

Name of person interviewed: Jay Speakman [JS]

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 27, 2013

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall Arber [MHA]

Abstract

Jay Speakman talks about his varied fishing experience first lobstering as a youth in the 1950s and 60s during the summers in Little Cranberry Island, Maine and later fishing year round in that community in the early 1970s. After leaving Maine he fished for a period of time in British Columbia and Alaska in the 1970s gill netting herring roe, long lining and seining for halibut, set netting for salmon and King Crabbing. He discusses changes in the fisheries.

Demographic information

Sex: Male

Age:

Ethnicity: White

Occupation: former fisherman

Born: New Haven, CT

Homeport: Oregon

Key words

Role

Former fisherman

General Social and Cultural Characteristics

Social networks (family, friends, neighbors, co-workers)

Social and Cultural Characteristics of Fishing

Sense of community

Generational knowledge

Gear and Fishing Technology

Other gear and technology

Changes in technology

MHA So thank you for agreeing to come. And what I'm gonna do, we have a set of questions that we'd like to ask, but we really prefer that it be more of a conversation. So what I'll do is I'll start out asking sort of more formal questions like what is your name? So that we have it recorded

JS Yup

MHA But then when we get to other parts of it I just might ask you to feel free to go off on tangents if you feel like it. And

JS Ok

MHA And you wanna tell me about your life. So what is your name?

JS Jay Speakman

MHA And you were born where?

JS I was actually born in New Haven, Connecticut, not very far from here.

MHA Aha. And did you grow up there?

JS Nope. I left there when I was a baby at six months and I lived elsewhere, there's a long strand of places that I've lived over the years.

MHA Do you have a particular place that you like to call home?

JS Maine actually would be my true home. I have roots there going back a number of generations, but I live in Oregon on the coast of Oregon.

MHA Aha. So when you were in Maine did you come from a fishing family by any chance?

JS I did on my mother's side. And I didn't know that until I was a little older, I mean it had probably come up some time in a conversation but I didn't really pay much attention. But I ended up in the fishing industry and then later on, years and years later, in fact just recently even found out that I'm descended from fishermen from the Cranberry Isles which is where I did a lot of my fishing during my career. So that was an interesting connection to make.

MHA Can, what is your ethnic background?

JS We're English. Both sides of my family are English.

MHA Ok. And so you didn't know the family, the fishing family until you were older, but what kind of fishing were they doing? Were they doing the same kind that you were doing?

JS Well in some cases maybe. I need to do more research. I have some genealogy that my mother left me and I haven't been able to research it thoroughly, but I do know the names of some of my ancestors and I know that they had schooners and I know that in, because of the time frame, it's likely that they were mackerelers, those schooners during the heyday of the mackerel and seining fleet was towards the end of the 19th century and that's the Holmes family was active in the fisheries. My great, great uncle and my great, great grandfather both fished and my great grandfather who was the son of a Thomas Holmes, fished with his father until he was I think probably in his late 20s or maybe even early 30s before he became a merchant. And the odd thing about that is that I'm, I had a fishing career and then left it and I am now a merchant [laughs] and have a fairly large retail store with my wife and that wasn't by design mind you, it's just, it's a very weird thing to me.

MHA In the DNA or something.

JS Yeah. Well you know you could look at that. It's possible. But nevertheless that's where he ended up and that store that he had was the largest general store on Mt. Desert Island in Maine in 1922 when it burned down, in March of 1922. And I still own a house that he owned. He built the house and then bought a house next door to it and inherited that house, the one that he bought, from my grandparents, that was their house and it was also my parent's house towards the end of their lives. So I'm the fourth generation to own the house and hope to leave it to my daughter.

MHA So do you rent it out?

JS We rent it out in the summer just to pay the taxes. The taxes are pretty high in these waterfront towns so yeah we do rent it out in the summertime.

MHA So what was your first fishing industry job? And how did you get it?

JS Well, in reality my first job, though I wasn't paid, was when I was probably eight. My father arranged--we were summer kids. My brother and I grew up as summer kids on Little Cranberry Island. My Dad was a professor and so he had his summers off a lot of time in the summer and they had a small cottage right in Bunker's Head Cove on the northeast shore of the Island and we knew all the lobster fishermen on the island at the time. They, it was a very small community and it was a fishing town, still is a fishing town, but I mean that was the primary occupation. And so we knew all the lobster fishermen and their kids. I grew up with their kids and so my father arranged for my brother and I to go out fishing with several different fishermen and my earliest memory was going out with a man by the name of Roland Sprague. And he let me bait bags for him. And so I was, I felt like I was pretty important, you know. He didn't have a deck hand at the time, it was just myself and Roland and so I went out a couple different days

with him. I don't know how many days, but I remember going down at least a couple of days. So that was my earliest memory of being on a working fishing boat and I was actually involved and he let me take lobsters out of the traps and plug them. We used to use wooden plugs in those days in their claws.

MHA Right.

JS And baiting bags.

MHA What were they using for bait?

JS Herring in the summertime during the shedder season, herring primarily that was, it was usually salted in casks, wooden casks. And it was pretty stinky.

MHA Mmm hmm.

JS And that's what shedders liked was the stinkiest bait. It was very greasy and oily and that was good shedder bait. Of course then things changed years later. Now I think you could put almost anything in a trap now, but they do actually prefer fresher bait now, so frozen herring is primary bait. We used a lot of redfish racks, especially in the wintertime 'cause they stay longer. And sometimes flatfish racks if we could get 'em after they'd been filleted, they'd sell us the racks and they'd stay in the trap. We'd use brimstringers and string 'em on bait strings and they would be able to survive longer than the herring on the longer set. But as a fisherman, as a working fisherman, my first job would have been probably in 1970. I moved back to the island and there was a man by the name of Tony Moody who was a real wild man at the time and he took me as crew. And if I'm not mistaken he might have still been using a, I think actually that was when we had haulers, the hydraulic hauler came in to use about that time. But before that, I had gone out with all these other fishermen and they were using winch heads. And it was pretty dangerous because if you got a wrap around a winch head, you could lose fingers. You had to actually take the warp off of the winch head by hand. You couldn't just let it fall on to the deck. You had to actually pull it. And so it was a lot more work involved. And of course the buoys were wood and they were heavy. And the toggles were all glass bottles. They used to use Cleaco Club I think was the favored probably like a club soda, maybe, that came in a green bottle and the fisheries supply stores sold rubber stoppers for 'em to keep 'em from filling up with water. The problem was if you, after we switched over to hydraulic haulers and some of these guys still had glass floats, toggles, ten fathoms down from the buoy was a toggle to keep the warp off the bottom so it didn't hang down in the hard bottom, if you forgot somehow looked away, here comes that corked bottle. And the hauler of course, you didn't have to hand feed it. You could let it run and they would, Tony had this habit of lighting a cigarette between the buoy and the toggle. And I can remember a couple of times when that toggle went up, flew up through the snatch block and smashed into the top of the steering shelter and there was quite a lot of cursing going on. But that's one thing I remember distinctly about fishing with him.

MHA [laughs]

JS And then it was after that I went with Warren Fernald who was I guess at some point we started calling him "The Codfather". I guess every harbor has a codfather. But he was the, sort of the kingpin for a long time and inducted a lot of us younger guys into the fishery. It was very clannish.

MHA Right.

JS In the islands there. Still is in some cases. You normally have to be related or have some history there to be able to fish. But Warren was really generous and they, he and his wife had six children and they wanted to see that the island population didn't wither away. There was a one room school, it was actually a two-room schoolhouse, still on Little Cranberry. And at last count there were only eight left in the State of Maine and at that time when I went to the school there were probably a lot more than that. But one by one as they closed their doors, usually they don't re-open. And these communities become ghost towns and that's what the Fernalds wanted to avoid among a lot of other people. But they really led the vanguard in trying to re-populate this island. Because at the turn of the century, it had a fairly large population. They were cutting ice for the schooners. There was an ice pond and an ice house. And they would take blocks of ice out during the winter and then they'd slide it down on slabs, put it in the barn. And then in the summer they would take it down and sell it to the boats. There was a coal wharf. There were farms on the island. They'd taken down most of the trees. There were lots of big pastures. And sheep and oxen and chickens of course. People had gardens. But after the end of that big boom, a lot of people moved away. Probably by World War I people were moving away. Wars I think really diminished the population a lot, not so much in fatalities as the fact that a lot of soldiers came back from the war having seen the world and decided, well there's more out there than just living on this little island. And then there were more opportunities on the mainland so they moved their families off. And so when I move back there in 1970, I think the population was still 200 between the two main islands, Great Cranberry and Little Cranberry, but it's been dropping down year by year, but they've still maintained their school which is basically the heart of the community. If you can keep the kids in school there, then it tends to make a big impact on the lifestyle. You don't have to go off on a boat everyday or be tempted to move.

MHS So I presume its mostly lobstering now off the island?

JS Yeah. Yeah I think there's still, it varies, but at my last count there's still fourteen boats fishing out of Little Cranberry. Some of them move off in the wintertime. They have a house off island. A lot of them because their kids got to high school age and so they decided to either rent or buy a house off island and then they'll fish off, they'll fish the same territory, but they'll come from Northeast Harbor in a lot of cases which is about three miles, not a long run. So they'll keep their boat over there. It's a good protected harbor. The island has a pretty, pretty good harbor, but it's exposed to the northwest so you have to keep your boat on a mooring all wintertime and it's, it can ice up. You have to pretty much be there. You can't just leave it. You get a lot of icing conditions that can damage the boat. Big balls of ice will form on the chains and bang against the stems and

do damage to your boat. Sometimes the bilge pump could fail, different things. It's a lot better now with almost every boat there now is glass. Fiberglass boats are a little more dependable. The last boat I had was a wood boat. 'Course they take a lot more tending.

MHA So what made you decide to leave?

JS Well I was single when I moved there. And I was single when I left. [laughs]

MHA [laughs]

JS Not a lot of social life in the islands. I mean they're, it's a really great group of people and there's a lot going on in the summer of course, probably a lot like some of these islands off of here. The population explodes in the summertime, but come Labor Day a lot of the people leave and it gets pretty quiet. So I found that I, it's a little more complicated than that. I wasn't living there in the same way that a lot of the families were living there. I'd built a log cabin from spruce that was on the island there and, I was living a fairly primitive existence compared to a lot of my friends. And at the time, my family had moved to Hawaii and so I had the escape hatch that a lot of people didn't enjoy. I could fly out to Hawaii and spend two or three months in the wintertime.

MHA Nice.

JS And I had enough connections there that I could work while I was there in a cabinet shop and various other things and so I was able to survive fairly well and then come back in the spring. And I did that when I first started fishing. Later on I decided when I had a bigger boat that I couldn't keep up, I had a boat payment to make and I had a gear mortgage as well so I fished through the winters a couple of winters and,

MHS This was lobstering?

JS Lobstering, yeah. And so I saw that that's really the most efficient and long term I think the most sustainable life style for a lobster fisherman is to have a family and to live on the island with their family and have a support system. There's a lot, an awful lot of work that needs to be done. There's bookkeeping and of course the boat maintenance and the gear work and of course you've gotta shop, and cook and feed yourself. So it's a little bit demanding if you don't have a family there.

MHA So how have you seen things change over time with the, well you've moved, but you still have a house there, so you go back I presume?

JS Yeah, actually I still have the cabin that I built as well. So I have, I still have my island enclave which my family enjoys. I've raised my kids in that same environment. And we've chosen to fix up the winterized house which is in Southwest Harbor and to just keep that exclusively for summer rentals, even though it's a very livable house. When we come in the summer we, it's usually occupied so we stay on the island and I have a small boat there. We have a barn, keep the boats in the barn and we have a vehicle in each

place. It's a fairly complex situation. We've managed to maintain over the years so that when we come back, we basically, it's just a second home.

MHA Do your kids ever go fishing?

JS Yes my daughter, my young daughter who's sixteen now was interested in fishing so I got her on a lobster boat probably, she was probably ten or eleven when she first started going with Stephanie Allie who's a woman that fishes off the island and has a smaller lobster boat she fishes mostly during the warmer seasons, the spring, summer and fall. Her husband Rick is also a lobster fisherman, has his own boat. But she went with Stephanie, Stephanie takes tourists in the summertime out on lobster tours and so Rachel was able to go with her. She wasn't going every day with her on a regular basis, but over a couple of different summers she'd go three or four times with her, five times in a summer. And got sort of broken in to the routine and then this past summer, just in August, last month, she, well actually I think it was either a year ago or the year before last, she went out with Danny Fernald who's one of Warren's sons. Warren Fernald was the man I mentioned who pretty much got, inducted me into the fishery. Three of his sons are active lobster fishermen. And Danny who's my good friend took Rachel out. She's been out a couple of days with him and then this summer she went with Mark. And Mark has a, he's got a two man crew and a 42 foot boat with a bigger engine. He's fishing farther off shore. He runs a lot of gear. And so I, she went two days with Mark this year. And that's pretty brutal.

MHA Yeah.

JS And that's basically an industrial operation. I mean she kept up with it, but it was tough for a sixteen year old kid, girl to try and stay up with the program. And she, they were, these were big hauls they were getting you know, thousand pound hauls.

MHA Do they go out on a daily, its still a day or is

JS Yeah it's a day, it's a day fishery. And so, but the fact that it's moved further and further off shore means that the boats have gotten bigger and if you have more horsepower they go faster and of course they set a trap limit of 800 so to maximize the, to maximize your license basically, if you have a license for 800 traps, you better well fish all of 'em if you've got a big boat and that's where it's ended up. You can argue about whether that's an efficient or a sustainable system because I think it's still possible to make a living with a smaller boat and not burn as much fuel and not use as much bait and still be very productive. So there are different models that work fairly well, but I think right now the boats that are set up for the fishery, the off shore fishery really have to go a lot of days and pull a lot of gear 'cause they're expenses are so high. And the price went down. So you read about Maine producing the biggest hauls, the biggest production that's ever been seen and it keeps going up but the flip side of that is that we were being paid these prices twenty five years ago. It doesn't pencil out the same.

MHA Right.

JS When I first started fishing, I think fuel was about 19 cents a gallon and bait was five dollars a bushel. And it's now it's forty dollars a bushel and fuel is five dollars a gallon.

MHA So when did you see that change? It was gradual somewhat or was it sudden?

JS Well for me, it was dramatic because, in my case, I first had a skiff. I went deckhand, I actually was a sternman for six, during six seasons, but during that time I saved enough money, about my third year to buy a skiff and my own gear. I started building my own gear. In those days, we built our own traps. We got a big truck came on the island with, from the mill and we all got trap stock and then we started building our traps during the winter and

MHA That was when they were still wood?

JS Yeah it was all wood, mostly oak, oak bows and oak lathes and the runners were oak. Some guys used spruce lathes, but the worms used to eat the spruce lathes so we used oak mostly and they were heavy. And that's the way it was done. You couldn't just order traps, maybe in western Maine you could, but downeast almost everybody and in Canada it was the same way, they all built their own gear. They rigged their own heads. In a lot of cases, they knit their own heads. We all learned how to knit and everybody had their secret formula about how many meshes on the wing and how to guy off the inside head. It was all like rocket science. We all thought that we had an edge. But we'd watch the older guys and we'd say "Oh yeah, ok, now I understand". We thought we were doing something really special. I'm not sure we really were. But I think that it's true that the way you rig your gear really does make a difference in how it holds lobsters. But we didn't have escape vents in those days so you were getting a lot of short lobsters in your traps and so it was a different situation when a trap came up. You might have one big bull lobster in there and a lot of shells. Or a big hen, a buried hen and she'd corner herself, get in a corner, and anybody else came in they, that was a threat and they'd crush the smaller lobsters or the smaller ones wouldn't even come in so if you had a bunch of legal size lobsters in there they could usually pretty well get along. But if a shedder came in it was soft shell, it didn't stand to survive very well. So things are different now with escape hatches. Usually there isn't a whole lot of pickin'. A trap comes up full of counters. And you're just banding lobsters basically.

MHA So when you were fishing, they did have a gauge limit?

JS Yeah. Yeah it was three, I think it was three and three sixteenths when it started and then it's gone up to, actually I think it was below that. It was probably three and an eighth, maybe, then it went to three and three sixteenths, or it's gone in the other direction. That's right, it was three and three sixteenths and then it went to three and an eighth. But it's, the way the biology works, they figured out that a lobster actually to reach legal size in most cases in the older, you know a few years back had not reached sexual maturity so you were pretty much taking out 90, 95 percent of the breeding, available breeders. But the thing that saved the Maine fishery I think was the maximum

measure. So everything over five inch carapace went back in the water, male or female. And then we also instituted a volunteer system, a voluntary system of notching egg females. And now that's become law.

MHA Right.

JS But people like Warren Fernald started that system a long, long time ago. I think it was even in the 50s when they first started doing it, just to see what would happen in the local area and it started growing and people started doing it. And when I sold my last boat, we were punching, we call it a punch, we take out a V with a knife. But we were punching off shore we could punch as many as well I don't know, twenty or thirty females a day, twenty or thirty good sized egg bearing lobsters. I've heard now, more recently friends of mine punching much higher numbers than that even in particular places like in hard bottom where there's good habitat. They'd be getting just lots and lots of breeders and so when you see that happening, you better believe that in a few years if ocean conditions don't change radically you're gonna see a big explosion and that's what exactly what's happened. We don't understand the entire system, because there are a lot of other factors. We've had the water warming up. We've had shedders shedding earlier and earlier in the spring, they're getting their shed now in May, June. It was unseen years ago when I fished. You'd never see a shedder until late June probably. They're shedding in May now, some of 'em. And they are shedding in a smaller, or they're breeding at a smaller age. We see females that are, that won't make the measure with eggs. And that was, that's something I'd never seen in my career. So the biology's changing, but ocean conditions are changing radically. At the same time that all of this was happening, the cod fisheries were so productive that they took out the biggest predator which was large codfish. And so when you combine those factors, it's no surprise that we're seeing a huge increase in lobster population. The problem is that there's nothing much left on the bottom for them to eat.

MHA Well I heard that that was one of the factors that they think is actually benefiting the lobster is the number of traps with bait

JS Yeah

MHA And they have lunch and leave

JS Yeah its a large aquaculture experiment and, there's a lot of bait going into the water so I think the young lobsters learn they have an escape hatch so they can learn to go in and out of traps at will and so when you've got that much gear in the water, how many thousands of lobster fishermen there are along the coast and times 800 each one of them's got feeding stations deployed.

MHA [laughs]

JS It's gonna be a big factor in their habits. But there are also these other things that can happen when you get crowding like that you, you're, increase the possibility of disease. I

know in Massachusetts here they've had shell disease has been a really big problem and it's starting to show up in parts of Maine as well. It's worrisome. Nobody really knows what it can do. And there are certain viruses that can become embedded in the population so nobody really knows what's gonna happen with this many lobsters. So I'm not in the industry right now. I go occasionally with friends of mine. I still go out with Danny Fernald who's, he's a good friend. And he's had the same boat since 1973. So I went out and I took my friend Jon Broderick who's with me this weekend, we came together, last year and we went fishing on Danny's boat, had a pretty good haul. And I commented to Danny that we'd been fishing off of that boat together for forty years. And it was quite a realization to look out at that same landscape and realize we were hauling gear, setting and hauling gear on the same bottom forty years later from the year that he launched that boat and you know even though I'm not an active lobster fishermen anymore, I still have the, I have a lot of connections with it. My daughter is interested in fishing.

MHA Does she think she'd wanna do that for a career?

JS I'm not so sure.

MHA After this experience.

JS Well I took her, this summer we went to Alaska together and I took her up to Nushagak Bay which is where, which is an arm of Bristol Bay and of course Bristol Bay is the biggest producer of wild salmon in the world. And we spent a few days at Nushagak point with the Brodericks and their, I think there's probably thirty different families that still have shacks and have a presence there and they all deploy from Nushagak point out in points of the Bay. Everybody has a net, a set net site at a particular location. Some of 'em have multiple sites. But we got to experience that. A lot of our music that we play actually is about fishing up north so my daughter got to experience that and of course I've done a lot of salmon fishing in my career. I went early, when I was younger, I went to Alaska and British Columbia and I wasn't familiar with, I had never actually been on a set net boat, or a set net site. So I think that kind of got her juices flowing a little bit to. We were, we saw some good fishing while we were there. It's pretty exciting when the fish are hitting the net. They're coming in out of deep water and they've finished their' migration and they're moving fast and when they're hitting the net they're noses and tails are out of the water and there's a lot of corks are going up and down. There's a lot of activity and you have to run the net, you have to clean it out, you can't leave 'em in there too long 'cause they tide's running hard and so it's exciting. It gets exciting for brief periods and then of course there's a lot of waiting around. You clean the net out and you wait and wait and wait and the tide's changing so then you have to haul the net up the beach as the tide advances 'cause they're big, big tides there. And then you work it back down the beach when the tide recedes again, gotta keep that net in the water. So I don't know between fishing Alaska and fishing Maine, my daughter has had a fairly good indoctrination into what the life of a working commercial fisherman looks like. She's never been on a dragger or a seiner, but I think that's yet to be seen. What I predict is that she may become a, she could become a biologist, she's very interested in science, but she's also a very good artist and so I think if anything it's taught her a deep respect for

the lifestyle and for the interaction between these animals and us humans because we are actually a predator and we're taking wild animals out of their environment for food. And I think we have a serious responsibility to those creatures to make sure that we're not destroying their way of life. I think we have to acknowledge that we're killing a living creature. And it's a wild animal. It's not a farm animal. You can talk about the ethics of farming, but I think when we're dealing with wild animals in the, in their own environment, we have a responsibility to do it smart. And that's why I feel strongly that a kid should get a good education and have a science base even if they don't become a scientist just to know, to take some courses in biology, marine biology if they can, especially if they're interested in the marine sciences. I had that background when I started fishing. And I think there's been a lot of waste. I think there have been some bad decisions made in the management side of it that have in some cases created that waste or allowed it to happen. And I think the partnership between government and fishermen, I think fishermen need to be in the equation if you're gonna have smart fisheries management because I think fishermen are the front line when it comes to harvesting and actually understanding a lot of the biology that's involved in harvesting these creatures whether they're scallops or herring or salmon or lobsters. It doesn't matter to me. I think a fisherman's point of view is a legitimate point of view. And obviously there are some that would just say we don't need any regulations, just let it regulate itself, what you end up in that situation is a boom and bust.

MHA Mmm Hmm.

JS And we've seen what that does. And that bust sometimes can go pretty deep. In fact with the cod fishery in Newfoundland, anybody, it's anybody's guess what the future will hold having let it get that far. So I feel strongly that kids need to understand something about what's going on and what we're doing and then be responsible about it. About if they become fishermen, knowing that it's just not cool to cheat or game the system, even though some of these regulations are harsh, we all have to live with them.

MHA So have you seen, or I don't know whether can say this, but have you seen a change over time among the fishing industry participants in attitudes about sort of the environment and what they should or shouldn't do?

JS Oh yeah. I've seen a huge change. See I was fortunate enough when I was twenty three to as I mentioned earlier, I had a skiff that I'd bought and fixed up and put a hauler in and I had a gang of lobster gear. I sold out right after I'd gotten things pretty well going and I was, the next step for me would have been a bigger boat with an inboard. I sold out and went to Alaska. And so I got to see, I fished in about four different fisheries up there and I got to see a phase of Alaskan fisheries in the early 70s so I have a perspective 'cause I've been back since and I've seen what it's like now. And I still have a lot of friends that fish in Alaska. And I've seen some, a lot of changes, some good and some bad and this is true of British Columbia as well. 'Cause I also have friends in Canada. What's happened is that the economics have been so topsy turvy for fishermen that it's become almost like well in a way its become monopolized in some fisheries by license holders. And in some cases those license holders are not the same people that were fishing when I was involved

in these fisheries. Some of them actually got aced in the deal when they went to limited entry or they went to interim permits and then from there to individual quotas. The way that was figured out, a lot of boats and a lot of people that were considered peripheral in some of these fisheries were just pushed out of them. And so what happened is a lot of younger, more aggressive fishermen that were just coming up got into the fishing and if they were active and had the history, they actually were able to get, to remain in the fishery. And it turns out that some of these permits are worth an awful lot of money. There's basically an unregulated market in permits. And so that's a big change in the fisheries. It was open. When I fished, I went to Alaska at twenty three years old and I walked into the DMV, and bought a gear license for I think it might have been fifty dollars. And I bought a personal commercial fishing license for thirty-five dollars and that enabled me to halibut fishing with my own boat. And so found a derelict skiff and I fixed it up and I went halibut fishing and it didn't cost me basically the cost of a house which is what, some of these permits, well if you're buying quota, you'd have to buy a lot of quota in the halibut fishery to make any money because you're gonna still need a boat, you're gonna need gear. But the quota itself could take you five or six years to pay off. In the meantime you've still got payments on the boat and the gear and you gotta eat, somehow. So the door is, it's jammed. It isn't completely shut, but it's not easy to get through it. And so I've found that in some cases it's really a rich man's occupation at some point to get into some of these fisheries. So that's a big change I've seen.

MHA So do you think that has affected the environmental aspects? Like the fishermen that were more traditional, hand down from their parents and so have maybe one attitude and these fishermen that are in it more for the investment or for the big bucks...

JS Well it's hard for me to speak to that because I'm not intimately in any of these fisheries. But what I do know is that, they come down in two separate groups basically and this has been true for a long time. There are those people that really, I guess they're highly aggressive fishermen who will work, they'll go every day that they can possibly go, good weather or bad. And if their crew can't keep up, they'll fire 'em, get another one. They just, they're just on fire, they're just gonna fish no matter what. And they're gonna push their gear to the limit and they're gonna push their crews to the limit and they, in a lot of cases they'll make pretty good money, but they can also end up in a mess. And because of the risk factor, a lot of people have died out there. There are the more conservative fishermen who have in a lot of cases, maybe a long experience or maybe even schooled by their father and grandfathers who will be a lot more cautious and maybe not push it quite as hard and maybe not spend quite as much money to try and be top dog and I think they don't make as much. They don't have as much to put in the bank at the end of the day, but they, I think they tend to survive longer and it's just a different paradigm. It's a different approach. As far as a change in the actual psychology of fishermen, I've seen that because of better education, the fishermen that I know tend to be smarter and more informed about environmental issues and about what they're actually doing about, I think they understand more how they fit into the whole scheme of it because I think there was a tendency in the old days without internet and without all the media that we have to be kind of isolated and people were sort of cut off in a way so I think it's, in some ways it's, it cuts both ways. I think the electronics have opened up

bottom that was unfishable years ago. I had what I thought was a pretty well equipped boat, my last lobster boat was 40 foot long Billings with Loran and several radios and a good paper graph recorder and radar of course. And I thought I was, that was pretty much as good as it got in the early 80s. But it wasn't long before everybody had a plotter and this was before GPS but they still, they had Loran plotters and then it went to GPS. Now everybody's got a plotter, everybody's got a color sounder, everybody's got well the draggers all have underwater cameras, they've got thermometers they can, they can tell what the temperature is. They have more gear than most research vessels. They can tell what's goin' on and you don't have to have any experience in the fishery to walk aboard one of these boats or just go down to the store and buy state of the art equipment and I'm not sayin' it's gonna make you a better fisherman, but as a fish I think it's a lot harder to hide when somebody's got that kind of gear. I've been pretty amazed by what sort of information you can get from a color sounder when you're spotting individual tuna. I mean I've been on bluefin runs out of Maine, we've seen individual fish down there, big fish, you can tell how big they are, pretty much, which way they're going. It's pretty amazing the way it's changed. And that kind of information, nobody had that kind of information and so it was pretty much like throwing darts at a dart board in the dark. You might hit a few, but you're sure gonna miss a lot. So I think the experience, the long experience used to be what gave you the edge. Now I think it's changed quite a bit.

MHA So what made you leave the fishery?

JS Well as I said I was single when I lived on the island in Maine and I went to Alaska and British Columbia and I was in a lot of different fisheries, but when you move around like that and you're workin' on boats, it just tends to not be conducive to settling down and having a family. I had, I had a lot of wanderlust. I wanted to experience a lot of different fishing experiences. I was on two different types of seine boats and a long-line halibut and I spent a winter on a king crabber. And I gill netted herring for roe. It was all exciting and every fishery I fished in I was, I just was drinking it up. I wanted to be involved in it. I was making money. I thought that it couldn't get any better than that. So it was a long time before I decided to settle down and I still maintain my place on the island and at the end of my fishing career I had this, I had gone back there and I had gone ahead and bought this bigger boat and like I said I fished a couple of winters by myself off-shore and of course right through the summer as well, but it wears on a person if you, you have to come home, you fished dark to dark and you come home in the dark and the cabin's cold and you've gotta make a fire. And at some point I decided, you know, I need to be doing something more creative than this. I, I have a, I have some artistic ability. So I started taking blacksmithing workshops at a craft school that was nearby at Deer Isle. And that led me to wanna become an artist blacksmith and so I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico of all places and I did that for ten years.

MHA Wow. It could hardly be more different.

JS No, no. Big switch. But as I was involved in that lifestyle I met my wife. You know after all those years, I recognized it was time for me to settle down.

MHA And how did you end up in Portland?

JS Well I live, actually we live in a small town of Gearhart which is two hours west of Portland so it's a little beach town. I didn't want to be away from the water. My daughter goes to Astoria High School. It's a big fishing town like this, not, I don't think we have as many boats there, but we've got a lot of fishing boats, big crabbers that, a lot of Alaskan boats winter there, well they come down and they, some of them are winter fisheries, but they come in and out of Astoria, they're families live there. It's got a huge Scandinavian population there. So I like that environment and I'm on the same latitude as eastern Maine and so it feels familiar to me. We can get into Portland and we're not far from an airport so I have a good lifestyle.

MHA Are you still doing the artwork? The blacksmithing?

JS No. In the effort to raise a family and pay all the bills we started this retail shop and it's grown. We have about nine employees now and by default I've become a business manager for the shop and I move everything. We have to keep it moving and I pay all the bills and I keep track of all the insurance and payroll and all that stuff. So yeah, I miss, I miss the boat. And I miss the fishing. But we're pretty successful at what we do and I play the cards I'm dealt.

MHA Yeah. It sounds like you've had some fascinating experiences over your life. A lot of different...

JS Yes it's been a good life. And I have to say that this, these, it's a real honor for me to be here because we, I'm involved in the fisherpoets gathering that we put on in Astoria every year and I've been doing it for, well this last one was the sixteenth I believe. I got into it about two years after it started so I've been doing it a long time and that's a way for me to keep my involvement and my sort of interest in commercial fishing and to also be an advocate for some of the things I just talked about, you know and be involved with interacting with other people that have the same sorts of ideas and of course it's fun. We have a lot of fun. So yeah that's been great. And it's not to say that I won't go back at some point to fishing. I still go down and walk the docks and look at boats and I'm certainly not going back in the way that I was before.

MHA Right. Maybe if your daughter gets into it, you'll have a way to go on occasionally. [laughs]

JS Yeah that's a possibility. If she's willing to take old dad.

MHA Right. Well this has been fascinating. I hate to, to end it, but there might be some other person that's supposed to be, that we're supposed to be interviewing as well at noon, but I could just listen to you all day. [laughs]

JS Well thank you very much.

MHA This has been great. I, I should have apologized in advance, one of the things that they ask us to do is not be very intrusive to try to have your voice be the one that's heard, so a lot of times I'll be nodding and I'm wanting to respond, but I can't so, sometime we'll have a full conversation where we can actually interact. [laughs]

JS Well I would enjoy that. Yeah you should have told me that 'cause I..

MHA Yeah you can cut it off...