

Oral History: William Kirk¹

Rockland, Maine

November 17, 2011

Interviewer: Cameron Thompson

William Kirk, born in 1947, lives in Rockland, Maine, and is the first member of his family to work in the fishing industry. He entered the lobstering fishery independently in 1967 to supplement his income from working at a clothing factory in town, and still actively lobsters. Kirk describes a significant increase in the cost of bait and other operating costs since he first started lobstering, lowering his profits despite the rise in prices. He sold his lobsters locally throughout his career, fishing between 5 and 6 hundred traps a season, despite knowing other lobstermen in the area were fishing over 2,000 traps, and continued to do so after limits were imposed. Kirk feels that the local infrastructure is more set up to cater to pleasure boaters rather than fishermen, particularly with regard to access to pier space. During his time serving on the local harbor committee, he felt that the views of lobstermen were not fully represented in the decision making process.

Interviewer: Okay, and how long have you lived here?

William Kirk: 33 years.

Interviewer: Why do you live here and not someplace else?

William Kirk: I guess because I was born here and I found a job here and I've always stayed here.

Interviewer: All right. Well, I'm gonna ask you some more details about your experience as a fisherman in a minute, but right now we want a little bit more background information. So talking on your family, can you tell me about your family? Do you come from a large family?

William Kirk: Five boys and one girl. Six of us.

Interviewer: And where'd your family originally come from?

William Kirk: My grandmother came from Machias and my grandfather came from Madison, Maine.

Interviewer: So do you know what generation you are in Maine?

William Kirk: Scot. What do you mean by generation? How long we've been here?

Interviewer: Yes, where have your ancestors come from, where'd your grandparents' family come from.

William Kirk: Like I said, my grandmother came from Machias. She was a school teacher. Her mother came from Machias. My grandmother came from Madison, Maine and I think his father lived in Madison, Maine. But I have the whole history when we came over on the boat.

Interviewer: So a long history.

¹ This interview was completed as part of a University of Maine study, Assessing Vulnerability and Resilience in Maine Fishing Communities, funded by Maine Sea Grant (PI: Dr. Teresa R. Johnson).

William Kirk: It's a long history, but I don't have it right in front of me.

Interviewer: And then your parents came here to Rockland?

William Kirk: My grandmother and grandfather moved to Rockland with my family in 1939.

Interviewer: And how, if at all, was your family involved in the fisheries?

William Kirk: None of them were. I was the only one.

Interviewer: So you're the first.

William Kirk: I was the first as a lobsterman.

Interviewer: Can I ask are you married?

William Kirk: Yes.

Interviewer: Is your spouse and their family originally from this area?

William Kirk: My spouse is originally from Union, which is 15 miles from here.

Interviewer: And are they involved in the fishing industry?

William Kirk: No.

Interviewer: So they don't come from a fishing family.

William Kirk: One of my boy's –

Interviewer: Oh yeah?

William Kirk: My oldest boy that's out there riding his four wheeler, he lobsters with me.

Interviewer: And just one last question on your spouse. Does she contribute at all to your business, maybe organizing the books or something like that?

William Kirk: No. No.

Interviewer: All right, so you have children then.

William Kirk: Yes, two. Boys.

Interviewer: Two boys. How old are they?

William Kirk: 29 and 27.

Interviewer: And they live in town or where do they live?

William Kirk: Oh, one lives in Owls Head, one lives in Bath. But the one lives in Bath works for a fishing company, Cozy Harbor.

Interviewer: So your son that lives in Owls Head helps you as well.

William Kirk: He lobsters with me, yes.

Interviewer: So both your sons are involved in fishing, but possible grandchildren, would you want them to be involved in the fishing industry as well?

William Kirk: That's their choice.

Interviewer: Do you expect that they might be?

William Kirk: I don't know. I can't answer that. I don't know. I mean I know my oldest one, his daughter will be going with us when we go lobstering.

Interviewer: Oh, nice.

William Kirk: Cause I took him when he was six or seven. And he's been doing it since then.

Interviewer: All right, so moving on. And then we're also interested in broader community. Can you tell me about the community when you growing up as Rockland?

William Kirk: It was a working community. It wasn't like it is now. You had five processing plants, plus fish engineering, plus a clothing company. Bath robe company, plus a poultry factory was here. Compared to Camden or other towns nearby, this was a working town.

Interviewer: And how was the overall economy at that time then?

William Kirk: Very good.

Interviewer: And how important was fishing to the community?

William Kirk: I'd have to say between the herring and the ground fishing boats, it probably was 30 to 40 percent of the gross.

Interviewer: So were there many fishing industry jobs here then?

William Kirk: Yes, there were. The herring was, they process the boats. You come in, they take the fish off the boats, cut them up and put them inside these. And the processing plants would bring in red fish, which one was O'Hara's and one was National Sea.

Interviewer: So that's part of the waterfront. What else was on the waterfront?

William Kirk: Well, you had, like I said, five, four sardine factories. You had two processing fish factories. You had Marine Colloids which was process seaweed. In fact, they're still here. And you Fisher engineering, which made plows, that was on the water which had nothing to do with the water. But they was on the water too.

Interviewer: Okay, so we're getting to your experience as a fisherman now. Can you just list what fisheries you've participated in?

William Kirk: Just lobstering.

Interviewer: Just lobstering?

William Kirk: Yes.

Interviewer: And have you done any other work besides lobstering?

William Kirk: Yeah, I always work two jobs. I started at Van Vallens.

Interviewer: Sorry?

William Kirk: Van, V-A-N V-A-L-L-E-N. They made bathrobes and loungewear.

Interviewer: And where is that?

William Kirk: That big white building down here. It's right there.

Interviewer: Okay, so you worked in town then.

William Kirk: I worked right there, yeah. And then I went lobstering.

Interviewer: And then you said you had another job?

William Kirk: And I worked at Nautica. It was called Nautica clothing company; you must of heard of that.. Van Vallen's bought Nautica and that's where it originally was here. Believe it or not. Nautica originated right here Maine, yeah. Right here in Rockland. And that employed 300 people. And I was the building manager.

Interviewer: And you do this all year round or when do you do these jobs?

William Kirk: I did that all year round. I lobstered in the afternoons and weekends. I fished 500 traps.

Interviewer: And what would you consider your main source of income?

William Kirk: Clothing company, Nautica.

Interviewer: You would?

William Kirk: Yeah, yeah. Between the insurance and what they paid me couldn't touch lobstering.

Interviewer: So in what year did you first start working in the fishing industry?

William Kirk: When I was 18, believe or not probably 1967.

Interviewer: And how did you first get started?

William Kirk: I just thought I'd like to try it and I did it.

Interviewer: Yeah? Just went out one day –

William Kirk: I like the water anyway. I love the water.

Interviewer: So you went out on your own then.

William Kirk: Yes, I did.

Interviewer: You bought a boat, bought a license, some traps.

William Kirk: Right, correct.

Interviewer: Okay, did you – *[Laughs]*. I'm just curious cause it's usually not as simple.

William Kirk: Now you can't do that. Now you can't do that. You can't do that now. You can't get a license without taking a \$100.00 course.

Interviewer: Yup. Did you always work for yourself then or did you ever work for anybody else?

William Kirk: Yeah, I worked for Nautica and Van Vallens.

Interviewer: I mean as a fisherman though.

William Kirk: No, no, it's always for myself.

Interviewer: So was it easy to get into?

William Kirk: Yeah, back then it was no problem.

Interviewer: What about learning everything?

William Kirk: You learned by the person beside you showing you what to do and by mistakes that you make, either way.

Interviewer: You figured it out?

William Kirk: Correct.

Interviewer: So you got your first boat when you were 18 then.

William Kirk: Yes.

Interviewer: And how many boats have you owned over your career?

William Kirk: Four.

Interviewer: How big have they been?

William Kirk: Started 14 footer goes up to 22 foot. I don't have a real big powerboat. I have a 22 foot with a cabin.

Interviewer: So now we're gonna get into the details of lobstering. What's your seasonal round like?

William Kirk: I go from May 15th to November 15th. Hauled a little before on the 15th of November, that's what I always figure on. That's about what you got out here in Rockland Harbor, after that it's all over.

Interviewer: So what was the fishery like when you first started?

William Kirk: It was more plentiful. Of course everything was cheaper. Bait was maybe either free or \$5.00 a barrel compared to now \$100.00 a barrel.

Interviewer: Wow.

William Kirk: \$115.00. But–

Interviewer: So how do you deal with that now, now that it's \$100.00?

William Kirk: Well, back then lobsters were probably \$0.60 a pound, now you're getting \$3.00 a pound. But if you figure it out, you're not making as much as back then you are now. Now you're not making as much.

Interviewer: You were making more?

William Kirk: Well, it wasn't making money wise, but you were getting more for your money. For \$1.00 you were getting more for your money than by now.

Interviewer: So more expensive.

William Kirk: Yeah, it's a lot more expensive now. I'm glad that all my lobstering boats are all paid for.

Interviewer: All your boats are paid for?

William Kirk: My boat's paid for, all the animal traps are paid for. I really don't know if I'd want to start over fresh.

Interviewer: How do you feel about other people then?

William Kirk: I don't know how. They got to really push it. And it's going to be tight for them.

Interviewer: You mind me asking is that why you bought a smaller boat compared to some of the other boats?

William Kirk: No, I've always had a small boat. I've always enjoyed bringing home every day – I got a double axle trailer, I'd rather have it in the dooryard than – when I first started in Rockland Harbor, if you had your boat on the water, the next day you might go and find your depth finder gone or something. When we first started in Rockland Harbor people would steal.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

William Kirk: Now there's no problem, like anywhere else it's very seldom anybody gets molested on the boat. No one bothers their boat. But when it started, when I can remember, people would be losing a lot of stuff off your boat. People would take it.

Interviewer: And that's when you started bringing –

William Kirk: So when I first started so I just automatically said, "I'm gonna bring it home." And truthfully I find it's quicker. You've got take your truck to your boat and row out to it. I take my truck to the landing, push the boat in the water, park the boat, take off. I'm already fishing. I don't have to row to my lobster boat, tie my skiff off, unhook my boat, I'm already going. But it's not a big one. It's not like a 25 or a 35 footer. And in Rockland Harbor you don't need a big boat because you're not going that far. You're only going out to maybe 40, 50 fathom of water, maybe three miles over. That's all you fish, three, four, five miles off

Interviewer: So is it pretty easy then to get the boat down to the water and the landing?

William Kirk: Yeah, there's a nice boat landing.

Interviewer: Yeah, no problem with that?

William Kirk: Of course that cost you to use landing.

Interviewer: Okay, so sort of getting back to like the fishery was when you first started, what kind of gear did you use?

William Kirk: Wooden traps.

Interviewer: Wooden traps. And you've since switched over to –

William Kirk: Now everything is wire. Which I don't know if that's the right way to go for the environmental area because wood doesn't hurt the bottom of water. Wire, you get cut off, I don't know what's in the wire cause wire comes down from China. It's not U.S.A. wire. It's always Chinese or wherever.

Interviewer: And so the wood wouldn't –

William Kirk: Well, I think the wood must be better for the bottom of the ocean.

Interviewer: And –

William Kirk: But it's all wire. I think the wire's good for the lobsters because they can hide the trap if the ghost trap gets cut off. They've proven that lobsters would go in and they can get in and out when they want to. So they go and hide, nothing can get at them. It's just like a home for them.

Interviewer: Oh, so it's –

William Kirk: A lot of times I'll find a trap just been down for a year or two. You can tell by the barnacles on it. There'll be a lobster in it, maybe two. The doors are open so they can climb in and out, but they go in so no one bothers them. But I don't know what it does to the water.

Interviewer: Just the pollution factor.

William Kirk: Yeah, it probably is.

Interviewer: You think that's an issue in Rockland?

William Kirk: Not just Rockland. No, I don't know. No more than anywhere else, nowhere else.

Interviewer: So you switched over to metal.

William Kirk: A wire – yeah.

Interviewer: Wire traps.

William Kirk: Yeah, cause nobody makes wooden anymore.

Interviewer: And what about hauling up your traps or winches or anything like that, would you –

William Kirk: You have a hydraulic.

Interviewer: Was it always that way?

William Kirk: No, used to haul by hand.

Interviewer: Yeah? When did you switch over?

William Kirk: Probably I think it was 1982, or 1983.

Interviewer: What other source of gear modifications have you made over the years or changes with technology?

William Kirk: That's about it. Well, aside from buoys, instead of wooden buoys – when I first started a lobster buoy was wooden, the buoy on top of the water, that was always wooden. Now it's Styrofoam. And now they're going into a plastic. They say it's like a bump on the boat, you see that? They mainly use those for lobster buoys now because they say if my Styrofoam buoy goes underwater for so long it shrivels up, the other one doesn't shrivel up. But it's a lot more money, you're talking about \$7.00 a buoy compared to \$2.50.

Interviewer: So what do you think you'll do?

William Kirk: I'll stay with Styrofoam because I don't go – those were really made for deep water, a lot of current. We don't have that much current where I fish.

Interviewer: And do you mind me asking do you use like a sonar or GPS or anything?

William Kirk: I have a depth finder.

Interviewer: You have a depth finder?

William Kirk: I don't have a GPS.

Interviewer: No?

William Kirk: I don't need it.

Interviewer: You don't need it.

William Kirk: I go where you can see. I'm always seeing shore, except maybe on a foggy day. So you're always at the shores and stuff to go by. If I was going out into open water where there's nothing but the water, yeah, I'd have a GPS.

Interviewer: So how does the gear that you use in Rockland compare to other lobster fishermen?

William Kirk: Same kind of gear. Same kind of gear.

William Kirk: Three footers, four footers, super threes, super fours, they're all the same basically.

Interviewer: Yeah, so most people just use the depth finder and –

William Kirk: People use a brick and a half and find – I guess some bricks and a half, I got some single bricks. But it's the same idea.

Interviewer: And so where do you typically fish?

William Kirk: I fish out of Rockland. I sell live lobster.

Interviewer: Okay, and how long are your trips? You said you –

William Kirk: Well, whenever the sun rises. We stay about six to eight hours.

Interviewer: How often in a week?

William Kirk: Once the season starts, we'll go three, four days a week.

Interviewer: Before the season gets going and when it's waning?

William Kirk: Once a week. Once a week. We'll start out with only like 200 traps out and we'd haul for a day. Then we'll go seven days after that. The bait will stay in. Bait is expensive, there's no sense hauling before that.

Interviewer: So sort of getting back at some of the changes in the fishery, how important was the fishery when you first started out?

William Kirk: It's been good. There's been a few changes. The gauge is the biggest change. They've gone, since I've known, at least five times in sizes, shrink the sizes so you only have a certain length like three and five eighths to a four inch gauge and that's the only size you can catch. When I first started it was a lot bigger. You had a bigger range of lobsters you could take. Now you don't, but that's fine. It took a few years to get up to where it belongs, but now you still catch a lot of lobsters that meet the length size. There's no problem. And if you know what you're doing and how to fish, you can make a decent pay.

Interviewer: But speaking about Rockland specifically, how important was it, the fishery to Rockland? Were there a lot of fishermen?

William Kirk: There's never been a lot of lobstermen in Rockland.

Interviewer: No?

William Kirk: I think that maybe there's 12, 14 of us.

Interviewer: And –

William Kirk: Other place like Owls Head has 30 to 40. Spruce Head has more than that probably.

Interviewer: So this is sort of an aside question of mine then.

William Kirk: There is a few. There is probably I have to say five of us that fishes, that's all they do. But they go into federal waters too. And that's where they're catching a lot of lobsters. They have a federal license which takes like two hours to run from Rockland to where they're gonna fish. But my license won't let me do that. You have to have a federal plus a state license. And federal licenses, you just can't get one. You have to find someone who's got one and they'll want to sell it. Federal license, they can sell it to you or me. But your Maine license you can't sell.

Interviewer: And even if you wanted to, you don't think you could get a federal license?

William Kirk: No, unless you found somebody that was getting out of it and they wanted to sell it, usually it's \$10,000.00 to \$20,000.00 for that license.

Interviewer: Oh, a lot of money.

William Kirk: Well no, they catch a lot of lobsters. They can go to there and get 15, 20 crates a day. That's a lot of lobsters even at \$3.00 a pound; you'll be paying for a lot of bait and fuel. But you're doing an awful wear and tear on your boat to get out there.

Interviewer: So what's the typical crew size like? You said your son goes out with you?

William Kirk: Yeah, just my son and I, and sometimes I go alone.

Interviewer: What's the situation typically for Rockland then for crews?

William Kirk: I would say everybody has probably a stern person, one person.

Interviewer: And where do they all come from?

William Kirk: Basically Rockland. One person lives in Jefferson. One person lives in Thomaston. Basically everybody's out of Rockland.

Interviewer: So thinking back about when you started out, do you remember any of the other fishermen that fished at that time and are any of them still around today fishing?

William Kirk: Yup. There's probably three of us. Howie Johnson, Roger Freeman, and myself.

Interviewer: So what were the markets like? How have they been –

William Kirk: Markets are the same way. We never sold to anybody but the dealer. Unless a friend of mine would call me, say, "Billy, can you send me ten lobsters?" to me I'd probably sell him ten lobsters. Like everybody else, they do the same thing.. Basically 99 percent of your catch goes to the dealer.

Interviewer: And so that's always been pretty much working with the dealer?

William Kirk: Yes, it's always been that way. Right.

Interviewer: And you have a good relationship with the dealer here?

William Kirk: Yeah, I do.

Interviewer: And the prices over time? Are you always pretty much just taking the price, that's been –

William Kirk: We don't have a choice. I mean I can sell anywhere. My license says I can lobsters anywhere I want to, but everybody works on the same basically \$0.05, might be \$0.10 high at one place, \$0.05 cheaper somewhere else, but it's basically the same.

Interviewer: So you just stick with the –

William Kirk: Yeah, I stick with the same person.

Interviewer: And do they give you any extra services or anything, is that –

William Kirk: No. Well, they'll help put my traps in. They'll lower my traps down for me and when I bring them in, they'll put them on pellets for me. But basically any pound does that for your fishermen. Some pounds gives out turkeys at Christmas and Thanksgiving. This one doesn't.

Interviewer: No.

William Kirk: Because he appreciate the fishermen. It's just a little extra.

Interviewer: A little extra.

William Kirk: Well, I don't mean to say it. But Terry Watkins, I know down in Spruce head does that.

Interviewer: So I'm wondering, what do you do when the price drops? Say in 2008 and this summer too.

William Kirk: Oh, do a little complaining about it, but that's about it.

Interviewer: Yeah? Do you still do the same amount of effort, same amount of fishing effort then?

William Kirk: I did until was it two years ago, went down to two and a quarter, and I stopped for maybe a week or two.

William Kirk: Because by the time I paid the gas and bait, I was making maybe a quarter a pound and it wasn't worth it.

Interviewer: And how do you deal with those high gas prices then?

William Kirk: Same thing. You try to just go a little less and stay out a little longer so you don't – once you get to your traps, the gas is no big deal. It's running to your traps and running back to the pound. Cause you're already going like from here to your car to the trap. The more that you could spend maybe \$5.00 on gas all day doing that, it's just running two miles to get where you want to go.

Interviewer: So once you're there though?

William Kirk: You're fine.

Interviewer: I had another question. You said you fished 500 traps in.

William Kirk: Five to six.

William Kirk: This year I fished almost six.

William Kirk: Last year I fished about five.

Interviewer: Has that always been pretty typical for you?

William Kirk: When I was younger I may have fished seven. But I've never gone over the limit, even when there was no limit. I never fished more than 600 or 700 when people were fishing 2,000.

Interviewer: So why not? Why don't you?

William Kirk: Because I was comfortable with what I was making. I wasn't trying to make any more than what I really wanted. I had a goal and my goal was a certain amount every day or every week. That's all I needed. I did not want to – maybe I was wrong. Maybe I should push it like the rest of them was. I didn't do it that way. I had a certain amount what I wanted to make and I was close to it and I was happy.

Interviewer: Okay. So you were reaching your goals then that's where you stopped.

William Kirk: Yeah. So - yeah.

Interviewer: I'm also wondering if we could talk about sort of fluctuations in the stocks, any trends that you've seen over the years since you've been fishing since the late '60s.

William Kirk: It's like anything else and just like a harvest on farms. Some years they get a great crop of corn and some years they don't. The same way lobstering would be. One year there'd be lobsters in this area and next year this area is dry and this area's fantastic. I see it that way all the time. It's just like up in Glen Cove last two years, Glen Cove doesn't fish very good. But the middle of the harbor and in the middle of the channel, fishing like crazy. It's been that way four, five years now. But five years before that, Glen Cove was fantastic. I don't know if something happened with the bottom, cause you don't know. And you don't know how the lobsters – they do have a mind their own. You can see that. What happened to the bottom, there's lobsters out there. But it's not plentiful like it was before.

Interviewer: But overall would you say –

William Kirk: I'd say it's about the same. There was one year that might not be as good as last year and then the next year would be better than it was the year before. It fluctuates.

Interviewer: Let's see. Anything else you can tell me about the fishery before we move onto to more community questions?

William Kirk: Well, the fisheries to me on the base situation they got herring when United States let Russia come over and take all the fish back about ten years ago. Used to have Russian boats out here that were taking millions of tons and the Rockland Harbor was one of the good places where you go up there and catch them and go pump into the Russians which I can never understand. I realize Russians said they needed it, but they got plenty on that coastline there between Alaska and them to catch all the fish they want.

Interviewer: But nothing that's affected you directly?

William Kirk: No, it's just that we feel that's what happened to the herring population. They're saying it didn't, but when you give out I don't know half a billion tons of fish that we could have used, it had to do something to the population though

and to the cost. And the herring's not very big. Used to be herring would be this big, 18 inches on an average. Now it's lucky to be 8 to 10 inches, 12 inches. I haven't seen any real big herring for two, three years now. So that must tell you something, I don't know. I don't know if the water temperatures – it is changing. The water temperature's changing too. It is warmer. Look at this season here; when I was a kid, by this time we was ice skating right here in Rockland.

William Kirk: Thanksgiving we used to go ice skating on the small ponds and sometimes we'd have a foot of snow on a level. Where is it now? We still got green grass up there.

Interviewer: Some people are complaining, some people aren't.

William Kirk: I'm not complaining. No, no. I'm not complaining. I'm just saying I see the difference in the times. And you just got to go with it.

Interviewer: So gonna move onto community perceptions. How is the infrastructure here? Does it meet your needs as a fisherman?

William Kirk: Not really. Rockland and just like other places, they feel that the pleasure and the outsiders needs more than the locals and the residents. And what I mean by that is like the middle pier is all for pleasure boats. South end all that is is a boat landing and you can't put your traps on the floats now, which is fine. But I'm just saying it's for the pleasure of people that has outboards and nothing to do with working people.

Interviewer: Is that conflict with your operations?

William Kirk: No, they're fair. They're pretty fair. But I feel they don't try to help the fishermen. They feel that like probably every town it's more important for the ones that are gonna go in the stores that live out of town and do the shopping, not so much the people that live here and spends the money.

If you take – and I was on the harbor committee for eight years. And the harbor committee knew that. Most of them owned sailboats and that's what they cared about, but they're saying a \$1.00 turns seven times on the top. Well, if you took all these people came in from outside, park their sailboat there, 90 percent of it they already brought their food. They didn't buy their food in Rockland. They brought it with them. They brought their clothes with them. Yeah, maybe once a month they might go to a restaurant. Rest of the time all they're doing is using our space and the mooring fee. That's all they're paying for and they're getting all the pleasures that to me, a taxpayer, is paying for. Because they don't make enough money to run that middle pier. It's the taxpayers puts their money into that, that budget because they say they want people to come in from outside to spend the money.

Interviewer: So you don't think it's contributing so much –

William Kirk: It is contributing. No, I'm not saying to get rid of it. I don't mean it that way. But I'm just saying if they looked at it the right way, the people that live here is turning the \$1.00 seven times compared to the people outside, maybe they're getting two back.

Interviewer: So if you had fishermen on these piers instead, it would –

William Kirk: No, no, you've got to have it all. I understand you need a good diversity of everything, but I think the city council like here and everywhere else should try to help the locals a little more so they can maybe earn more and spend more. That's what it's all about is putting the money back into the economy. And I don't see it working that way.

Interviewer: Do you think they could do anything for the infrastructure in Rockland to help fishermen?

William Kirk: Yeah, they could probably do a little more to the fish pier. They could maybe help a little more. They charge, down at the fish pier, for a spot, if you want to come buy lobsters. Now I'm not sure what the dimensions are, but live lobster? They pay almost \$70,000.00 to use that fish pier and all they have is maybe a third of a fish pier. \$70,000.00 they pay. And they have a guy on duty that the city pays a year a salary of around \$30,000.00 with benefits and all he does is sit in his little house as you drive in with canvas and that's all he does.

And again, is there another way to work around it? Again I don't know. Like I said, I was on the council and I had some thoughts about it, but I found it was basically for the pleasure boats. No offense, but Portland gets those big boats come in and they don't do anything but right there in Portland. These boats come into Rockland, if you check with it, you'll find that there's a bus that picks up probably at least 90 percent of them who came to Camden. They don't even shop in Rockland, but they come into Rockland Harbor. They come through our traps. They cut them.

And it's just the same way with the ferry and the island transportation. There's supposed to be a channel, it's supposed to be left open. When I was on the fishermen committee, fishermen wouldn't use it. If we did, we lose our traps, we lose them. So there's the channel. They don't use the channel; they cut right across, the island ferry. Transportation will cut right through our traps, off the sides. So if one of them props by because it's cheaper to go straight line out than going around using the harbor.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about that? Because I didn't hear about the establishment of this channel.

William Kirk: There is a channel by the – what they call it? Army corps of engineers, there's a channel that it comes right out, right down in north end there's markers that come out, follows marine colloids and the coast guard station and there's buoys and it goes straight out.

Interviewer: So how'd that come about? When was the channel –

William Kirk: Oh, it was during the first World War or whatever, it's been there for a long while.

Interviewer: Okay, but what about that agreement then that –

William Kirk: The agreement was always that the channel was left alone. Lobstermen wouldn't fish the channel. If they did, at their own risk of losing gear which was fine. Sometimes you might put an old trap in there because you might get 15 lobsters because the channels are deepest and certain times lobsters fall down in deep channel to fan out which is fine. But the channel's are only supposed to be at is it 80 feet or 120 feet wide? That's what the channel – all we need. And

those boats will come right across and cut you right off. So you don't think the channel's being used?

Nobody – no, no. Nobody use – the ferry does the best, the state ferry. But that island transportation, and he's quite ornery. He uses wherever he goes, wherever he wants to go. And it's a lot flat boat that doesn't take much water, but he's saving gas so he'll come – so this is the end of the break water. He'll come along and he'll come right this way, right towards the north end instead of coming right in, right towards the coast guard station and cutting across and using the markers he won't do that.

Interviewer: Now, how's this agreement work then? Is it just sort of a –

William Kirk: The agreement was discussed and said this is what it's gonna be, but no one forces it.

Interviewer: No enforcement then.

William Kirk: No, no. The city won't force it and for the last five years, truthfully the fishermen don't even go and complain anymore because it doesn't do any good.

Interviewer: Yeah? They –

William Kirk: We used to go when we have meetings and I think one of the representative used to – went to ferry one day and they said, "Look, we're saving gas. Gas is a lot of money. We're gonna go the best way we can." But with that gear at \$70.00 a trap out there, and you know and I know that they would go crazy if I was on the ferry and I started cutting right through them, cut off five or six traps, they'd be out there.

Interviewer: It's a loss of income.

William Kirk: Yes, it is. Loss of money on the gear too besides the income.

Interviewer: I've also heard that some of the pleasure boaters might molest some of the traps, in your experience is that much of a problem?

William Kirk: That's no more than anybody going out to molest it. It's maybe not even 1 percent, not even 1/10th of a percent I don't believe. No, I don't feel that.

Interviewer: Okay, good, good to know.

William Kirk: It could happen. Yeah, like anybody else just like somebody can even rob me at the house, what's the percentage? That is very, very minute. It's gonna happen, that's just human nature. You get some bad people and you get some people that want to do what they want to do.

Interviewer: So moving onto my questions, so we got stuck there for awhile. It's good information though, but do you consider Rockland to be a fishing community today?

William Kirk: No. It is a fishing community, but to me it's not a real down to earth fishing community. There's really nobody – I don't think there's anybody in Maine anymore that's really – except for small towns like Spruce Head, Owls Head maybe, but a town – they're not a town anyway, they're like a village. I don't

know any town in Maine that would say that they are a fishing village, village town. I can't think of any town.

Interviewer: And so why?

William Kirk: Every town has got, along the coast, got people fishing, but it's –

Interviewer: So why not then? What makes it a fishing community or not a fishing community?

William Kirk: Well, to me a fishing community is probably 70 percent of the community is fishermen. Like Deer Isle, but they're not really a town, they're just a village. You get down to Eastport and all those places down there, but they're not – to me a town is 8,000 to 9,000, 10,000 people. And I don't think of any town that size that you could say that's a fishing – complete fishing village.

Interviewer: Overall do you think the fishermen in this port are doing better or worse than 20 years ago?

William Kirk: Like I said, we're making more money, but is the money worth what it was 20 years ago? No. So is it better? I'd have to say the same.

Interviewer: Do you feel the fishing community here is resilient?

William Kirk: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah? Why then?

William Kirk: Because the ones that fish, that's what they want to do. It's in their blood and they do it. Doesn't matter if it's a bad year or a good year, no, they're gonna do it. It's in his blood and I love being on the water. If you like being on the water – I think if they didn't like the water, they probably basically wouldn't do it.

Interviewer: So they'll do it no matter what.

William Kirk: What it is is, just like anything else, your own boss. You're out there, there's nobody out there to be your boss but yourself. There's no one around to tell you what to do. You put the radio on. You got a stern person, he listens to the radio and – like my son and I, we would not talk for an hour. He does his thing, I do mine. And it's peaceful. Could be dangerous lot of times when it's rough and choppy, but most of the time it's very nice out there.

Interviewer: What do you see as the major strengths of this fishing community?

William Kirk: I don't see any really major strengths except for being on the ocean because the town, like I said, really does not work with the fishermen. They're fair, I guess somewhat, but they don't seem to go out of their way to work with the fishermen.

Interviewer: Do you consider the community here to be vulnerable?

William Kirk: No.

Interviewer: No? What about the fishing community?

William Kirk: No. Well, yeah, the fishing – we could be hurting if more moorings come into the harbor and that's what people want. The Samoset wants to put a lot of moorings out and they said no right now. And they also want to do something on the outside the break water and that would hurt us. The more traffic there is, the worse the fishing is because you're gonna lose gear, not because the fishing is bad. The traffic doesn't do anything to the bottom, it's just the gear needs places that won't get a lot of traffic.

Interviewer: But the community overall you don't think is vulnerable?

William Kirk: No.

Interviewer: Why not?

William Kirk: Because as long as the lobstering is here, the ones that are doing the fishing will always fish. And with the regulations we have with the gauges and what we do for the females, I don't truthfully see the lobstering ever having a problem. Not unless something kills them, some disease.

William Kirk: We've been monitoring. We've been doing this now for four years and we're the only state that are still catching a lot of lobsters.

Interviewer: And what do you see as major threats facing the community then? So disease.

William Kirk: Just disease, pollution. And that's pretty good now too. Because when I first started Marine Colloids used to dump out here. Slime everywhere. I mean really slime. And they said it was just part of the seaweed, but it used to be as white as that sheet, sitting on your buoys and everything. Now it's not. The water always looks clean.

Interviewer: So Rockland's cleaned up its –

William Kirk: Yup.

Interviewer: And in what ways do you think fishermen can adapt to sort of threats or challenges they face? Say more moorings or -

William Kirk: There's no problem. There's nothing really we have to adapt except for the overuse of the moorings and the harbor by pleasure boats.

Interviewer: Do you have any opinions on what is needed to strengthen the viability of commercial fishing?

William Kirk: No, I don't have a problem, like they have a moratorium now, you can't get a license without having hours plus then you have to go into a pool and three lobstermen have to drop out for one can come in. I don't even know if that's, to me, if that's necessary. It's like anything else, once the economy starts coming back and doing good, a lot of the ones that's fishing now will go get another job.

William Kirk: Right now everybody's trying to survive.

Interviewer: So you think there's a lot of people on the waiting list because they don't have anything else to do, is that –

William Kirk: I don't know about that, but I know there's always people waiting to get into the business.

Interviewer: Who represents the interest of commercial fishermen in this port?

William Kirk: You're talking about like legislation?

Interviewer: Are fishermen organized? Are lobstermen organized?

William Kirk: No

Interviewer: No?

William Kirk: There is a lobster committee, a council that is by lobstermen. I was on it for awhile too, but the problem is everything is discussed and wants to go – what they think should do, it goes to Augusta and basically it doesn't – Augusta changes to what it wants.

Interviewer: But what about locally?

William Kirk: No, there's no local committee. There's no lobstermen getting together to have a meeting, no.

Interviewer: But you said you were part of the harbor committee, you've gone to town council meetings.

William Kirk: The harbor committee – I've gone to town council meetings as a harbor committee and they wanted me because I was a lobsterman. But besides that, this harbor committee was just really for the harbor and for the moorings and for the pleasure boats. Basically that's what it was all about.

Interviewer: So you didn't feel that even though you were there as a lobsterman, you were represented?

William Kirk: Oh, they asked me questions and my opinion, but I don't ever remember truthfully too much being done. They'd vote on it and say, "We'll table it the next time."

Interviewer: Moving on to this next section on different sorts of relationships between groups and the community. How would you characterize the relationship between fishermen within this community?

William Kirk: I think it's fine. Everybody I know is friendly with me and I'm friendly with them. There's always one or two that, like anything else, gets a little upset and thinks he's being conned or whatever, somebody else is doing it. But basically I'd have to say 90 percent of us are good. We're not headstrong or anything.

Interviewer: And what about between fishermen in this community and nearby community, say Rockland and Owls Head or – how's that relationship?

William Kirk: Even though our license says that we can fish this zone, which is part is Owls Head, as long as Rockland don't go by Owls Head light we're fine. If we go by Owls Head light, we'd probably get cut.

Interviewer: So there's still?

William Kirk: Correct. I don't think there's anywhere, and if they tell you it's different, they're giving you a line of garbage. I mean I've never been cut really like with Owls Head cause I won't go past Owls Head light. But I know that if I go by Owls Head light, I probably won't have too many traps left if they're out there. It's the same way with Rockport. Rockland fishermen don't go up to Rockport.

Interviewer: So how about between fishermen and non-fishermen in this community?

William Kirk: No, there's no problem. And with the pleasure boat it's no problem cause they like to have us out there because if they break down they know we'll bring them in.

Interviewer: Yeah, so good.

William Kirk: So I've never had a problem with any of them—

Interviewer: Has fishermen's access to the waterfront changed over the years?

William Kirk: It's a little hard certainly. It certainly isn't like it was before. All in the waterfront you could go anywhere and get to the water. Here it's changing, yes. It's more private.

Interviewer: There's more private property now.

William Kirk: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: But do you have any trouble accessing the waterfront?

William Kirk: No, not where I go in, no.

Interviewer: And what about other fishermen?

William Kirk: No, I don't think they do either. Might be a little harder to get where you want to go, but you can still get there.

Interviewer: Yeah?

William Kirk: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so just some wrap up questions in here. Besides fishermen, who else is using the water or the dock space?

William Kirk: Okay, in Rockland we have smack boats. All they do is get bait and go to the islands and buy lobsters. So that's part of lobstermen, they don't lobster in Rockland Harbor and they don't buy from Rockland Harbor. They go out and buy – and then they usually give the fishermen out there \$0.05 or \$0.10 more than we get in town. Which I actually never understand that either about – and it's the same people that we're buying from. We sell them. They'll take their smack boats, and run them out and give the islanders \$0.10 or \$0.15 or \$0.25 more than they give us and we deliver it to them. But it's been that way so there's no – they don't give you an answer, they just say that's what they want. Because they know they got ours because we're coming there. They go to them and there's so many different people buying so they – sometimes it's a war.

Interviewer: That's out on the islands, a bidding war for this?

William Kirk: Yup. And we have a war here sometimes from the north end to the fish pier because there's a dealer right here on the north end, sometimes he'll be a quarter or \$0.40 more than where I sell. And the next thing you know, where I sell, it'll be \$0.40 more than where the other place is, but then they go back to even.

Interviewer: Since we're on the subject, I'm wondering if you could talk about— there's only a few fishermen or lobstermen in town. You said there's a dozen lobstermen.

William Kirk: I don't know if there's a dozen or 20. I average I think about 15.

Interviewer: But there seems to be a lot of buyers and there seems to be a lot of—

William Kirk: There's two buyers. But like again, basically they're getting their lobsters by using their smack boats to go to the islands or go to Spruce Head and just hang off the Spruce Head. And when there's the boats coming in, say, "Hey, I'll take your lobsters right here. I'll give you \$0.25 more than what you're getting in there." And they use this for the headquarters. Really these 2 buyers can't make enough when there's only 2 fishermen here, not 2, 14, 15 fishermen out of Rockland. You really need only one buyer.

Interviewer: Okay. So switching gears, how important has tourism been to this community?

William Kirk: Well, I have to say it's like Camden, or any coastal town. It's probably been very good, but again, Rockland until 15 or 20 years ago was not a town for tourism. It was a working town.

William Kirk: And Rockland didn't change because they wanted tourism. They had to change because the working town closed up. Everything left but maybe two businesses, Marine Colloids and Fisher Engineering when we used to have maybe five or six, seven.

William Kirk: They employed probably I guess 2,000 or 3,000 people. Now they employ maybe between them 500 people.

Interviewer: And how do you feel about tourism in general then that's come in since the loss of these production?

William Kirk: I don't have a problem with tourism, because like anybody else will tell you, I like it down on my hill and not have to wait for traffic because of tourism here. But that doesn't bother me because I understand it's bringing money into the restaurants and stuff. I don't like it so much because I believe that every town should be a working town because I think it's better for the people, I think the people are more healthier by working and I think the town tax base is a lot better if you had businesses in here that was here to do work. Besides that, that's the way the economy is now.

In general, how many people in the United States work in a factory or something besides working for somebody else, restaurants or something? That's what it is now, or telemarketers or whatever.

Interviewer: And what about some other activities like party or charter boats or recreational fishing, has that been important?

William Kirk: Well, we don't have any fishing boats that are here. We do have a couple charter boats that are here, yeah. And we have schooners. They go out in the summer time here.

Interviewer: And is that very important?

William Kirk: But again, they don't live here all year. Once the season's over they go away. So that means six months of the year they aren't spending their money here. They're gone. But that's not a big thing either. I don't think we have more than maybe five charter boats, two schooners maybe and they're not real big.

Interviewer: No.

William Kirk: Maybe 15, 20 people they charter at a time. And again, those people come in to town, they arrive in the morning, they get on the boat, boat docks and six days later in the morning, they hop in a car and leave. How much do they spend in town? All they're spending is on that boat that belongs to somebody that probably doesn't even live in Maine.

Interviewer: Are there opportunities for fishermen here to be involved in tourism or charter boating?

William Kirk: There is. Believe it or not, there is one lobsterman that he lobsters plus he takes out four or five people at a time on his boat. They call Captain Jack. And he started that I think about five years ago. And this year I think he did a real good job with it. I always saw people in his boat. So he probably made some money because I—I think it's like \$50.00 a head for three hours.

Interviewer: Sure. Is that something you could do?

William Kirk: I don't think I really care about doing that. I mean I don't mind and a lot of times I take people out because they want to go, but I don't care about charging them. I just take them around, show them the lobsters, show them the difference between a male and female and what the gauge sizes are because a lot of people don't know the difference between a male and female.

William Kirk: Well yeah, anybody can get into it. I don't know how many Rockland could survive with it if you had five or six or ten, but we do have one who uses a lobster boat for charter.

Interviewer: How do you feel about tourists and people from outside the community who want to move here?

William Kirk: Well, I don't have a problem with that.

Interviewer: No?

William Kirk: No, it doesn't bother me. As long as they don't want to try to change the waterfront. I mean change is good sometimes on some things, yes, but a lot of things is good just the way it is.

Interviewer: Has that been a problem?

William Kirk: There was a couple. It was a couple of people that – but no, no, on an average, no. I'd have to say no.

Interviewer: How affordable is the current housing situation here?

William Kirk: The property tax is high. And the properties are quite expensive, are some of them are quite expensive.

Interviewer: Has that changed over the years?

William Kirk: Quite a bit. When I first bought this house, it was, believe it or not, one bed was like \$400.00 here. Now it's over \$3,000.00.
I think we have, if I'm not mistaken, about 25 percent of our property is non-profit. I think Rockland is one of the biggest in the state by capita for non-profit. I think we are the biggest for non-profit.

And a lot of – not a lot of it, but a few are on the waterfront where it could be used for something else and pay taxes on it. And I don't understand the city council, why they don't do something. I just don't understand. No offense to Farnsworth Museum, I think they got 14 buildings that's all non-profit, but yet they have a gift shop. They still get the fire department, the police department for nothing. I think everybody should pay something for the fire and police department and the snow plowing. Same with the church, no offense, but Littlefield Baptist Church – are you familiar with Rockland?

Interviewer: Yeah.

William Kirk: You know where that is, Littlefield?

Interviewer: No.

William Kirk: VIP. You get to VIP right down this corner, stop at the light, Littlefield starts. Overlooking the whole water. Why do you have to worship a church? And I did go to that church till I was 20. Overlooking the water and they don't have to pay any taxes and they own probably from here to McDonalds on the water.

William Kirk: To me I think that there should be something that our tax rate would drop if everybody would kick in something. I don't mind them having the water, it's just I don't understand why they don't have to pay something for that privilege. Where I get this 100 and some year old house and I'm paying \$3,000.00 and I have to work two jobs to do that.

Interviewer: Do you think fishermen can afford to have property in Rockland then generally?

William Kirk: Yeah, if you want to work at it. If I put out 800 traps, and forced it, I could probably make more. You see I work at Hannaford because I need the insurance. I can't afford that insurance. Young kids don't even have insurance. But at my age I want the insurance so I work at Hannaford 30 hours a week in the fish market. [laughter]

Interviewer: What do you feel have been the most critical changes in the community since you've lived here?

William Kirk: Just like anything else it's the jobs.

Interviewer: And what caused these changes?

William Kirk: Maybe our policy starting with Reagan back in 1980 when he opened up the garment industry, say that Brazil could bring in 20 percent of their cloth without

being taxed. The next thing you know that company that was doing all the manufacturing within eight years stopped manufacturing and had everything made overseas.

Interviewer: Yeah, so it's just been a loss of production jobs.

William Kirk: I understand they want the global world to step up to be like America, but what did it do to the people? It made a lot of people richer and a lot of people poorer.

Interviewer: What do you think the community will look like in ten years?

William Kirk: That's hard to tell. It's scary because I didn't know ten years ago it was going to look like it is now.

Interviewer: Well, what would you like the community to look like?

William Kirk: I'd like it to stay the same, about 8,000 to 10,000 people. But I have a feeling it probably will grow because of the weather.

Interviewer: How do you mean?

William Kirk: Well, the weather's changing up here. We're getting longer and longer summer, more in fall and less winter. And that's what people want.

William Kirk: And the crime is less right now. Our crime is not really bad here for a small town. There is of course, like everybody else, runs around.

Interviewer: Would you still go fishing if you had your life or career to live over?

William Kirk: Yup.

Interviewer: Yeah?

William Kirk: As long as I've lived here, yes, I would. I'd still do that as a second job, yes.

Interviewer: And would you advise other young men to enter the fishery?

William Kirk: If that's what they wanted, yes, I would.

Interviewer: What do you like most about living here?

William Kirk: Quiet neighborhood. Quiet town. But I've lived other places. I was in service in Oklahoma. I didn't like Oklahoma. I've been in New Jersey working for Nautica when I worked for them. It's fine. I found where we were is a nice town.