

Name of person interviewed: Renee Rusco [RR]

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 30, 2012

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber [MHA]

### **Abstract**

A true southerner, Renee Rusco got her site when the “cook didn’t call”. She has fished from Alaska down the Pacific Coast, and earns her respect by always “pulling her weight”.

### **Demographic information**

Sex: Female

Age: unknown

Ethnicity: White

Occupation: Commercial fisherman/ cook

Born: Mississippi

Homeport: Astoria, Oregon

### **Key words**

#### Role

Commercial fisherman (captain, crew)

#### General Social and Cultural Characteristics

Sources of prestige, rank, status

#### Social and Cultural Characteristics of Fishing

Life aboard a fishing vessel

Relationship with other fisherman

Socialization/ training to be a fisherman

Other social and cultural characteristics of fishing

#### Gear and Fishing Technology

Seine

Boats, ships, vessels

Other gear and technology

[00:00]

MHA: Alright, and I would ask to ask you what your name is.

RR: Renee Rusco.

MHA: And when and where were you born?

RR: I am a Southerner. If I'm talking to my mother, that Southern accent's gonna come right out. But, I am from Mississippi, a little in the Mississippi delta, very close to where the delta blues was born. And, have made it sort of an active pursuit for most of my life to get away from the Mississippi delta. Well just because it's a very different, very kind of I guess staid way of life and I was always an adventure seeker and wanted to, wanted to get out and see the world. So, yeah.

MHA: And so how, how long did you end up staying there?

RR: Well I was born in Mississippi and I grew up there, left there when I was about 18 and started just sort of I don't know, travelling around, going different places in the southeast and I ended up in Houston, Texas for a very long time and when I realized that that was not where I really wanted to be, which was about 25 years later [laughs] I ended up coming to the Pacific northwest in Portland, Oregon, specifically, Vancouver, Washington, and now I actually live on a fishing boat in Astoria, Oregon.

MHA: Wow. So how, how did you make that transition? What, what drew you to the north Pacific?

RR: Oh the Pacific Northwest is beautiful, it's, it's a gorgeous, gorgeous place in the world and I had found myself getting sort of, more in tune with wanting to know the beautiful places in the world. And when I got there, of course the first thing that strikes you is the trees because they're so massive and so, I mean, the right word is amazing but that's so clichéd and I hate to use it but anyway, they are, they're just, they stir your soul in a way that I had never had that happen before. And water that you can actually see the bottom of the rivers, and I had a really good tour guide I guess and went through some of the very pretty places and then started discovering more and so I decided to stay there and loved it. I really have loved being in that part of the world. And from there, I've travelled, not real...not extremely extensively but I've been to places in the Central America, in South America, in Europe and, and enjoy travelling.

[03:00]

Of course been to Alaska and I just, I just love doing that and going different places. Meeting different people, seeing different cultures, ways of life, food, music, the whole, you know, just the whole experience. So.

MHA: Okay. So what is your ethnic background?

RR: Southern. [Laughter]

MHA: [Laughs] Love it.

RR: It's true. You know, as I understand it...well my dad was born in a house that's exactly a quarter of a mile away from where my parents live right now. So, and we moved into that house in 1969. I remember it happening, the the day we moved into that house, and so without telling you exactly how I old I am. But yeah. My family is very centered, very, as I said, very staid sort of you know this is where we are, this is who we are. We, we stay here. So...

MHA: So what is their reaction to your travels?

RR: Vicarious. You know, I mean my, my mother talks about all the time, she's all where are you in the world, she goes. Well 'cause I'll call her like when I was, when I got here I called her and I said, I'm in New Bedford, Massachusetts. She goes, wow! How'd that happen? [Laughs] Talked to you three days ago in Oregon. I was like, yeah well. And, and the most interesting thing about, about that is that my mother learned about me a long time ago she shouldn't worry me unless I tell her to. Because I allow it to happen, I allow trips to happen, adventures to happen, that sort of thing. I don't, I don't stay in one place for very long. [Laughs]

MHA: So how did you end up in Houston for so long?

RR: Well you know, I was raised in Mississippi, but the truth is I grew up in Texas. You know I, I sort of realized that I was on my own, for the first time in my life. Well young life of course, but I really just sort of wanted to find out who I was in the world because I was, it was a very sheltered upbringing you know. And we went to church every Sunday and every Wednesday and we you know did this and that and I had known for some time that I felt a little bit differently about spirit than my parents do who are southern baptists which is, that's fine, they get to be. I'm not that and so, but anyway I started sort of self discovery, figuring out what I wanted, who I wanted to be in the life and and what I wanted to do and how you know my career was going to shape and mold. And I ended up getting work in Houston and liked what I was doing and so...and and my work, funny, allowed me to travel. So...[laughs] So it was perfect.

[06:00]

So for a long time I worked in the, in the environmental safety and health field selling consulting services to industrial clients. And the, the, the typical story I think, you know, taking meetings with clients, taking 'em to lunch, emails, phone calls, you know that sort of thing. And so yeah, that's, that's where I was when I got to, when I went to Oregon. I was sort of doing the same thing, looking around, you know, trying to find that sort of thing to do. I ended up doing it a lot for a lot of different companies when I got to Portland. And, and it just wasn't as satisfying anymore. It, just doing that wasn't as satisfying. But I still did it, because I needed to work and you know that sort of thing. But, anyway, so yeah, from Houston I did, I got to travel quite a bit. Mostly in the US

but some, some Mexico, and you know Canada, and that sort of thing. That was sort of the beginning of my getting to travel and that sort of thing. So.

MHA: So how did you end up, in fishing? [Laughs]

RR: Well I was going to wait for you to ask me that question, actually. [Laughs] Well, the truth is, as I said, I was, I was in Portland. I was working, you know, different, sort of trying to find my own niche in Portland and wasn't having a lot of success with that. And had I, a huge life transition last Christmas. And left Portland the day after Christmas. Completely left. Left where I was living, left a relationship I was in, left my cat which was a very big deal. [Laughs] And ended up staying with a friend in Canon Beach, Oregon, 'cause I wasn't sure where I was, direction where I was headed, what I was doing. I just knew I needed to be out of what I was in. So, I was staying in Canon Beach and read a little ad in a local newspaper that a poet, a fisherman poet, was going to be appearing at the cultural center there in Canon Beach. And that happened to be Dave Densmore, and I met Dave and we, we sort of characterized our friendship as old friends who had never met before. Kind of thing. We met seriously from a wave across the room, you know, and have been sort of delving into friendship and then more and since then, we have subsequently become partners and that sort of thing. And so I asked him when I got there, we, we spent some time together and then I ended up going and seeing the boats 'cause he has two fishing boats in Astoria.

[09:00]

Asked him if he could use some help, because he was doing some extensive remodels on his boats and so he was working alone and, yeah, I could use some help so I started helping him on the boat. And then I started living on the boat and so it just sort of went from there as a, a progression. I was a, I'm a person who has found myself to be pretty handy with tools. I can, you know, take on a project and figure out how to get it done and, so I had never known any of this about myself in the past. And so I started thinking about going fishing with Dave and he told me, well, as of right now I have a full crew. But, but the cook hasn't called yet. And so, at last year's fisher poets, it sort of became a theme. If the cook doesn't call. And I wrote a poem about it actually. [Laughs] So if the cook doesn't call, or if the cook didn't call, I was going to get to go to Alaska. Well come to find out, the cook did not call. [Laughs] And so I ended up getting to go to Alaska, fishing with Dave for the summer as a full share crew member, stacking corks when the web would come in to the boat and cooking. I found out I'm a pretty good cook too. I didn't know that about myself either. [Laughs] So yeah, I, I ended up...it's interesting what, the thing that I'm finding about this whole, the people I'm meeting, the work I'm doing and all of the periphery around all of that...the more I get into fishing the more fishing gets into me. And I really am enjoying what I'm doing and how it's playing out and...there were moments this summer, boy, I just wanted to say, you know I'm not enjoying this today. [Laughs]

MHA: Can you talk a little bit about what day is like?

RR: Absolutely. Well one of the things that happen on the boat, is the main, the main engine is your alarm clock. So the main comes on every day at 5:30. I, I was typically up before that but the rest of the crew, you know, 5:30. The main comes on, that's your alarm clock and you get up and put on your fishing clothes. 'Cause the skipper's headed for the first set, the place we're going to fish first. The Genset is on, the main is on and you have all this noise happening and you're scrambling on with the other crew, who are men, trying to, you know, make make sure you're dressed appropriately for whatever the weather is and.

[12:00]

So you put on your Xtra Tuffs and you put on, and you go out on deck and you put your rain gear on and the fish, the, the skipper has picked his site and the tow line gets connected to the skiff. The skipper gives the signal, the net goes out. It's about, it's a little over a quarter of a mile long and it's about 60 feet deep. And it's a seine, it's a purse seine. We were seining for salmon. And so the net stays out for about 30 minutes and in that time the skiff and the boat sort of do this dance where they come around and they, eventually the ends meet. And that sort of encircles the fish. And then the skiff goes under the tow line which is holding the net and the pass-off is made and then the skiff has his own towline so that he can now maneuver the boat. Because the boat's propeller has to be off while the net's coming in, because obviously, but so the skiff is out about, I don't know, 50 feet away from the boat and is literally maneuvering the boat to the best, the most advantageous position for the net to come in and the fish, to, to remain contained. The skipper makes those calls and is communicating with the skiff and that sort of thing, the whole time. And so when the net comes together, we start, the block starts. We do, we do this, this very interesting pass-off between this line and that line and making sure that things are hooked up correctly and the skipper turns the block on and then the web starts coming over the power block which looks like a big pulley to me but he assures me it's called a power block and so the leads are stacked on the starboard side, the corks are stacked on the port side. And so as it comes over the block, the lead, the lead man takes the leads and stacks the leads and the corks come over to me and I'm stacking the corks. And then the web, ideally falls in the middle, sort of going like this, or side to side of course it never does. It ends up in a beehive. You know, you have to sort of kick it over and you know try to maneuver the web as well because it's a lot of, I thought it was a lot of web. I was, later informed that this is really not a lot of web. This is kind of a little seine. I'm like you people are insane. So anyway, the cork stacks would ultimately, it was a space I would have to get all of corks from a quarter of a mile of of net into a space that was, I guess it was about 8 feet wide by about 10 feet long. And so it required you know some, some technique I guess. And I spent the entire summer trying to figure out the perfect technique so that it stacked right and looked good and all that kind of thing because you can't go to town without a Sunday stack.

[15:00]

Now and so I was, it was my goal to make every stack a Sunday stack. Of course that didn't happen. Anyway so as the, as the net's coming in and the fish, the purse is sort of

tightening, the skipper is pulling in the purse and the purse is sort of tightening in and at some point in that process, the leads come up. The rings come up and then the rings get attached to a ring bar and that pulls the bottom of the net onto the deck of the boat which then, the skipper says, “theoretically [ph]” that’s a skipper word. I love it, theoretically fish are ours now. Unless of course they find that hole in the net that we forgot to mend. So anyway yeah that’s essentially what happens. Is that the leads come up, they’re put on the deck of the boat and the net has the fish. And Lord, the jellyfish too. [Laughs] I can, I can tell you from personal experience that a jellyfish in your eye doesn’t hurt nearly as much as you think it might, however a jelly fish in the corner of your eye hurt really, really, really bad. So yeah, you put Vaseline on your face to try and make the, the block the the toxin from getting into your skin. Helps a little sometimes, doesn’t sometimes.

MHA: Did they, is this, has this been a common problem all through out....

RR: It is, and I think they should develop a product that’s Vaseline and vinegar. ‘Cause vinegar takes the sting out of jellyfish. The itch is still there but at least it doesn’t sting. So yeah, I think they should develop a product that’s Vaseline and vinegar and call it the Holy Grail of jellyfish or something like that [laughs].

MHA: There you go.

RR: Exactly, new marketing concept. So yeah anyway you, so you have your hat to keep the jellyfish from falling in your face. You have your glasses to try and keep it from getting in your eyes. You have your Vaseline to try to keep it off of, so yeah, it’s, it’s interesting. But you know, another very interesting thing about where we were fishing which was off of Kodiak Island, Alaska, is how much it resembles lakes in any other part of the world. Because every, every time we would go, we’d be, we could be up the bay or, if we were fishing out on the Capes, it was a little different. If we were up the bay, it looked like we were, you know, taking a trip to the lake ‘cause it was so, it was green and it was beautiful and it came right down to the water and it looked, it didn’t have a lot of swell but there were the reminders that, that it was the ocean in fact and jellyfish was one of those reminders. And another reminder was whales. Yes, I mean, whales were swimming all around us.

[18:00]

There was, one of my very favorite stories is one of the other crew members was out of deck one morning. We were travelling somewhere to find a place to fish. And he opens the galley door and he says, “Renee a whale just breached right off the stern of the boat.” So I go running out there, and the next thing I knew, a whale off the stern of the boat, 100 feet maybe, 50 to 100 feet, jumped all the way, head down to tail, out of the water. Fell over sideways. Well, a moment later, and I was so excited, it jumped again, almost all the way out of the water. Four times, that same whale jumped off the stern of the boat. We could literally feel the wake from where it fell into the water. It was completely fantastic, it was.

MHA: What kind of whale was it?

RR: You know, the, the whales that are there are blue whales and fin back whales.

MHA: Right.

RR: I'm not sure what it was, 'cause I didn't really see a lot of 'em out of the water, but you know, I saw a lot of the backs of the fin backs. But I think it was probably a blue whale because the fin backs are so massive, they're so long and I don't, I don't, I don't recall, I don't think that whale as long. I mean it was certainly big you know, it was quite the big jumper. But [laughs] but yeah, it was just, that was just one of the things. I mean, you could, it, it's an incredible thing when you can say to yourself, oh another eagle. Oh another whale. I mean, when, when whales and eagles are passe, you've having a good time. [Laughs] I promise you. There was a, there were a couple of days at one point in the summer, it was like, the whales had a convention. There were 40, and you could see 40 blows at one time you know. I didn't count 'em, maybe there were 30, maybe there were 60, I don't know but there were so many. And they were like just everywhere, at all once. And I don't know, it was, it was really, really incredible.

MHA: Oh that's wonderful.

RR: So, yeah, yeah. And it's a beautiful place it's such a, the little village that we were fishing out of is, is a cannery village. It ramps up population in the summer and then in the winter, the people who live there, it's a 96 person little community. They've got their own VPSO, Village Protection Safety Officer. His name is Roy, he's hysterical. But the VPSO program is what they use instead of police sort of and it's a brilliant program. But the entire village, Roy told us, 3 miles including the driveways.

[21:00]

[Laughs] So, so, and so there's bears and there's you know eagles and it, so, this is a, this is a big place where we are. It's very remote, internet is difficult. There's no, I mean, there was phone service. This was the first year they actually had cell phone service in the village. So we ended up getting a little cell phone and we could call and talk to mom and that kind of thing. So it was nice, it was nice as far as that went. But yeah, communication was difficult, internet was very difficult. It was not, we were not longer in Kansas Dorothy. [laughs]

MHA: So how long did you, was it only daylight hours that you were fishing? Or?

RR: You know, Dave is a skipper who has been a skipper for most of his life. He started, he had his first boat when he was 13. And seriously, he has spent his whole life fishing. And one of things that he was learned through that amount of time is you fish to your crew's capability. We were all green, all of us. And he's, he's a big enough skipper to be able to handle that. We were not a big enough crew to handle fishing at night. That

said, yes it was open to fish and there were crews that fished at all hours, all the time. Yes but we fished daylight hours simply because again, we didn't have the ability, we didn't have the cohesiveness to be able to handle, not being able to see what we were doing. [Laughs]

MHA: So what, what happened once the fish came on board? How did you handle them from there?

RR: Well depending on the size of the set, we did get some water hauls. Which are, that's really not a good thing to happen you know. You get, you do all this work, like a said it's a quarter mile net. You pull all this net in and there's nothing in the net. It's like Christmas but no presents. [Laughs] So yeah, we got some of those, particularly in the beginning. Again we were all green. We'd really, we were all sort of learning what we were doing. But when the fish do roll aboard and the set is a nice size, it just feels so good because it's like you have hundreds of fish. And when the when the set was big like that they would open the hatch covers and just roll the fish directly from the net into the hold. Which is kept at 34, 35 degrees for the quality of the product. But when the set was, when the set was a little smaller and the hatch over stayed closed and the fish got spilled out on deck at which point we had to pitch fish into the hold.

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After the set was over. So, but there were, there were times that the, that the hold was plugged. Plugged is a term that means you can no longer put fish into the hold because it is plugged. And deck loaded, now we had, we had a set that, oh my gosh it was so cool, deck loaded. We could put no more fish into the hold. The boat, the deck was completely full. So I found myself like sprawled across the fish so they wouldn't go over the rail. And the other guys were pitching fish as fast as they could. And I was like, get these fish, get 'em...you know, you worked so hard for 'em. And then they come in and it's so exciting and you really don't want to lose any. So [laughs] it's like, sprawled out, my legs, my head, everything was engaged trying to keep the fish from going back over the rail. So yeah, that's what you do and if you have a deck load like that, it is possible to keep fishing, provided that there is a delivery boat which is called a tender. And it's somewhere close. And just take the fish off the deck and keep fishing, on to the deck and that sort of thing, without pumping out the hold, the entire hold. Because one of the things that's involved in salmon fishing is sorting, because the salmon fishermen, or salmon are graded for what you're paid for the fish based on the species of fish. So red fish, red salmon which are Sockeye, you're paid the most money for. And then it sort of goes down from there. You've got your Silvers, which are Coho and then you've got Kings, Chinook, and then dogs. Dogs are chum and then pinks which are, which we call humpies because of the hump that they develop. But anyways so, so, part of what we do at the tender boat is we go to the tender and they pump the fish out of the hold and two of us are standing, as the fish are pumped out, standing there and we're literally sorting the fish one by one to, to okay, this is a red, this is a silver, this is a, a king. This is a dog, and then we just let the pinks go because the pinks are the volume fish. We're paid the

least for 'em. There the more, there're the most of 'em. And so we let the, literally we pick them out one at a time.

MHA: How quickly did you learn to sort?

RR: You know it, we're fortunate because looking at them, you can tell the difference. Once you start doing it a little bit, you can see the difference...the first thing you look for is the size of the scales.

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Then you start looking at the tail, because the tails are different. And then if you still need further clarification because silver's tails have a bright flash of silver but sometimes the dogs also have silver and then you have to look at the color of their gums to tell what species you're looking at. So the first thing again is the scales. And so when you see the larger scales you immediately pick that fish and then you look to see if it's a red, or silver or a dog. [Laughs] And then you put it in the right chute. And then you you're on to the next fish. So you have to be a little bit careful because you don't want to lose any reds certainly in with the pinks because the difference literally is a dollar a pound, approximately and so it makes a very big difference in the end.

MHA: Right.

RR: It really does, so...how fast, we could sort 5000 pounds of fish in 20 to 30 minutes. Depending on how fast the pump could run, how fast the hold could be emptied and the fish could, could come over and depending on how many of the species there were. Because obviously if there's a lot of pinks then it goes a lot faster because you're not sorting as much. So, anyway yeah.

MHA: And does the tender have a scale?

RR: What they do, is they have a like a hopper and so so as you're sorting the fish, the pinks as I said, the volume fish and this is sort of toward the end of the season when the humpies show up. The pinks goes into the big hopper. And they, it's on a, it's on a scale and so when it reaches a thousand or 1100 pounds they empty it, empty it into their hold and so they start again and so they basically end up with a list of the number of times the hopper got emptied. And it's the same for all of the species. They have, not necessarily hoppers for the, for the lesser, smaller numbers of species but they have certainly ways of weighing them and making sure that we're getting paid for the right fish, at the right rate. So, yeah.

MHA: And did you end up socializing with any of the other fishing, fishermen in the area?

RR: You do, because we were fishing for a specific cannery. Okay. So the boats that are fishing for that specific cannery is called a fleet. And so yes, we, you know, I was

hanging out a lot with the skipper and the skippers all like to get together and tell fish tales and read poetry to each other and sign songs and have meals and that sort of thing. So I was, I was in a little but different position than most of the crew members are simply because I was, I was with Dave and, but going to the, yeah, going and listening to their conversations and and all of them have the same issues. It's so interesting.

[30:00]

They just tell 'em in different ways. And and do different, you know, resolve things differently and that sort of thing. But, but they do, they all have the same you know and when they go home to their wives, and their families and that sort of thing. It's all the same, you know. The day they all get back, they have a story to tell about how strange it sort of feels and what conversations to have that day and what conversations to not have that day. [Laughs] You know and because you know, they're mostly men and men have a different expectation of how things look than women do, Mars, Venus, all of that. So they have, they go home and they want, they want a hot meal and a little care and a good shower and you know what I mean. But the women want to talk about, the wives want to talk about, well you know, we need to, to re-roof the house. And we need to, you know, this this chair needs to be replaced and you know because she's...

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RR: ...she's spent all summer thinking about things that need to get done and of course he spent all summer thinking about, oh this season is turning out great. I need a new skiff and I need you know a power block and I need a new this and so the conversation, that, that's what I'm talking about, the conversations you don't have, the night you get home. So, yeah.

MHA: Did you run into any prejudice?

RR: I think again because of my association with Dave, no one would dare. But I do know that there are people who won't fish with women. There are crew, there are skippers, etcetera who will not have a woman on the boat, they won't fish with a woman on the boat. Which you know, the truth is, I'm not a 30 year old man, I'm not, I don't have the physical strength of that person but you know I had my own gifts to bring to the party. And I was fortunate that I had a skipper that recognized my gifts so I, but I pulled my weight, don't get my wrong. And I, boy but the end of the summer I was whipping those corks around you know, that's, that's, it's quite a bit of a, it's a big job. You say you're stacking corks. What does that mean? [Laughs]

MHA: Actually I was going to ask you that. Are they literally corks?

RR: They used to be, in the days of old they actually did use to, they were pieces of cork that, that were attached to the, to the line that held the net up. But now they are more plastic materials and different kinds of nylon and that sort of thing simply because they last longer and because the advent of power blocks would tear that material, that natural

material, tear it up really too bad and it would, and so you'd have to, you'd end up replacing corks at a rate that was really a lot faster than you'd certainly with the, with the nylon or plastic.

MHA: Right, and how about the leads?

RR: It, the favored line, lead line is actually a piece of line that's about an inch to an inch to an inch and a half but has a lead center. There are, there is the old you know tie each lead on one by one. That system is not quite as efficient I think as the lead line itself because it's so much more stable and it's, it stays secure so much and, and it's easier quite frankly to stack because the the the web that's attached to it is, just stays together, it holds together better than the leads. But there, but there slugs of leads everywhere you look because there's...every skipper has more than one seine and that's what we call the net.

[03:00]

And so one of Dave's seines had the individual little slugs, he didn't like that, he liked that seine, but he didn't like that lead line on that seine and then he liked this lead line really well 'cause it worked to do what it was supposed to do but he didn't really care for that net that much and you know. This net needed repair and so you know from, from that and another big part of what we, what we did was make sure that there weren't holes, because fish are smart. One finds it and the rest follow.

MHA: Did you learn how to mend?

RR: I am learning how to mend net. Yes, I know the basics. I know the specific knot which is called a sheet bend and there, you know there are other things you learn how to do, hanging knots and different, different techniques and like if you're looking at a particular hole, if you've got a 3 bar which is kind of the starting place and you've got 4 3 bars you've got to make some of them into 2 bars because you could only have one a starting 3 bar and an ending 3 bar, and so there's a lot of technique in learning to mend net. So, and I'm fascinated to watch someone who knows what they're doing, it's just, it's beautiful to watch someone do that.

MHA: So what about, in the winter, what does, what...

RR: Some skippers fish year round. I don't know that much about northeast fishing but I know that out west if you have the right permits and you have the right gear you can fish year round. You can fish Dungeness you can fish king crab, you can fish pollock, you can fish herring, you can fish, I mean there's so many fisheries. But again if you have the right permits, if you have the right gear, you can...or if you want or if you have the right gear, you can tender for the different fisheries doing that sort of thing. So I mean depending on the type of boat you have because the boats can only be certain lengths in different fisheries. Different, again, different gear for the different kinds of fisheries. The permits have their own specific sets of rules as to how you know how the equipment

gets used and what equipment you can use and what equipment you must use or can't use, that sort of thing.

MHA: So what does Dave do?

RR: Well Dave, salmon seining. That's his primary fishery.

MHA: Okay.

RR: But he also has a Dungeness crab permit and he also has tuna gear, you don't have to have a permit to fish tuna which is, don't tell anybody because somebody'll make one up but no.

[06:00]

Fishing tuna, salmon trolling, that sort of thing, he can do those fisheries without a, necessarily a permit to do it. The program as you know was started as a 5 year program and it became, it sort of became a heirloom. You know, like, fathers passed their permits down to their sons who either fished them or sold them and it became like something you could bequeath. You know and so they, they continued the program and everything now has permits. [Laughs] Except for tuna.

MHA: So, do you, have you talked about I assume your seining is done for the summer?

RR: Yes, well yes, the summer, or the season goes from somewhere around the first of June to end of September, first week in October. Most guys have their seines on the dock by the first week, stretching it for two in September. So yes the salmon runs as far as catching salmon, purse seining are done for the season for the most part. So you know this winter, what what Dave and I are going to do actually is we've got two boats in Astoria. The boat's that in Kodiak right now is the Dreamer and it's up for sale. He's, he's got two, he's got three boats. He's got a fiberglass boat, a steel boat and a wood boat. Yes. Blonde, redhead and brunette. [Laughs] So anyways, the blonde's going by the wayside. No, so the Dreamer is getting sold in Kodiak and we are, we've sort of made it a mission to get the Rosemary, the Lady Rosemary which is an 85 foot gulf shrimper, steel boat, geared up ready for tendering next year and get the Colt Stream which is a 54 foot wood boat built in 1964 ready to seine. So and then so the fiberglass boat will be gone and then, so that's our, that's our focus right now is getting the Colt Stream ready to seine and the Rosemary ready to tender which is a pretty big job.

MHA: So last, this last summer you were on which boat?

RR: We were on the Dreamer.

MHA: Okay.

RR: Yes the 47 foot fiberglass boat beautiful, beautiful boat although I will tell you the house is a little small for three men and a woman.

[09:00]

[Laughs] The first thing you do as a woman crew, a lady crew member of an all male crew is disengage your sense of smell. [Laughter]. The men were 25, 33, and then the skipper. So yeah you disengage your sense of smell completely. And yeah you cook a lot [Laughs] oh and lots of garlic. Lots of garlic, oh yeah. So yeah, and and and there were, you know, there was very little challenge from the perspective of having, you know, having trouble being the only woman crew member. One of the reasons is because of who I am to Dave and I mean, the respect was absolutely commanded, it was it was part of it. Dare them, and again who I was to Dave helped me a lot over the summer. 'Cause I'm the person who, I've already kind of a little bit told you how old I am. It's the first time I've ever fished. It's the first time I've ever done hard, physical work as my job. It's the first time I've ever thought of you know doing anything like...you know, being on the water it's the first time, first time. I never even got a little bit seasick. Not even a hint of seasickness being on the sea. And we fished the Capes, we fished in some pretty good, pretty good seas, 7, 8 foot seas. On the deck you know, the boat's going like this and, and actually the truth is I even, I even ended up getting knocked out one day, yeah. I was telling you about how the ends of the net meet when the skiff brings the, brings the net around and well one day the sea was pretty rough and the skiff, the the tow line goes off the side of the boat. And the skiff goes under the tow line to connect itself over to the, to the port side of the boat so that it can maneuver the boat. So the seas were pretty rough and the Dreamer is doing, the the rolling and bucking and the skiff comes under and the bow of the skiff snagged on the tow line. Well basically what happened was I saw it happen and part of the crew's job is to help each other and so I was going to try to help the skiff man get the tow line off the bow of the, of the skiff but he didn't, he didn't process it that way.

[12:00]

And I took a look at him and I could see the look of determination on his face as he hit the throttle with the tow line on the bow of the skiff. So I saw what was happening, I let go of the tow line and I was on my way down and the tow line swung around or like a bow, or like a bow, and and hit me in my face and I was, next thing I knew I was on my hands and knees and there was blood coming out of my rain gear and so the first thing you do, you know when you hit the deck like that and you regain consciousness is you say okay, am I alive. [Laughs] Realizing that I was alive, I could see the blood, I was like, ok, does everything work? Do I have both my eyes, my ears, do I you know, can I move my hands can I? You know. Really, you sort of do a body scan to see what's going on and then come to find out I was the luckiest person in Alaska because where it hit was exactly was halfway between my eye and my temple. Yeah on the right side of my face. So I, I had a big pair of Jackie Onassis sunglasses on and I attribute my you know, I guess the... 'cause it was, it was a pretty good little, little cut. But I think that the reason it wasn't any worse is because the tow line didn't directly hit my face. It hit the

arm of the glasses and so, at that moment I was, hadn't thought about it this way but I was probably pretty grateful for jellyfish because I had on those big Jackie O glasses [laughter] to protect my eyes and it ended up protecting my, my face. So yeah. So I'm threatening to, because one of the things that you do when your salmon, salmon fishing or seining is you, you, you just around for jumpers, what we call jumpers. Because salmon will jump out of the water and when you see salmon jumping particularly, you see 2 or 3 or 5 or whatever that means there's every opportunity for a very good set. So put the net out. I'm threatening to get fins and a tail tattooed on my scar here and make it my jumper scar. [Laughs] And yeah, so hey, I'm a fisherman now I have a scar. That's right.

MHA: So how did Dave get the other crew members? You said they were all sort of green.

RR: Yes, the skiff man that we had is the son of a man who ran skiff for Dave for over 20 years. Yeah so I mean it really is true what they say about fathers and sons in the, in the fishing world.

[15:00]

The other crew member, the deck hand was a guy who had fished with Dave last year. So he's you know, he's still kind of mossy green not Kelly green. [Laughs] So yeah he had fished with Dave last year and brought him, and Dave brought him back this year and so and then it was my first season. So, we were green, we were a green crew. And the skiff man's son was the 25 year old who had fished for 10 days in the Puget Sound, seined, drum seined for 10 days in the Puget Sound and knew everything there was to know of course about seining. [Laughs]

MHA: He's 25 that goes without saying.

RR: Precisely. Precisely, so yeah it was, it was....it was a challenge for Dave certainly because he's been fishing so long and he forgets just because he knows everything doesn't mean that you know. We know certainly what he's...even some of his expressions. Some of his expressions...one day we were trying to get the rings up and I was telling you about the leads and getting the rings and that sort of thing. Trying to get the rings up and some net had become tangled in the rings and the deck hands, part of the deck hand's job while he's stacking leads is to come forward when the rings are coming up and to put the ring bar through the rings. That said, he can't do that if there's web tangled, you know web and lead line and everything else tangled in, in the rings. And so he was trying to pull the web out of the rings and Dave told him, break it over the rail. Break it over the rail. **BREAK IT OVER THE RAIL.** Bless his heart you know, Trevor looked at me and I was looking at him, we both looked at Dave. What does that mean? [Laughs] Break it over the...and he kind of looked at both of us and he was like, ugh. And so he explained that what that means is to bring it inboard, hold it there with your knee and then you can...and then he can lower the rings down so that it, so that it unloosens itself because of the weight. Because it's the, the single pulley that's basically

dictating that and so he could then lower it and as long as he had it secure over the rail, so but yeah. I mean things like that because he's been doing this his whole life and he's, he has his way of saying things and doing things and but anyway. So, yeah. That was, it is, it's it's a fascinating world.

[18:00]

I, one of the things that I've started doing writing a skipper dictionary...the world fathom has no "h". Noreast, norwest, souwest, soeast...they don't have "h"s either. "Thoritically" ...real word. "Quinsicontly," that's another one. There's there's "mare's tails", there are "white horses", and I mean we're not even talking about equines. You know, equine animals. We're we're talking about clouds, you know and things that happen in the ocean and so it's, I, I love that idea. And I just kind of started scribbling it out and and one day I'll finish it. It's probably not going to be an A o Z but it's going to be something sort of the skipper's dictionary. And as I talk to other skippers, I hear their vernacular and their terminologies and that sort of thing and sort of just have to put it together based on the context of the conversation what they're talking about because I don't know sometimes. [Laughs] I really don't.

MHA: That could be a fun children's book.

RR: Oh wouldn't it? Oh what a great idea, thank you. Thank you that would be a fun children's book. That adults would really enjoy, like I said, break it over the rail. [Laughs] what?

MHA: You know, that's what I was visualizing.

RR: I know, I know, so yeah.

MHA: So do you, does, have you run into any issues with regulations at all?

RR: Daily. You know, this is kind of a funny story but maybe I shouldn't tell it.

MHA: Oh come on.

RR: Okay fine.

MHA: One day we were fishing, fishing out at Uyak Cape and it was, it was, it was a very cool morning. There's there's a certain places that are called hook and hauls which is the places where the seiners fish. And then there's the set net sites and you know so you don't want to cork the set netters which is another great term. You don't want to cork 'em. So but the hook and hauls is where the seiners, and there's certain spots you know because it's where the fish are proven to run and that sort of thing. So we're out fishing on Cape Uyak and we had noticed that there were 10, 12 boats fishing right at the way, at Rocky Point. But we were fishing out at Cape Uyak and having a wonderful morning.

[21:00]

We had made a couple of sets and had been rolling some fish in and it was so cool, of course we didn't want anybody to know that we were getting fish because we figured they must have been really killing 'em at Rocky Point 'cause there was all these boats down there. And we were fishing, like I said we didn't want anybody to know that we were catching fish, because we had it all to ourselves it was great. So something happened with the net and Dave went back and was mending and he had put the boat in a place where none of the other boats could see the Dreamer. We were up in this little cove and he had asked me to be on the wheel and make sure that the boat didn't come around the corner so any of those other boats could see that we were out in at Cape Uyak. All of a sudden you know we heard a couple of, couple of people on the radio. "Dreamer, Dreamer, Dave you there?" Well we didn't want to talk to anybody, we didn't want to have to tell anybody we were getting any fish. So we didn't want to...so we were, you know he got the net mended and we laid out another set and rolling the fish aboard and having you know just a wonderful time. Well after about doing that for about 3 sets, we had several thousand pounds of fish. And it was fun, it was great you know. First thing in the morning here we go, haven't even had breakfast yet and we've got 5000 pounds of fish. It's wonderful. "Dreamer, Dreamer, Dave you there?" And so he finally answers after like 4 times of somebody trying to hail 'em, he says. "Yup, this is Dreamer." "Dave, do you know Cape Uyak is closed?" [Laughs] "Uh, no." [Laughs] Do you know.... We just thought you guys were wonderful times down there at Rocky, really. [Laughs] yeah, so that actually happened and like I said maybe I shouldn't say that because it is kind of a public forum. Things like that happen, you know, communication like I said is difficult and sometimes, and we had been fishing Cape Uyak the day before. We didn't, we had really did not know that it had closed at 9 'o' clock or whatever time it had closed the night before. And so we had anchored there and and fully intending to fish there the following day and did.

MHA: So was that a state regulation that closed it?

RR: Well what happens is the, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, based on the counts of fish what come across, what they call a weir. I'm not sure I know what a weir is but it's, it's a thing they count fish across. And if they have a certain number of fish then they will open an area. If they don't get the counts that they want then they will close an area. And then if they get like almost what they want or they get a certain level, then they'll open it for 72 hours, or for 24 hours, or for 36 hours.

[24:00]

Whatever, whatever timeframe their magic formulas dictate they open it for. And if you are fishing it or you know, you might hear that it's open. You don't know how long it's open, you don't know when it closes, all you know is that there's an announcement. And the announcements come you know an hour or two or 10 before an area opens. So if you don't, if you don't have access to a computer or you know, at the very least some sort of

communication you don't know. You just don't know. As the season progresses, the openings and closings...the openings get longer the closings get shorter. So they will open an area for 24 hours, close it for 48 hours. Then they'll open it for 48 and then they'll close it for 72. I mean, it really is like that and it makes it sort of difficult to...so so so when I say that we were fishing...do you know Cape...no we didn't know Cape Uyak was closed that morning. So but again towards the end of the season they open 'em until further notice.

MHA: So you, it's, I guess they expect the captain to learn when the openings and the closings are?

RR: They, they hope so. I mean, we hope so. We don't, we don't want to get crosswise with ADFW. We really don't but at the same time you know we don't necessarily know all of the time you know how, what their formula is, what their, you know, what they're gonna see or not see. And so we don't know. There are areas that we'd like to fish better than other areas and if Rocky Point's got 14 boats on it and Cape Uyak's open, we're gonna go fish Cape Uyak you know, because because what happens is the way sets go, again there are certain places that are called hook hauls that the seine boats can fish. And so when you sent your net out, there's 30 minutes that you have the net out. And then you you bring it to a close and you then you close up after 30 minutes. Well when you start closing the next guy lays out. So if you've got 14 boats trying to fish 1 area you know you're looking at 5, 6 hours between sets you know that you're able to, to...and so. Again, you know if Rocky's got 14 boats and Cape Uyak is empty and open which we thought it was, certainly.

MHA: So do you ever, thank you, run into any, are there any native Alaskans that are fishing these days?

[27:00]

RR: A lot, a lot. The same rules apply to natives. There are other, there are areas that they open specifically for the native Alaskans. The Aleutic people in this particular, on Kodiak, it's the Aleutians or the Aleutic people. And if you are any fraction thereof, you're included but for the most part everybody falls under the same set of rules as far as fishing. The guys who come out and fish with their kids for example, that's what they do. I mean it's so cool to watch a father bring his whole family, you know, his kids, his wife usually kind of stays home. Brings his kids out 'cause he's teaching them a way of life. And I love that because it's such a special, beautiful thing for a person to learn, to to do in their lifetime. I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to see it. I was raised on a farm, you know, inland sort of. I didn't even, I never even thought about fishing any, anything other than...I never made the correlation between fishermen and fish on my plate, but I do now. I understand what it is and what it takes and and next time, next time you order that salmon in that restaurant, really just sort of think about you know the people and the stories, the years, 400 years it's been like America's leading industry. As far as, it's been feeding American families for 400 years this industry, whatever it is I'm trying to say, I think you know what it is. But anyway, yeah, next time you have that

plate of salmon think about it. Or cod, or scallops, or whatever it is. There are people behind that bringing them out of the ocean.

MHA: Well unfortunately we're running out of time, but is there anything, any little...I mean maybe that's the last word that you want to say to the, to the people who might hear this interview.

RR: There is one more thing I'd like to say, and that is I had looked for a job for 3 years. I didn't find one but I found this one door open and I went through it. I'm so glad I did. So never ever give up. If you see a door open, you don't know whether, you don't know whether you're supposed to be there or not, but you can't find out unless you go through it. You can't, and you know what, any door opens sometimes. Leads to others, leads to others. So, yeah, don't, never ever give up. Never ever stop hoping that there's something.

[30:00]

Get, you know, get your adventure boots on, let's go. [Laughs]

MHA: That's great, wonderful note...

RR: Thank you for the time, I appreciate it.

MHA: I, I...

[END INTERVIEW]