can get to that point, but hopefully it doesn't come to that, but it's unrealistic to think that it might not. So you do want to be prepared if and when it happens.

JF: Now survival suits; does the boat keep them or does every fisherman have to have their own, how does that work?

FM: It's funny; I think there are policies that are different. In Point Judith, most of us as owners, we have them. I have 7 on my boat, I never have more than five crew, but I have 7. I provide all 7. The fellows that we trained today on the scallopers, they have a couple on the vessel, but actually all their crewmen come with their own. It's not a bad idea, because there's Universal size for say an Imperial survival suit, and it says it fits a man 6'3", 330 pounds, well I've never seen one that big ever get close to being in one. So it really is a 6'1", 200-220 lb guy or less, that's what fits in it. Then they make Jumbo's for the bigger man, the 6'4" man, the guy over 220, 250, 260 pounds for that man. Now I man have all Universal, I don't have a Jumbo. I have two guys that are 6'4" 250 pounds, what do I do now? So it's if constantly changing like that, it is better, if you're a big person, to have your own, spend the \$300 or \$250 and buy your own Jumbo suit and take it with you all the time. You don't want to be fighting with it; you don't want to put loaded guns in the suit, and fighting over who's going to have the suit and who's not going to have the suit. That's not what we need.

JF: That would just waste time.

FM: And lives potentially!

[41:27]

JF: Are you missing the fishing at all?

FM: I do. There's nights I'll walk around or I'll be down on the harbor and I'll say, ah man, I remember what it felt like to be out there. I remember some of the sunrises; the moments of that exhilaration of that big pop of fish, the big tow of haddock, big tow of cod, big tow of squid. There's nothing like it, it's exhilarating, it really is. You just think, yes! You stand on that pile. If it's cod or haddock, then you realize it's the next 24 hour of gut, gut, gut with no sleep, but you still caught them. And it's just... everyone loves that big tow, that big catch. So I miss that, I miss the comradery of being out there, I miss the challenge of it all, I miss being with that group of guys, not only on the bulkhead doing what I do. It's different now; I'm sort of on the other side now. For some fishermen, it's hard for them to relate to me now on the other side. Some really fight it.

JF: I was going to say, how are they responding to the whole safety issue, I mean, it's a culture you're trying to change, an attitude?

FM: The way I describe it, it's a third that have embraced it whole heartedly. There's a 3rd that recognize it's important and they are doing it. And there's a 3rd that are

fighting me. All the time. Not so much the crews, a lot of time it's the owners and captains that will fight you. The crews are constantly shaking your hand, patting you on the back, telling you to come back, "thanks, man, I learned more, I feel safer, thanks' that you did that, make sure you get here next month, this is great, great..." All the way up the dock. But the skippers that think they know more or at least as much and why are you teaching me when I should be doing it myself. Which is fine. All we're doing is creating a program for a year to get everybody used to it, then they'll be trained and do it on their own. It's not like we want to do this redundantly year after year after year, the idea and the concept is: let's do it for a year, let's get it saturated; let's make sure we get the transients and all the bodies that are coming on here trained, then next year we'll make them all become drill conductors and they'll do their own. And I'll come every quarter...

JF: So this is very new?

[44:01]

FM: It's very new, we're in our infancy. We're in the 9th month of our 12 months.

JF: Now what led you to make the change?

FM: Some of it health reasons. I'm diabetic and I'm also 33 years of fishing; I'm 53 years old. Fishing when I started was hands and knees, back breaking. It wasn't until... like the end of the 80's that I had a conveyor, so now these guys that go fishing, never pick fish on their hands and knees, they never bend over; everybody is on the end of a tote, two together. So physically I beat myself up. And mostly the diabetes; I found that at the end of the trip, my insulin levels would be high; I didn't eat right on the vessel. It was awful. I would come in and my sugar levels would be so high and I would be thinking: "This is crazy; I'm going to kill myself. I'm going to kill myself going this, and doing this fishing and everything else. I'll go into another direction".

JF: There are those two names on the boat that probably made you think about it, huh?

FM: And my wife. Children are gone; my children are older; my son is 27 and my daughter is 25 and they have their lives. She lives in New York City, she works for magazines for a sales manager, went to Hofstra in Long Island and she loves the city. And this is a girl who grew up in rural suburban. That if I told her I needed to get a newspaper two blocks away, she'd tell me it's too sketchy to go anywhere in the dark. And now she trots around the city like she owns it. She's definitely changed and she's very glamorous; she's in fashion for magazines, I don't know if you know Lucky Magazine? She worked for Lucky, and now she works for another, Brides or something. And my son, we were very fortunate, my son went to Annapolis. He's in the Naval Academy, finished his 4 years there, went off to Flight School, then left from there and went to a Carrier. Was in Iraq for 10 months on the *Abraham Lincoln*. Was the one that shook hands with Bush when he got off the plane, in that picture. My son is the one shaking hands with him. Finished his Military commitment in the past year, and is now aerospace engineer with Boeing in Seattle. The only hard thing is he's 3,000 miles away which is not that easy for me and especially for his mom. But it means we got to get out there to see him.

JF: But he's back from Iraq, so isn't that a good thing?

FM: Yes, he's back from Iraq, out of harms way. But he had no aspirations for fishing. He's bright.

JF: It was interesting to me that you mentioned your brother ended up in it, was that because of you? Your poor dad.

FM: Yeah, I know. There were times, especially my mother, because we'd both be on the boat together, and she would say if something ever happened to that boat and I lose both my sons, I will never be able to live through that. We never think about that. Honestly... you think of certain things when you're in rough weather, and you're lying in your bunk and the boat rolls deep into that swell, and you think, "Is she coming back? Is she really coming back this time, or is the next one going to roll us over?" So there were many a times when my heart skipped a beat and I said, "This is the one." Other than that, I really never dwell on the fact that, oh, we're going out and we're going to perish out here. I think if you talk to a lot of fishermen, you'll find out we all feel the same way. But he's good; he's pretty much a natural; he's a big boy, bigger than I am, very strong, younger, 14 years younger. And then the money was always in intrigue, it's good.

JF: It's good if it stays an intrigue, because as I understand it, it can go up and down.

FM: Oh, there are peaks and valleys. There's times when I've been on top of the world and there are times when I've been broker than broke. I don't think it ever ends; I think it always continues like that. It's not as bad now. But yes, he does well. He works hard at it and he's got his little family and hopefully he'll save enough money to buy the boat from me.

[48:43]

JF: Starting a family tradition here.

FM: Like I say: it will be something for his retirement when he gets on, moves on, from that boat, maybe he'll buy another one and sell that one.

JF: I might have somebody waiting, I don't know. The last question I would want to ask you is: what would you want the average Festival visitor to know about the fishing industry? But is there anything else you wanted to talk about that we didn't touch on.

FM: Nope, I think we've talked about quite a bit here, my goodness.

JF: I think we could probably come back to you another time to learn a lot more.

FM: Oh, there's a lot more inside, especially certain things that we've done management wise and all of that, and insurance and fishing, and how we all come together as a group in need to actually stay united. To stand linked, arm to arm as one and not splintered; but that's a whole other conversation. But what I'd like people to come out of this with is an understanding of what fishermen really are. There are characters behind this. There are characters in the fishing business, trust me. There are some unique characters in the fishing business. One thing I've always been on this kick, for 25 years; is that there are a lot of professional fishermen. People that are very professional, they really aspire to what they do and maintain excellent vessels. They are doing all the safety standards, they catch an excellent product, and they are supplying food for society. And at times, there are people that fall through the cracks. There's sometimes some of the dregs of society get caught up in it. Sometimes people have drinking or drugs problems. But I know lawyers, doctors, policemen that have drinking and drugs problems. Its part of what society is. I want people to know

that in this industry there are a lot of excellent people, bright people, that are very professional about what we do. We don't go out and rape the ocean. We're not out here to catch the last fish. We actually are the best at what we do. And most of us will be the first to sit down and say, "Hey, we need to cut back on this; there's not much here."

JF: So they are very professional.

FM: Very professional. And try and eliminate that stigma that the media, especially this... I'm not going to say specific newspapers, the one here in this area, it's always this negative connotation and they embellish, sensationalism, that's exactly what sells. It's never the positive part; it's not much of "Hey, fishermen are willing..." We tried recently, any of the extra bycatch we were catching in the last 2-3 weeks, we said, "Let us bring it in. We'll send it to a food mart. And we'll ship it to the people down south for the hurricane Katrina." So there are a lot of people willing to do the right things. A lot of people who are willing to say, we need to rebuild this stock, let's back off, let's put quota limits, let's put something else in, let's do something. But yet anytime you read something its like, "Oh the fishermen are caught over the line." You don't know, maybe his net was fouled in the wheel, but all they say is he was caught over the line and he's catching fish illegally when he shouldn't be. And that's what I want people to come with, and say, "Hey, this is great. Look at this community coming together. Look at all of us enjoying it, enjoying it with our families." This is a community/ family thing. And if we could continue to do that, that's what it's all about.

JF: Well, thank you so much.

[52:51] END OF INTERVIEW