

Interview with James Leonard, commercial fisherman

Occupation: commercial fisherman

Port Community: Point Judith, Rhode Island

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: November 1, 2020

Location: Warwick, Rhode Island

Project: The Graying of the Fleet Part II: How and Why Young Fishermen Choose to Fish?

Transcriber: Sarah Schumann

[Start of interview]

[00:00]

Sarah Schumann [SS]: My name is Sarah Schumann. Today is November 1, 2020. I'm in Warwick, Rhode Island. Could I please ask you to state your name?

James Leonard [JL]: My name is James Alfred Leonard.

SS: Great, thank you. And you go by Jimmy?

JL: Yes, Jim, Jim-Jim, Jimmy, whatever.

SS: Thank you. Jim, what is your occupation?

JL: I am the captain of a commercial fishing boat, which is a dragger otter trawl. I fish out of Point Judith, Rhode Island. I live in Warwick, Rhode Island.

SS: Excellent. Do you fish fulltime or part-time?

JL: Fulltime, for the most part. With the coronavirus right now, it's mostly been part-time, just because it seems a little bit more efficient for me to go quahogging right now, because the prices of the fish are so low.

SS: Right. Did you say your homeport? I think you did. Point Judith?

JL: Yes. Point Judith, Rhode Island.

SS: What's the name of your vessel?

JL: The name of my vessel is fishing vessel Briana James.

SS: Ok. What's your age, Jim?

JL: I am thirty-four years old.

SS: Ok. Final question, what's your educational background?

JL: I graduated high school. That was it.

SS: Great. Those were the biographical questions I wanted to get over with at the beginning. Now, it's up to you. Where would you like to start to tell your story as a young fisherman?

[01:39]

JL: I started commercial fishing at the age of nine years old, with my uncle Jeff in Narragansett Bay, lobstering. I started out banding lobsters for him. I started summers. I fished the summers. Sometimes I could get out of school. Not often, but sometimes, depending on the money. I started off banding lobsters with my uncle at nine years old for like twenty dollars a day. Then after that, I worked the deck. We hauled three hundred traps. I was his deckhand at the age of thirteen years old. It literally kicked my butt, but it was worth it. We were making good money at the time. Then from there, throughout high school, I fished with my uncle Jeff and my family. My uncle George has a dragger also. I went out with him a few times as I got older. On the side, I did commercial diving for shellfish. I did tonging for shellfish. I did bullraking for shellfish. Then, when I approached the age of eighteen, I started working for Seafreeze, which is out of Davisville, Rhode Island. It's owned by Kyle and Glenn Goodwin and Dickie Goodwin, Richard Goodwin. I started unloading the boats with them, as in lumping the boats, taking the frozen blocks of fish out of the boats. I did that for probably a year and a half to two years, and then I made my first offshore commercial trip, actually out of Galilee. I went with Brian Fielding on the Corey T, which is a small offshore lobster boat, which was just crazy. I think I was nineteen years old. It was my first time being away from land without any family. The money was not worth it, but I got a lot of experience. After that, seeing if I could do this on a boat of fifty-five foot in length, why couldn't I do it with the company I was working for? Because it was a big step. Everyone would start out lumping at Seafreeze and it took a big step. It took a big jump to say, "Hey, I'm going to go offshore fishing." I actually started with a group of my friends that are all still in the industry now. Some of them are fishermen. Some of them work for some of the coops [editor's note: the narrator uses the word "coop" as a synonym for seafood dealer]. Others are not alive.

[04:28]

JL: My first fishing trip with the Goodwins, I want to say I was maybe nineteen and a half, somewhere around there. I went offshore with Kyle Goodwin. I think it was a mackerel trip. I want to say it was eight or nine days long. Everybody else on the boat was much, much older. The guys were in their mid-forties, young fifties. It was just a different environment. Anyways, I did it, and kind of got a taste for the money. The money was just absolutely excellent. I was three-quarters share, and I think I made forty-five hundred dollars at the age of nineteen. I was like, "Wow, this is awesome." After that, I stayed lumping, because there were so many people on the crew of the boat. At that time, there was a total of fourteen guys on the fishing vessel Persistence. It was tough. There was probably about twenty to twenty-two guys that all worked there. When it came time to making the list, you had to

really do your boat work, and you had to be on time, and you had to really be somebody to be able to go fishing. It took a little while for me to get on the boat, to actually go fulltime. I probably did lumping every time the boats came in, and did my free boat work every time the guys came in from a fishing trip. It would be anywhere from a day to a day and a half. You had to go down. You had to do free work in order to get on the list. It was a lottery. It was whoever seemed to do the best work. Whoever was good on the boat could go fishing. You had to clean the boat, clean tanks, clean the baskets, clean the packing table. I did that for probably, I want to say, around six months. It was hard to get on them boats back in the day. Long story short, I did that and then I started fulltime at, I want to say, twenty years old. It's easily said: I was there just for the money. It was awesome.

[06:36]

JL: I think I started fulltime in *Illex* season. I think I got to go five trips in a row. Then I think I got bumped one. Then, after that, it was pretty much simple: just go fishing as much as you could, fish as hard as you could. I saved all of my money. I mean, I bought a few cool toys. I bought my first house at the age of twenty-one. I bought a rental property that I own at the age of twenty-five. We were just fishing hardcore. I want to say it was between three hundred and three hundred and twenty days per year I spent offshore fishing with Kyle and Glenn Goodwin. I did one fishing trip on the *Relentless* with Greg Bray. That was a fun trip. That was pretty cool—different set of guys. Anyway, I worked there fulltime, three hundred, three hundred twenty days a year, I think up until 2015, 2016. Then, I wouldn't say I refused to take the boat captain. That was the next step in my life was to either captain the *Persistence* or try something else. I've always, since I was a little kid, since I banded that first lobster, my whole family's been in the industry. It's exactly what everybody says. It's something in the water. Something in your blood that never leaves. With the money I was making, I was saving it along the way. I knew I wanted to try my own thing. Everybody used to always say, "There's no money on the beach. You can't make any money fishing on the beach. You got to go offshore. You need federal permits." It was just so expensive. As I sit right now, with the brand-new boat and license, everything, I'm into my vessel right now like two hundred and seventy thousand dollars. I mean, we went overboard on a lot of things, but I went overboard on a lot of things because I was expecting big outcomes. I don't know why I shouldn't have, either. The only reason I haven't is because of coronavirus, and prices are just sliced seventy-five percent off. It's like a going-out-of-business sale for fish. It's just absolutely sickening.

[09:07]

JL: Yeah, I think I had just turned thirty years old, maybe thirty-one. I found a boat. Actually, maybe I should talk about how I bought the other boat. Sorry. I bought a twenty-six-foot *Webbers Cove*, from Kyle and Glenn Goodwin. No, it was *Dickie*. *Dickie* owned the boat. I bought this boat, a nice little diesel in it. I brought it to my home, did a bunch of fiberglass work to it—which is another thing in the family that we're fairly talented at, not to sound conceited. We're good at fixing our own boats. I think it's in the trade for everybody. I bought this boat from them guys. I brought it home. I worked on it, and I started doing commercial diving for quahogs. I was doing really well at it. Not an easy game. It was a little expensive to get into. But it was a very well-paying game, and you only had to invest a couple dollars into gas every day. I mean, the initial cost of buying the dive gear and all that fun stuff was quite expensive, but it paid off very quickly, and it seemed to be a very

profitable thing. But I always wanted more. I didn't want just to be a diver. I wanted my own dragger.

[10:30]

JL: I looked around at boats that were for sale. They were just not trustworthy from my outlook on wanting to be on the ocean. Seeing some of the weather that I've seen with Kyle and Glenn, it's pretty intense. I don't trust it, whether it's three miles off the beach or whether you're a hundred miles offshore. Fishing beaches, or at the Hague Line, Gulf of Mexico—doesn't matter. I don't care where you go. Mother Nature is very unforgiving. I looked around at a lot of boats. They just seemed—sorry to curse—like shit boxes. Something I didn't trust, something I didn't want to put my life in, something I didn't want to not come home in. I knew my family and myself had the talent to build a nice boat, because everyone in my family has built their own boats. My grandfather has numerous patents on building quahog skiffs. He's built flat-bottom skiffs since the mid-sixties, I would guess. That is not a fact, but I just know he's been building them forever. My whole family's been in the fishing industry at least over a hundred years, I would like to say, just not down in Point Judith. But we always had a boat building skill.

[12:00]

JL: I looked around at probably three or four different boats while I was diving for quahogs, after I left Seafreeze. Finally, I found a boat which was in Nova Scotia. I was very leery about this, because bringing boats into the country, from talking to fishermen, it was very confusing. Everyone made it out like, "Oh, it's going to cost thousands of dollars. Then you need to get—" What's the inspection called? Do you remember what that's called? [editor's note: JL is directing these questions towards his wife] We had to qualify for the net tons to bring it into the country. There's a certain thing that you had to pass. It was a tonnage certificate. That's what it's called. We had to get a special engineer and pay him to come down. Not too many people had brought boats in from Nova Scotia. They have now. But when I bought mine, it was close to the start of everybody bringing them in, when people realized it wasn't that big of a deal. Because it wasn't that big of a deal. It was a far ride, but once we crossed the Bay of Fundy with my boat, into the states, into customs, and the border officer comes on the boat—the customs guy, sheriff guy, in Bar Harbor, Maine—comes on the boat, and he's just like, "Oh, you can't have that banana, because you bought it in Canada." It was that simple. It was, "Sign this paper." It was "Twenty bucks, and you're in the country." I paid forty-four thousand dollars for my boat, and up until that point, I was expecting to just throw that forty-four grand away. I was like, "I don't know how this is going to work." It was really, really easy.

[13:56]

JL: Anyways, I found this boat—a forty-four [foot] Atkinson. It's got a seventeen-foot beam. Absolute beautiful, beautiful boat. I found it in a place called Clam Harbour in Nova Scotia. It's probably sixty miles east of Halifax, and that's half the reason it was so cheap. I think it was listed for sixty grand or something. It was originally a Danish seiner, which is a very dying industry. These guys have these big giant winches on the boat, and what they do is they take a high-flyer, and they attach it to one end of the winches. The winch holds between three quarters to a mile of groundline, and it's got lead on the inside. They throw the high-flyer

overboard and they do a big half circle with one winch, and then they throw one wing end of the net in the water, and then they pay the rest of the net out, and then they throw the other end of the net, and attach it to the other winch. Then they finish out their big half circle, they get to their high-flyer, and just slowly wind it in. That's what they call Danish seining. This boat was built and designed through and through, brand new, to do that job. It just had absolute incredible hydraulic power on it. It's got its own hydraulic engine in it. That was one of the biggest reasons I wanted the boat—that and it holds forty-five thousand pounds of fish. It's pretty intense. Those guys, they used to catch some cod and haddock and all sorts of things up there. But the boat, it was a dying industry and it was going really cheap. I bought it from a company, Troy's Marine Broker. Everything was almost too easy. My wife and I, Briana, we took my truck up. We drove to look at the boat. After things got really serious, where I talked to the owner, I was like, "Listen, I never did this before. How easy [is it]?" The broker was like, "Listen, I'm going to go through the whole process with you. I'm going to help you get the boat in the states, all this stuff." I was like, "You know what? Let's try it." I asked a few guys in the industry. I've heard of a few guys doing it. I didn't know too many guys back in the industry, because I'd worked with the Goodwins, and they're not in Point Judith. They don't really know too many other people. But I did speak to Phil Ruhle. He did it, so it had to be possible. I was bound and determined to start out somewhere. Instead of buying a boat for forty grand that was all done and ready to go, but maybe I took it out and it was going to sink, I wanted to buy a boat for forty grand that I could put my family and myself's talent into, and know that it's going to be seaworthy.

[16:35]

JL: That's basically where the journey began. My wife and I drove up there. It was an eleven-hour drive. We looked at the boat. I was already ready to buy it before I even stepped on it, because it was just beautiful. It had a lot of rot on it, but I knew going into this that I didn't want to buy this boat and then go fish it next season. I expected this industry to turn out to be more local, and people starting to somehow want to get fish as fresh as they possibly can. I thought it was a never-ending thing. I thought this was the time. This is the time for a young person, if they're going to get into it. I know the regulations are hard. I know that license fees are up. I know that it takes every single ounce of courage and determination to do this. But I was ready to do it from a different aspect. A lot of guys that get into the industry, they're either somebody's son, or they fish for somebody for so long and then they take the boat. [That] was an opportunity that I had. But it wasn't my boat. It wasn't my company. I didn't want that. I want to know why isn't there room for a younger person to start out and get his own company? I know that sounds like I'm dreaming too big. But it's unfair that there's so many people out there that just get rich and buy permits and buy another boat, get some other idiot to run it, and they just keep getting richer and richer, and there's no room for young guys. In my own opinion, that's the answer to this whole conversation we're having here. No one wants to get into the industry because they have to fight so hard to get anywhere. Everybody doesn't need to own a coop, but coops control the entire process. It's like you are victim to them. I mean, I couldn't sell fish for the whole month of April. It's just sad.

[18:30]

JL: But anyways, back to the topic. I drove up to this place, Clam Harbour, with my wife. We met the owners. We looked at the boat. We stayed in Halifax, at a hotel. What was the hotel

we stayed in, sweetheart? Sheraton or something. I can't remember. Something. It was pretty cool. It was in the heart of Halifax. That was really fun. That was like a little vacation for the wife and I. They had some cool things up there. We checked out the Titanic's gravesite. That was incredible. That was right outside the hotel. We did a lot of cool things. We did Peggy's Cove. We did a few different things. We looked at the boat probably three times. I drove up there with a deposit, knowing I was going to get it. Left the guy a deposit, told him I'd be back on an airplane, told him I wanted it fueled up, I wanted a diver underneath it, wanted to check it out, multiple things, and I wanted a guarantee that it was going to get to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, which is—this isn't a fact, but I think—the most southern tip of Nova Scotia. It took us two days or so—maybe two and a half days—I could be wrong, I don't really remember—to get the boat from Clam Harbour to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, which is the best place to cross the Bay of Fundy before pulling into Bar Harbor, Maine to meet and pass through customs. Long story short, I come home, tell the wife, "Yeah, that's it. We're going to do it. We're going to buy the boat." I ended up selling the Webber's Cover boat that I had, that I was using for quahogging. I sold that for fifty-five thousand dollars, which was nice, because it allowed me to get this, and then still quahog out of my skiff while I was building this boat. I saved lots of money from the Goodwins before I did this, to start this adventure. Which if I could back it up, I honestly think I wouldn't have done it [resigned laughter; editor's note: JL referring to the context of the coronavirus].

[20:16]

JL: So anyways, we get the boat. We bring it to Yarmouth. It makes it there, no problem whatsoever. We finish all the paperwork. Me and this guy named Buddy—he's probably eighty-six years old—decide to cross the Bay of Fundy with this boat. It was a very shitty ride. The Bay of Fundy is no joke. I think I slept the night in Yarmouth. Then we made the crossing the next day. I think it took between eighteen and twenty-four hours to get to Bar Harbor. Then I had my grandfather, Alfred Mulligan, and my uncle, Jeffrey Mulligan, along with my wife Briana Martin, and my mother, Kathleen Mulligan. They all drove up and met me at Bar Harbor and we waited for our next weather window. This was my birthday, November 7, when we did this. This was not good weather. We waited there a day or two in Bar Harbor, and then we steamed the boat all the way home. That was pretty cool too. We were about eighty miles east of Platts [editors' note: Platts Bank, in the Gulf of Maine]. We were in some weather, probably fifteen to twenty-five Northwest. It was pretty shitty. It put the boat to the test, and the boat was exactly what I expected and my family expected. We all loved it. We all knew it was going to be a nice solid boat. It was our foundation to start. All of us. We all wanted to build this thing up. It's what my family's done. They weren't going to make money on it, but it was a chance for me to go fishing.

[21:53]

JL: We bring the boat back, and we immediately started working on it. My grandfather Alfred has a little tiny quahogger's marina in Warwick. It's in Oakland Beach. We ended up waiting for a monster tide, and we got the boat up there, because the boat draws seven and a half feet. We bring the boat up there, and we strip everything off the boat. I wanted to do everything brand new. We brought the boat down to [where] it was just a hull left. The engines were in place. Everything was in place. We just tore the whole deck out. We opened the stern up. We put a brand-new wheelhouse on. We rebuilt this boat from almost scratch.

The entire hydraulic system had to be changed. We took all the winches off. It took two and a half winters, because we were working in the summer. I was working with my uncle Jeff, lobstering in the summer, because we couldn't just build a boat. We had to go to work. Like I said, and I'll say it again, I saved a lot of money with them guys [editor's note: JL is referring to the Goodwins at Seafreeze], but at the end of the day, you still had to go to work.

[23:02]

JL: Building the boat was really hard, really tough, but all the while building it, we had all this hope. Prices were through the roof. Guys were making awesome money. It didn't take much to go out and get a hundred pounds of fluke, and you had a four-hundred-dollar bill. It didn't seem that hard, because I was fishing with my uncle George a couple times on the Mud Turtle out of Point Judith. It's another dayboat. It's almost an exact replica of what I have, just a different style boat. The money's there. I'm not saying he's rich, but the money was there. The dream was there. All the facts were there, and I thought it was a wise investment to do this. I know we would never be able to turn around and sell the boat for what I have into it, but it was something I wanted to do since I was a little kid, had all the determination, saved my pennies, and we gave it hell. We build the boat. I spared literally no cost. I put every right fitting in there, everything we possibly could. All stainless-steel hydraulic lines. It's an absolute beautiful boat. I think we ended up spending seven thousand dollars just on the windows. It's awesome. I love the boat. I wish it was a little bit bigger, of course, but it's beautiful. It came out great. I think I started fishing August 28 of 2019. As I was building this, I built the whole boat on credit cards and savings. It got to the point where we were like, "Oh shit." It kind of threw the balance off. You can't just plan a project like this. Not too many people are like, "Hey, I'm going to build a dragger," without having ten million dollars in the bank. It got to the point where it was like, "Ok, time to apply for a credit card." "Time to apply for another credit card." You don't get bank loans for this, because you can't convince the teller that you're going to pay them back in fluke. Anyways, things started getting a little tight and it was time to go. I ended up missing three quarters of a season. I showed up down in Point Judith. Luckily, thank you to Dan Costa, he had a slip down there for me. It was very helpful. The state of Rhode Island, or at least Dan anyways, helped out with seeing a young gunner down there ready to go. Had my license, had sellouts on it. He had a slip for me. I showed up down there and I was able to go fishing. But the first season, showing up at the end of August without any gear even on the boat, it was tough. I threw the gear on as fast as I could. I had to put the cable on. I had a set of doors that I was towing that weren't really working. The boat was overheating. It wasn't just shiny armor and gold coins. It was a lot of learning. There was really nobody there to help you. No one's saying, "Hey, do this. Hey, try this. Hey, try that." It was just my family. It was pretty hard. But we made a little bit of money at the end of 2019. Then I had to just stop, forget about the boat. I had to quahog all winter through 2019, do some other things. I did some side jobs, some carpentry stuff, simple things all fishermen do. After that, I showed up hard and strong. I think it was first week of April. I knew there was no fish in. I knew it was too cold. I knew the fish didn't show up on the beach until end of April. But I didn't care. I needed to try. I was like, "I just built this boat. I got over two-hundred-something thousand dollars into it. I'm ready. I'm ready to go here." I was going to go as hard as I could go.

[26:51]

JL: All of a sudden, I start fishing, and then we start hearing about this “pandemic” or this “virus,” and I’m just like, “Ok, well first thought is, hopefully the world will just shit the bed and then I won’t need to pay all my credit cards back, and everything will be ok.” [laughter]. After that, came the realization that wasn’t going to happen. Oh my god, did it destroy the fishing industry! I remember coming in one day. I can’t remember. I had a really nice trip on. I had a couple thousand dollars in fish. You can choose to cut this out. It’s up to you. But I had to throw it overboard, because guys were closed. I don’t understand. I just poured every single thing I had into this boat. “Oh yeah, we’re not taking your [fish].” “What do you mean, you’re not taking my fish? We’re in a pandemic here. Why are you not going to take my fish? It’s caught in the ocean. It’s wild. It’s fresh. I mean, come on. It’s the United States here. Why are you not taking my fish? How can you tell me somebody’s not buying fish right now?” That’s when I realized that it was literally super-dependent on restaurants. I never realized. I mean, I knew restaurants are part of the whole thing. I get it. But then when you really start thinking about it, “Oh, that sushi grade fluke you were catching? Yeah, I guess it goes for sushi, and there’s not too many people with masks on eating sushi.” Yeah, the fish prices just absolutely dropped out. The coops tried the best they could to keep it decent, but it wasn’t enough for me to keep trying to put money into the boat and keep it up. I was fishing as hard as I could, I would say, probably up until maybe middle of August. Maybe the first of August, beginning of August. The prices of almost everything dropped out to the point where I couldn’t afford a deckhand. I tried my hardest to build my boat so that I could fish it alone, but I never realized how concerning it is when you’re out—even if you’re three miles off the beach or a mile off the beach—when you’re fishing alone, how many things can go wrong and how fast they can go wrong. I have two young boys, and I would really hate to have something happen where I fall overboard, the boat stays in gear, it’s all over. I don’t even have insurance on the boat. That was a whole other thing I didn’t come to understand. It’s like sixty-something hundred dollars a year to get insurance on the boat. It is by far the hardest thing in the world for some person to say, “Hey, I want to go get my own boat and go dragging.” I think the only way it’s going to happen is if your dad owns a coop or you’re an absolute millionaire and a complete dumbass [laughter]. I’m sure everything would have been great and dandy if coronavirus didn’t show up. I was catching plenty of fish. I’ve done a lot of work on nets. Kyle, Glenn, friends of mine, Jon Knight, Trevor Knight. I’ve watched them guys. I learned how to mend twine. I covered every single obstacle before I made this attempt. It’s working. It just wasn’t worth the effort, unless for some weird reason this coronavirus is going to go away. I don’t see that happening. I think the same prices we’re dealing with now, no matter who gets elected president—who cares?—I have a feeling they’re going to still be there next year.

[30:40]

JL: Let’s talk about the dockside sales, I guess, when whoever came up with the idea, whether it was the governor, whoever it was, decided to come up with the idea that we were allowed to sell fish for the first time. In my own opinion, I think it was 1976 or ’74, since the Magnuson Stevens Act was dropped, when you were allowed to sell fish dockside legally. I’m not sure if that’s true or not, but it’s been a long time since people were able to sell fish off their boat to the public. While all this was going on—while the coops were giving me a phone call, saying, “Hey, you can go fishing this week,” or, “Hey, you shouldn’t go fishing this week,” or, “Hey, we don’t know what’s going on tomorrow”—they released—I think it was the governor—released this dockside sales immediate action, where you were allowed to

sell your fish to the public. To be quite honest with you, it was a no-brainer. It was the only option we had. The only option my wife and I had was to do this, because the fish were there. I'm so grateful that we did it in the spring, because this season, this 2020 season, wasn't that spectacular. Squid and things were up and down. I've never fished the beach off of Rhode Island. I've fished here off the beach in the wintertime with the Goodwins and stuff on a few different boats. I understand that certain times, certain species show up. But things just seem a little weird when I was out dragging this season, even just from last fall when I was out—August, September, October 2019. This season started off with a bang, but then it shut down and never turned back on. Even still now, while we're going this interview, from a dragger's point of view, it's not all dollar bills here. It's a fight. And it's not just the prices. It's the fish. The fish don't really know what they're doing. I don't know what it is. I have no idea. It just seems a little off, from my own perspective. I'm looking at my logbook from last year, at certain times where it is now, I should be catching my two hundred pounds of fluke. I haven't seen them update the sea bass. It's a hundred and fifty pounds a day now, all the way to January 1st. That's never happened, in my own opinion. That's crazy. That's because nobody's catching a seabass. No dragger guy is catching a sea bass. The pot guys are, but pot guys aren't catching that many, because my uncle is fishing twenty traps and he was catching thirty pounds. It's not that they're not there. They're either in the rocks, they're not coming out. Something's going on. Maybe they got coronavirus [laughter]. I have no idea. But it's a different season. It was just a lot of things adding up to me losing my hope in this industry, to fight so hard to get here.

[33:49]

JL: I'm not someone to quit, but having that option to do the dockside sales was awesome. It was really cool. And I'm going to be honest with you, I went at that thing with my head and my horns down. I didn't even read the rules, the regulations. I didn't care. It said on there that I could sell my fish dockside, and we went right into it. Of course, within the first three days, I got hit with a violation from DEM [editor's note: Department of Environmental Management], because I was just doing something wrong. I said, "Ok, maybe it's time to start reading these rules and regulations to see what's going on," so I did. We never did anything bad. I think a couple times, we had someone fillet a fish or something. We weren't allowed to do it, of course. Everyone knows Rhode Island. Everybody's got to have the toughest rules around. I don't blame them. Fast forward, and the biggest thing about these direct sales is this twenty-four hour law, which entitles that if you go out fishing and you catch your fish, you have to come into the dock, you need to sell it off your boat dockside, you have to keep it cool, shaded, all this fun stuff, and when you sell it to the public, when you're done, it has to be within twenty-four hours. When you're done, you need to either discard your fish, which means kill it, throw it overboard, or you need to sell it to the coop before they close. That was another glitch that came along with this coronavirus. The coops decided to close at three o'clock instead of five, or even say, "Hey, I'll leave a guy here late until seven," because that's a simple equation too—the economy. They can't just come up with this money when they're not making it. If we're not getting paid for the fish, then they're not getting paid for the fish, so they can't pay their employees. The coop's closing at three, so we leave the dock and go fishing at four o'clock in the morning, four thirty, five o'clock in the morning. Three thirty sometimes. As hard as I tried to catch as much fish as I could to come in, you're never going to please the public with this. You're never going to be able to get exactly what they want. We did ok certain times. There were some times we

made some decent money. But it was in no way the savior. It didn't save me. You can only do it so much, because the amount of restrictions that came along with it were just asinine. My wife and I were one of the first to do it, or one of the first to do it on a bigger scale. When we did, it was immediate: we got boarded by DEM. It wasn't just one boarding. We were boarded every single time we did it. It's like, "Ok, I get it. It's a new law. I understand." But first off, they had no idea what they were talking about. We had one day where we were selling fish to the public down in Point Judith. By the way, I come in from a half a day of fishing at twelve o'clock, twelve thirty, maybe one, in order to just sell fish to the public for an hour before I have to say, "Ok, that's it. We're done. Pack it up. Untie the boat. We're going to bring the rest of the fish to the coop before they close at three, before [otherwise] I have to throw it over the rail of my boat." That's just absolutely asinine. It's simple math. There's probably three thousand fishermen out there on the eastern seaboard, and there's like four million people that tell us what to do. The restrictions are horrible.

[37:34]

JL: Anyways, we still did it. We did ok with it, but like I said, it wasn't the savior. We could only do it on Saturdays. It wasn't just because the most people were down there for tourism on Saturdays. It was just, that was the time when I could get a babysitter for my kids, I could have my wife come and help me, and it all just came down to lining everything up. Throw the weather into it. If it's crappy out, you couldn't go. If it's raining, no one's going to come buy fish, so why even try? But it worked. We probably did twenty-five dockside sales, something like that. We did really well sometimes. But the beginning was the best, when everybody was panicking down there. I wish the state got ahead of this a little bit more, because if the state had this set up a little bit more, I think that more fishermen would have signed onto these sales. But they didn't. It seemed to me like they threw it in Dan's lap, and they were like, "Dan, get a hold of this. Put some cones up and let these guys figure out where they're going." When we started selling fish, it was literally like we were having a zombie apocalypse. I've seen people with suits and ties on who were spending hundreds of dollars. "Oh, I'll take that!" You hold up the biggest fluke, and within five minutes, it was gone. We were selling out fluke for ten bucks a pound. Like I said, it worked for a little while. But then when everybody settled down and toilet paper came back to Walmart, it kind of went to where it was almost not worth it, so we kind of stopped. We stopped because we had a couple different Zoom meetings where the restrictions with every single person in charge in the state of Rhode Island decided not to give us anything excepted for a two-hundred-dollar license fee for next year, and say, "Hey, good job. It might be a law." We didn't stop because of that, necessarily. We stopped because the people stopped coming. If the state of Rhode Island gave a little bit more on the publicity end of this earlier, we would be still selling fish.

[39:51]

JL: I didn't mind the fight. I didn't mind working hard. I didn't mind the sweat. But I ain't doing that for two hundred and fifty bucks, three hundred bucks, four hundred bucks. Sorry, but I'd rather go kill more fish and make the same amount of money. It's one of them things where they were just a little bit late to the punch. If you ask them, they were the superstars, the heroes. They saved the day. "We did everything." That's not what happened at all. I think they issued something like eighty permits or seventy-eight permits, and I literally went up and down the docks talking to a couple friends that I made, like, "Hey, dude, make sure

you keep using this certificate.” They’re like, “I handed it back. I don’t want that.” I’m like, “Why?” They’re like, “Well, we see you get boarded every day. Then on top of it, you have to fill out everything you land every day, whether you sell out or not.” I’m like, “Oh, yeah. I guess.” But I had no other option. I had to do this. I had to try. I couldn’t see killing a fish for two-fifty a pound. It was six dollars a pound last year. It just wasn’t fair. So that’s what led up to now.

[41:06]

JL: I’m still fishing. I just went out the other day. I just had an awesome encounter [editor’s note: sarcasm] with the floats on my net. They came around my net drum and hit me in the ribs. I got two hairline fractures in each rib. It is what it is. It’s life. You learn. But the prices have just—I just wish someone could put this on a commercial and explain to them that, “Hey, if you showed up to Point Judith on a Saturday or you went on Facebook or our website or something, or called the phone number on the side of my truck, that you could come get a piece of real, fresh-caught, wild fish from state waters that was caught and landed inside of twenty-four hours, and you could take it home to your family and eat it.” I mean, I don’t understand why you wouldn’t, when it’s cheaper than going anywhere else for your seafood. It’s just something that needs more publicity. We’ve tried multiple times—how many times did we contact Channel Ten [editor’s note: JL is speaking to his wife]? We’d put it on our phone and we’d write a little spiel, and then we’d just cut and paste it and put it on a notepad, so that once a week, we could just send it in. No response. Oh no, but the governor, she got all the credit. She signed this thing in an act, but nobody wants to put any publicity behind it. That would have made it all worth it. The Christopher Andrew, my buddy John, over in Newport, he was doing it too with us. In my opinion, he was the only other bigger-quantity lander landing fishing boat—however you would say that—that sold fish. We were teaming up together, talking strategies and what we were going to do and stuff, and how we were going to do it better. There was just no help, no nothing, from the state. They don’t understand how hard it is to go fishing, take care of the fish, take pictures of the fish and put them on an app—this new designed app that we had to do to help sell our own fish—it’s not easy. And then icing it in the middle of July, when it’s like ninety degrees outside. It’s a job in itself. But any fishermen out there will tell you the same thing: they are never not going to keep their fish cold, because that’s just how it’s done. Whether it’s going to the coop, it’s all about pride when you land your fish, in this state, and keeping it for a good product. Even if it does go overseas, no matter where it goes, it’s part of your job entitlement. Keeping your fish cold so whoever buys it gets a good meal and it makes you feel better at the end of the night. That was one of the hardest things, shoveling the ice every single time you turn around. Sometimes we’d only be at the dock for two hours. But it goes quick, whether it’s in shade or not. All that stuff costs money.

[44:01]

JL: Yeah, we kind of slowed down on that. I focused more on fishing a little bit, and just selling to the coops and kind of dialing into that. You have to call ahead. You have to tell them what you have, so they can pull out whatever many boxes. You need to be there before three o’clock or they’re not going to take your fish. It’s turning more into like I spent this money to go to jail. I mean, it’s fun. It’s great. I feel achieved. It was my dream. But now it’s turned into a burden, depending on how long this coronavirus is going to happen. I don’t know. I don’t know, depending on how some prices can change. To me, it’s just not worth

me going out. Sounds like a lot of money, going out and having the boat stock five hundred dollars when you're by yourself. [But] that five hundred dollars was twenty-five hundred dollars last year. For me, to go out by myself and risk my life, it's just—. Some fishermen would probably laugh, "Heh-heh, risk your life!" Well, you know, it doesn't take much, man. I've seen lots of things. I've seen guys lose their fingers. Broken ribs. Broken arms. You name it. I've seen guys get helicopter-lifted offshore. I mean, accidents happen all the time. It just takes one slip for you to not come home. I don't care if it's flat calm. I don't care if it's crystal clear. It happens. For me, it's not worth the risk to go out there and harvest fish for five hundred bucks, four hundred dollars a day, when you can't afford a deckhand. You can't get somebody to work for a hundred dollars a day. They can go to McDonald's, get to keep their feet dry, and text. You know what I mean? I mean, they can text on the boat, too, but whatever. They can do whatever they want. It's a little complicated. I think that's pretty much my entire story there. I think I covered it all.

[45:57]

SS: It sounds like I'm catching you at a real low point in the story, which is a shame. It's a shame that it is that way, and that this is when we're talking, as opposed to the previous twenty-five years that you've been fishing, when it sounds like you had a dream that you were getting towards, where you wanted to be.

JL: Yeah, it sucks.

SS: Can you talk about that feeling, though, a little bit? Like, when did you know that this is what you wanted to do?

JL: That I wanted to be a fisherman?

SS: Yeah.

JL: Oh, as soon as I banded that first lobster with my uncle Jeff. It was awesome. Like I said, to be able to go out somewhere. I understand people have dreams to be an astronaut, or they want to go be a scientist. But when you can go out, and you can harvest something from the ocean, to be able to have that feeling. Whether you're hauling a gillnet, hauling a lobster pot, a fish pot, a net. For me, it was [that] you never know what you're going to get. You know what I mean? I mean, I know you're out there targeting lobster. But you never know. It was almost like that euphoria of [when] you're pulling up to that first trawl. You're getting ready to haul the net back. You're getting ready to wind the gillnet up. You never know what's going to be there. You never know. You could make five thousand dollars. This is going to sound weird, but there could be a body hanging off the up and down line, which I've seen when I was a kid and someone jumped off the Newport Bridge. There could be anything. It was that surprise and that enjoyment, for me, which got me hooked. What made me stay was the money, of course. You could do whatever you wanted. And it wasn't even that long ago. It was even last year with these guys. Guys were making killer money all the time. When I started lobstering, that was enough where my freshman year, I went out. My parents didn't have any money. My dad is still a custodian. My mother works at Job Lot. She doesn't anymore, but she did. We had a tough life, growing up. We never had lots of money, so when you went out and earned it, in my own opinion, it meant more. I went out quahogging. Whether I made twenty dollars, fifty dollars, or two hundred dollars, I made it. I

was thirteen, fourteen years old. I made it, and I bought the coolest, baddest shit you could buy, and I went to high school, and I was like, “My family’s broke.” That, to me, was the feeling. That was the cool part of it, where I was like, “I’m going to make it in this world. Whether it’s fishing, whether it’s working for somebody else on the ocean, you just knew you could do it. It doesn’t matter whether you did it in a river, puddling, soft-shell clamming, it was just what really grabbed me. To step it up to when I fished with the Goodwins, that money was just unbelievable. I still don’t think too many guys know how much money you can make there. I know they just recently sold the company, but I still think there’s still good money there. That was just unbelievable. You’d go out, you’d go make two ten-day trips or something, and you had a down payment for a house. I wouldn’t have anything I have right now if it wasn’t for fishing. That was what really got me. I think it’s what gets everybody else. I hate to really sound corny, but a lot of it too was passion. I never really understood why everybody in the industry’s fifty, sixty, seventy years old. But, once again, that came with brains, because the more you learn, the more you read into it, the more you’ve seen how much restrictions, regulations—how much stuff is involved with trying to get into this industry. It’s tough. I hate to end on a bad note, but it’s very hard not to. It’s very hard not to.

[50:20]

SS: Yeah. So you sort of had your blinders on and were driven by passion, and now you’re sort of focusing more on those challenges?

JL: Yeah. Being this young, I just don’t see how you get over these challenges. Between us, I don’t see this coronavirus thing going anywhere. The only way this is going to happen, as of right now—I know this is a project for the past—but as of right now, the only way it’s going to work is if they sell fish to the public. There’s people there. People want to buy it. It’s just, I don’t know. Dockside sales needs to generate more publicity. Yeah. It’s tough for me to bring back a smile.

[51:16]

SS: Your parents weren’t fishermen, but your grandfather, uncles, the surrounding family [were]?

JL: My mother’s side was pretty much all fishermen. [On] my father’s side, one was a cop, fireman, not really into fishing. Hands down, it was the money and doing something different from anyone else. I went to school with a buddy of mine, Jeff Grant. His dad was always a great quahogger. He would go out quahogging. I mean, I would go out quahogging. There was another friend of mine, Danny Carozza [spelling?]. Same thing. He would go out quahogging. We weren’t really a group. We weren’t super close friends. But we did something different than just walking to your Burger King and having to be like, “Yes, sir. No, sir.” Lobstering and working for somebody else at such a young age was great. You always made more money. But when you were completely by yourself, and you could put a bullrake in the water, or a set of tongs or even if you just went dry-digging, whatever it was. There was a sense of accomplishment that when you did that, and you came back, and you sold your own product that you went out into the wild and caught. You just felt on top of the world. You felt like you could do whatever you wanted to do. That was it. You’re your own boss. You don’t have to answer to nobody. That’s another one, I guess, if I didn’t cover it

earlier, which made me want to try. I always said, going into this, I put almost all my eggs into this one basket, but I always keep a back door in case. I recommend that to anybody else who's entering this industry. Anybody at this time, with the coronavirus, if there's anybody else trying to get into this industry, try not to put all your eggs in one basket, because you're going to be having a tough time. We just need some more local. Like right now, she's working with a lot of restaurants, the guy from the Coast Guard House, with what you started, Eating with the Ecosystem [editor's note: the "she" in this sentence refers to JL's wife Briana. SS founded the organization Eating with the Ecosystem]. She talks to Kate and stuff, trying to get more people [editor's note: Kate is the program director at Eating with the Ecosystem]. But we need a group. People need to be together. Like, me and Dean need to talk about different species [editor's note: Dean is another fisherman on the same dock as JL. SS works as a deckhand on Dean's boat]. He needs to sell something, and someone else needs to sell something, because with fishing, the species of fish are in all different water columns. You got different depths, all different kinds of things. You and Dean might go out. You guys might go out and fish a gillnet, and you guys are going to get stripers. Me, I can't catch my ass with two hands for stripers. But I'll come in with my fluke, or I'll come in with my squid. A customer wants what they want. That's what separates the seafood market from the dockside sales. There's still plenty of hope for younger kids to come in this generation, even the way it is right now, but in my own opinion, the only way it's going to work, for say next season, if the prices are the same way—I mean, you can make a lot of money down there. That day you showed up, I think we did good there. I think we did fifteen hundred bucks that day. But you have to get more people. There's only two people that are really trying this. They just came out with too many regulations off the top with this thing. It's not even that they came out with too many. It's just that they enforced the shit out of them. I was held up at Town Dock for three and a half hours. I was offloading sixty-five hundred pounds of fluke—I mean scup, sorry. There you go, I almost got arrested right there [editor's note: sarcasm]! Because the guy on my boat found my logbook, which was just a temporary logbook for what we sold, because they need you to pay attention to not only what you sold—how many squid you sold, how much money you got for them squid, how many fluke you sold, how many sea bass you sold, how many scup you sold, how many butterfish you sold, how many whiting you sold, how many ling you sold, what sizes they were when you sold them, how much you got for each one—but you needed to log that on a guess on the way in from fishing. One of my boardings, where I was held up for two and a half hours and in which they took my fish from me—oh my god, that pissed me off really bad—anyways, one of them boardings, my wife made a mistake. She wrote on the logbook, "Had 350 pounds of sea bass left." At the time, the limit was only fifty pounds. But it wasn't sea bass. My poor wife made a mistake. She meant to write scup. That was it. I was held up. I was going to jail. "Do not pass go." I was considered just like a rapist. I'm sorry I keep ending on bad notes. This time sucks, Sarah.

[56:44]

SS: Are you the only one in your generation in your family that's fishing? [editor's note: JL disregards the generational aspect of this question and responds by naming several members of his family in the generation older than him.]

JL: My uncle George, my mother's brother. We actually dock stern to stern with each other, down in Galilee. He's had many, many successful years down there. He does great. He started sort of the same way I did. He never worked for a company. He actually started

harder than I did. He had a harder time getting going. He started off with a real small boat, did some things in the bay kind of like I did. But he was a lucky generation, where he was able to actually go to DEM and actually buy a multipurpose license. Which you cannot do anymore. You have to spend upwards of twenty-five thousand dollars on one. I had to spend fifteen thousand dollars on one. But my uncle George was lucky enough, when they had that open, to go and get his multipurpose license. He did a lot of fishing winkle gear. He fished some lobster gear, back in, I would guess the eighties. I think he did that three or four years. Then he said, "You know what? I want to go dragging." He got a small little dragger, started out real small in the bay. It was pretty good at the time. Then he kept going. Then he stepped up to a little bigger boat. Then he stepped up to another bigger boat. Then he made his way down to Point Judith. Out of the dayboat fleet, he's up there. He can catch fish. He makes money. He knows where to go. There's plenty of hope in this industry. There's plenty of room, especially for dragging or any choice these young guys want to make. There's plenty of room in it. There's plenty of money. It's just the coronavirus thing has to get figured out. It's that simple. If you had a day dragger down there and you fished hard, you could stock up to a quarter million dollars a year, just with a state license. You don't need any federal licenses. Everybody says that. You can make a lot of money. There's a lot of money out there to be made.

[58:47]

SS: Let me stop you there. Coronavirus is obviously something that is a real and present issue right now. But the graying of the fleet phenomenon has been going on longer than that, right?

JL: The what?

SS: The graying of the fleet. Do you agree that there is a graying of the fleet trend where fewer younger people are getting into the industry?

JL: Prior to Covid, you're saying?

SS: Yeah.

JL: Prior to Covid, I still think there's not that many people getting in the industry.

SS: I want to hear why that is, from your perspective.

JL: In my own opinion, I think it's because it's too expensive. Now, I think we're on the wrong page because I'm looking at it as owning your own boat. If you're thinking of "I want to be a deckhand," is that what you're leaning towards? Or are you talking the whole aspect?

SS: Well, in general. How about owning your own boat? Doing what you do?

JL: I think it's very hard to get the money to invest to get there, because everything is so expensive. I don't think it's not worth it. Say, if we just took coronavirus off the map, I probably would have had almost all my boat paid off by now this season. I would have kicked ass. Even with the fishing as thinned out as it was, I would have done really well, because I would have fished harder. The prices would have been there. You would have made plenty

of money. I just think it's, once again, it's not enough publicity. In my own opinion, I think there's a generation missing. There's a generation of forty-five-year-old guys out there who are willing to teach them eighteen-year-old guys how to go fishing. I think we're at a standstill of whether this industry is going to completely shit the bed or it's going to actually be one. I think it's very cut and simple right there, because there's not enough guys willing to teach somebody how to work deck, to give them the dream anymore. Whereas back in the day, life was a lot more simple. You weren't given these options, like my seven-year-old niece on her iPhone, making phone calls. You didn't have that option. You had that extra part of you, where you didn't sit in front of your TV or your computer, and you said, "You know what? I want to go get my hands dirty. I want to go catch a quahog. I want to go catch a clam. I want to go catch a striped bass. Anything." I think there needs to be more of that publicity, to teach these—not even teach them. The kids are going to want to learn themselves. To go and get into the industry and all that, you have to give them hope. You have to give them the dream. That dream, in my own opinion, I don't see it down there that much. There's not too many exhilarating things going on. It takes a special person to want to go fishing. That's just how I feel.

[61:52]

SS: How would you describe that special person? What is it that defines that special person?

JL: I would say hands-on. Someone that likes to be hands-on. Someone that likes the outdoors. Someone that wants to get off of their ass and earn a living the way that it should be. Another, in my opinion, is when you get all these people that are going to college. Eventually, all them jobs are going to be taken up. I don't know how many robots we're going to be able to build for the rest of our life. That's where it was for me. My hope and dream was, you want to be able to harvest fresh fish. I bring fresh fish home for my family every single day. You don't know where your meals are coming [from]. Even these kids that go to college, they have no idea where that hamburger been. It's one of them things, where that's going to be that type of person. You're going to want that type of person that cares about what they eat. They're going to want to care about the ocean, let's just say. We're talking back to fishing. They're going to want to learn what's out in the ocean. The ocean's one of the biggest undiscovered thing besides space. Why would you not want to go out and learn that? It's going to take one of them kids that just like manual labor, undiscovered things. All they need to do is go on a boat once. It can be anybody. It can be a college student. It can be anybody in the world. When you go on a boat, if you don't puke and you see a fish get caught—whether it's a commercial matter or a recreational matter—it changes people's lives. I think it's in the "how to raise a kid" book: teach them to go fishing. It's a must. That's the best I could say, for that type of person. It's kind of tough. This whole world has changed. How many deckhands do you see down there applying? I've seen a couple. I wish Fred's program took off a little bit more [editor's note: JL is referring to the crew apprenticeship program coordinated by Fred Mattera at the Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island.] I see him doing tours with people, but I don't know if that's fishing people. I have no idea. I see him walking around with a group of people, but I don't know if they're fishermen or if they're trying to learn to be a deckhand or something. It's kind of tough to tell, because I wasn't down there. Warwick kind of died out for fishing in the bay, when it came to seeing the younger generations wanting to go. Like Seafreeze and stuff, there's young guys coming down there all the time—guys from URI, stuff like that. But that's big money. It also came with big intimidation, though. There needs to be a program, just like

they were doing. Instead of funding all these observers, I think we need to fund some—make it a program in college. Give them an option. Then maybe they'll know about it. Again, it's publicity. The biggest one with me is, believe it or not, I did a marine trades program in high school. I guess I missed doing that. That was awesome. I did the marine trades program because I was always into building boats and working on boats. Maybe not building them prior to high school, but working on them, and watching my family, watching my uncle Jeff fiberglass a patch or something like that, whatever he was doing. That was why I chose the vocational class. Do I think it helped me to where I am now? No, because my family would come in that class once a week and be calling my teacher an idiot, and "He's using the wrong stuff," and all this. Because they're commercial. I do think that if there was a class, or if they just kept that going—I don't know if they are.

SS: The apprenticeship program?

[65:43]

JL: Yeah, that's a really cool thing. There's got to be a ratio that's higher than fifty-fifty for whoever goes in them classes that at least tries it. If they get on a boat, the boat don't make money, they don't make money, they're like, "Yeah, ok, I get it. I can't do this." That's the biggest problem I had this year. Early in the season, I was catching a lot of scup. Even when the price was down, you could still make money. I had a couple guys working for me. They worked great. After that, just couldn't do it. The fish—I guess they do it every year, but this year was just different. Even talking to my uncle George. My uncle George was like, "We're going to have an awesome fall." Hmm. Never happened. I just went out yesterday. I had five hours of bottom time. I had sixty pounds of fluke. Can't find a tautog to save my life. I had to go put the rock-hopper on. But they're out there. It's a change. Next season. But we got to get some better prices.

[66:51]

SS: You just fish state waters?

JL: Yes. I only have a state license. I actually got really lucky this year, too. I applied for this pilot aggregate program. It's a new program the state's working on. This is another hope for younger generation people, I do think. When I got into this industry, when I said, "Ok, I'm leaving Seafreeze and I want to be a commercial fisherman," in the back of my head—this is taking Covid and wiping it off the map; pretend Covid isn't here. Paying attention to when you started doing this thing, looking at it online, just looking at it, I was like, "This girl's onto something. I'm telling you." I just always had this feeling that fishing was going to make a turnaround. It has to happen. It's inevitable. Because if it doesn't, it's going away. All the other guys I talked to were just like, "It's going away." To me, I just couldn't fathom: how can it go away? How can you just let it go away? You can't. You just can't. I thought it was going to stay, and that's how I really wanted to take that jump. Every price for fish was like, you had to be an idiot to not go out and make three or four hundred bucks a day, without working hard. That's what made me really want to do it. That pilot aggregate was one of the proving points, also along with the dockside sales. I think it was forced their hand with that. But that pilot aggregate program was another point of me looking at this industry like maybe the state does want a fishing industry. Maybe they're just a little bit too caught up with regulations and rules. But seeing that come out for the guy with a state license, that was like,

“Wow.” That was like a free permit. I didn’t get a chance to use it this year, because I didn’t save seventy-five hundred and build a groundfish net, so now I have to get a groundfish net in order to utilize the permit. But I’ve spoken to DEM. They say I won’t get punished if I don’t use it. I haven’t activated it yet, even though I paid for it. [It] cost a thousand dollars. It allows you to catch all your fluke as fast as you want for the week. If it’s two hundred pounds a day, like it’s been, and they’re in here thick, you can go land fourteen hundred pounds and be done. Go home and go be a fireman. Go do what you want to do. The industry has plenty of opportunities in it. It’s just you have to wipe Covid off the map.

[69:29]

SS: That was interesting, when you mentioned the aggregate and the dockside sales. I think what I heard you say was that for a young fisherman, those little things, when the states shows some flexibility to make things work better for you, can be very encouraging in giving you the faith that the government’s a partner that’s going to enable you to thrive.

JL: Extremely. That was a big turnaround, when I heard about that pilot aggregate. I never thought in a million years I’d get approved for it. I have a feeling it’s because I’m a younger guy in the industry. Maybe they want this to survive. Every year was getting better and better. This is just one of them “once in five years this happens”. You know what I mean? It was just a shitty season. Not just the Covid. The fish didn’t show up. Like I said, if the fish were here, I would have had the boat—maybe not completely paid off, but it would have been pretty close. I would have had a steady deckhand. Maybe would have had a few different guys I could have taught myself, to be like, “Hey, you want to try fishing?” It’s just this freak season. But there’s plenty of reasons you should want to be a fisherman. To me, it seems like the state, if they didn’t do the dockside thing and I didn’t get a really good chance to peek up their skirt, I’d feel a little bit different. But seeing how, like, “It’s here. It’s happened. Why don’t you guys want to do it?” They want to, but for them to see they just handed out seventy-five permits, eighty permits, and there’s only two guys really doing it, you got to be like, “Maybe we got to fix something.” Or make it a little bit better. Not just come out of the box on the next webinar and be like, “Ok, we’re going to charge you three hundred dollars for the permit.” Nobody has any. But it was a cool idea. There’s just too many people that have jobs that aren’t fishermen, that tell fishermen what to do. But there is hope. I have a feeling this meeting was supposed to be about hope.

[71:49]

SS: [laughter] I’m curious to hear a bit more about the role your wife Briana plays in your fishing business.

JL: Oh, if it wasn’t for her, I’d be a janitor myself. With the coronavirus, it was just great, but even while building the boat. When I started building the boat, I was never home. I was working twelve-hour days. My uncle Jeff was down there with me. My grandfather. This was a whole-family thing. All the while this was going on, we decided to have two kids. That’s how much hope I had in this industry. It’s like, you talk about having kids forever. It never came to “It’s too late.” It always came to, “When is the right time?” I didn’t want to have a kid, working offshore. I was offshore three hundred and some days a year. I’m not having a kid like that. She was already fed up with me working that long a time. My wife has been amazing through this journey. That’s the best woman in the world, right there. She stuck by

me the whole time I was fishing offshore. She stuck by me building this boat, going to Nova Scotia. Geez, I mean, she goes fishing with me half the time now. She comes down, goes fishing, picks the deck, holds the wheel. I'm working on getting her to pull the boat in the slip next. She's been the greatest. She takes care of the kids. I can't wait until they're old enough. I want to bring them on the boat, and then I don't need to pay a deckhand.

SS: How old are they right now?

JL: James is about to be three years old December 28, and Max just turned one September—what was it, nineteen, twenty? Twenty-one. See how close I was? September 21, he just turned one. Those are tough ages. Those are tough ages to be like, “Hey, coronavirus! Hey, you can't sell fish! Hey, you just built a boat! Hey, no daycare!” It's just a shitty time. Like I said, I hate keeping on bringing it down, but the no help for the guys that decided to get into this industry, because you don't have any background slips? We can talk about that later.

[74:09]

SS: I usually ask people what they see for the future. This is a weird time to be asking that question, since none of us have a clue what the future's going to look like a week from now, a year from now, five years from now. Where would you like to see yourself in the future?

JL: I would love to see myself right down in Point Judith catching fish, with a good solid deckhand. I do think it's possible. I don't think the industry's over. It can't be over. And even if it is, if the industry's ever over, I'm still going to go out there and harvest fish just so I can eat it. That was another massive thing that we loved. It wasn't even because we liked fish. It was just because, why would you not want to go catch your own food? I'm not trying to get weird, like building off the grid and stuff like that, but it's like, you get to harvest your own meal. You know where it came from. You didn't have to guess which license plate was on which truck or which refrigerator it came out of. You know what it was like. Yeah. I kind of forgot the question.

SS: Your vision of the future.

JL: Oh, the future. I honestly think it's going to come back. There's a few options. The state was talking about doing farmers' markets. Coronavirus, in my opinion, has not affected farmers' markets. Farmers' markets are still kicking ass. Everybody wants local food. So we take the cards, you put them on the table. The coops are cool. They've always been there. They always bought your fish. My wife and I are all ready. Since they unleashed the “you're allowed to sell your fish” thing and we started getting publicity, my immediate backup was “We're opening a seafood market.” We went all the way in. She's got all her permits. She's a seafood dealer. We got everything. If we open the door in there [editor's note: JL motions towards the garage of his house], there's like a seven-thousand-dollar standup double freezer from Traulsen. She has all sorts of equipment that we bought. We didn't spend seven grand on it. We bought it used. Got it cheap. Killer deal. All sorts of things. But that was our backup plan. Because, like you said, we don't know how long the future's going to hold. We have no idea. Look at now. They're talking all these cases now. How long is this economy going to be able to float like that? In my own opinion, those are the best times for fishing, with this. The coops are closed, but with the dockside dealer's license, people were like—I don't know if it was just being scared, or if it was, “Holy shit, wow, you can go down there

and get fresh fish.” But, to the point, I do think it’s going to eventually fix itself. I don’t think it’s going to stick around. I think there’s going to be many more opportunities for people to get a license, buy a license. I really thought for a time being there that they were going to eventually open up licenses. Maybe not a multi-purpose, but say a restricted finfish endorsement. I really hope they do go that route, because I’m going to get one for one of my kids at least, just to have it. That’s the only way. The future of this industry revolves on the people who control it. It’s not by the people who fish it. It’s the people who make the restrictions. If they want an industry, it’s going to be their choice. Coronavirus or not, it doesn’t matter. Fishermen are going to succeed. We’ll catch fish. We’ll land fish. We’ll sell them to the public. We’ll sell them to whoever. But I definitely think there’s going to be an industry. There has to be an industry. That hope has never lost my mind. I do see myself fishing out of Point Judith, hopefully. In that boat, another boat. I’m not sure. My original plans were to have at least one of my kids come fishing with me. Maybe both of them. I’m not going to force their hand. I’m going to let them choose what they want to do. But they are damn well going to learn manual labor. Because if you don’t learn manual labor, then you just turn out to wear skinny jeans and eating at Taco Bell every night. They need to learn that. It’s a must. They need to learn how to actually earn money the hard way. I don’t disrespect anyone who went to college. I think it’s wise. I think it’s great. I think there’s many opportunities. But I think the next wave of the future is in trades. It doesn’t necessarily need to be fishing. It can be carpentry. It can be electrical. It can be heat. All them rich-ass people, they’re all going to need them things. Someone’s always going to need to flush their toilet and have it go down, because if it don’t go down, they’re not going to be happy. The trades, in my own opinion, is definitely where it is, and I consider fishing a trade. I’m hoping. I’m hoping they figure something out. It’s not that hard. There’s only a few amount of guys down there that do the day fishing. Everyone talked about how this affected the big coops the most, and how all these guys are going fishing. But, in my own opinion, the number one fish species that hasn’t changed at all is squid. Squid prices haven’t gone anywhere. Every single coop was built on squid. All these big boats are catching squid. Everybody gets a relief fund that’s a millionaire. But that’s hope right there, just seeing the squid prices. Everybody eats calamari. Everybody does. If people can catch a little squid. You probably know, the squid fishing around here has always been relatively good. You always go out there, you get a couple hundred pounds. Like I said, it’s not a million dollars, but at ninety cents for smalls, a dollar seventy-five for the large, you can scrape a little money out of it if you don’t have to work that hard. But I mean, that’s peanuts. I used to go out and get six, seven hundred pounds all the time. But I do. I see myself in the industry. It depends on how long I can balance this in a financial aspect of my own family’s decision. Because it’s going to get to a point of where it’s not affordable. There are still guys down there that argue it’s worth having the federal permits, paying all this money, all these things, because that’s where the fish are. I disagree. I was catching so much fish earlier in the spring. Even in the middle of the summer, I was catching all sorts of fish around the beach. There’s plenty of guys out there. Even if you went every day with a guy this year, you still would have did pretty good. You wouldn’t have done spectacular. Now, where we’re at at this point, where it’s probably been maybe three or four weeks, maybe five weeks of, “Oh boy, I might want to go work at Walmart,” or “I might want to go quahogging” or something like that. There’s always an avenue out of it, especially for a commercial fisherman, if you have a multipurpose license. The guys did good lobstering. Nothing changed, in my own opinion, for the lobstermen. All them guys can keep crying, because nothing changed. All they had to do was stay there a little later to sell their lobsters. I don’t get it. Because Champlin’s dropped their price a

dollar? No one sold there anyways. Everybody came in, they kept all their lobsters. You see it. The same dock. But, yeah, fishermen definitely got hit with the worst. But I one-hundred-percent see myself fishing in the future.

SS: Wonderful. Is there anything else you'd like to touch on before we end?

JL: No, I think I covered it all.

SS: All set then?

JL: Yeah.

SS: Ok. Thank you, Jimmy. I'll shut off the recorder.

[82:35]

[end of interview]