

Fishtales, Sunday September 29, 2013
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Markham Starr
Interviewee – Richard Dubowik

MS Great. Alright well tell you what. I'll start off with a series of questions. If you have any story in particular you wanna tell, you know, the biggest storm, biggest fish, biggest disaster, funniest thing that ever happened...I'll start with just asking you a couple questions.

RD That's even better

MS What is your name?

RD My name's Rich

MS Rich. And last name?

RD Dubowik

MS And are you from New Bedford?

RD Yeah. I was born in New Jersey. I moved to New Bedford when I was eight.

MS Was your family in fishing at all?

RD Yeah my uncle has a bunch of boats. My grandfather, my father fished for a little while. Yeah it's pretty much fluent in the family. Relatives in Maine fish.

MS Yeah. And when did you start fishing?

RD I started in 1988. I was fifteen.

MS And uh...

RD I was fifteen standing on the corner like the rest of the trouble makers and my brother took me on the boat and said "Let's go. We're going to work." And I hated it. And then you know after two weeks of gettin' picked on and 'cause you're the shacker, you're the new guy so even my own brother didn't call me by my name. I'm like, "I'll never do this again." And then when I got my check and it had, "gear work, nine a.m." you know it was a thousand bucks, that was good money, fifteen years old, 1988. But the one thing that made me wanna come back is like, "Wow, somebody really wants me for somethin'" You know what I mean? Like they want me back. It wasn't that bad, you know? And since then, that's all I've really known. My dad does construction, I do a little bit with him, helpin' him out once in a while but, I mean other than that, I'm a fisherman, you know. I

just bought me own little boat. I have a little IFQ boat. I also work on the ANTICIPATION, it's right over here. I'm on one boat now. For a long time I've been on two boats. I was on the HUNTRESS for a little while, that's the boat I broke in on. Chris Wright, good guy. He does a lot for this place. And you know over the last thirty years I've been long linin', clammin', draggin', scallopin', gill nettin'. I've done everything. I've been on a, couple times I was supposed to go out on a, particular time I was supposed to go out fishin' on two different clam boats and I ended up blowin' 'em both off which is out of my character, but the kind of guy I was back then, that was in that character. And both of those boats ended up sinking and everybody died. So that was kind of like a blessing in disguise that I was in that character at the time. 'Cause I wouldn't be here talkin' to you.

MS What about worst day at sea you ever had.

RD Worst day at sea, oh the day after Christmas I was out one time. Me, a buddy of mine, and three guys. Small boat, this was, I don't know, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago. Small boat, day after Christmas and the engine room was filled up with water because the packing, the stuffin' box there was water comin' in and the pumps were failing. So the captain went down there and there was water up to his waist. So this is the day after Christmas. We're probably about, oh I don't know, thirty, forty miles off of Hyannis and, you know, we were sinking in the winter time. So he's down there tryin' to get the pumps working and my buddy was driving the boat trying to get the Coast Guard going, you know and they were on their way, you know. So he's freakin' out down there. And I'm like goin' back and forth. He's yellin' at me. I'm like "Don't yell at me, you're the one who got us into this." You know it was like, totally, it was crazy but the Coast Guard ended up comin' out and droppin' us some pumps and we got it pumped out and we made it home safe. Everything was good. That was one of them stories. Let me see, I've got so many, I wish I could just pick one out that you would [laughs]

MS What about the best day, the best day you ever had on the water.

RD The best day I ever had on the water, I mean every day is a good day if you're safe and makin' money. Yeah. I mean like I said, I can't really single one out because every day is good that I'm out there makin' money and I'm safe and everything is goin' good. You know I've had a lot of big trips and I've been on a lot of highliners. Gillnetter highliners, scallopin' highliners, clammers. I told you the clam story, you know. I almost went out and didn't come back a couple times.

MS So with the boats that you have now, what kind of license do you have or...

RD I have an IFQ scallop boat, a 600 pounds a day, dayboat, general category boat. And I'm in the process of buyin' a clam boat. But I also work on deck on the ANTICIPATION because that's bread buttered so all these ventures I got, but I'm tryin' to you know, I'm gettin' old, I'm forty. I'm tryin' to become the owner. Tryin' to, you know, transition into the business part of it, which ain't easy, you know? And it's all trial and error, you know what I mean. It's, you gotta learn a lot about the laws, the rules and regulations, the

business end of it, you know, safety. It's like from the top to the bottom, you know. You're runnin' the boat. You gotta get the trip. It's a lot. But you know with days at sea slowin' down, and I'm only on one boat, it gives me time to be an entrepreneur and try to be, you know, get on the business end of it and get off the deck end part of it. You know what I mean, 'cause that's a young man's game. Even though I can still pull my own, I'm startin' to feel it, I just had carpal tunnel surgery. My shoulder's goin'. That's pretty much, I mean. I had a lot of good days, a lot of bad days. I wish I could find like a particular story. But there's, you know, every trip there's like a little story of mine that...

MS What about the funniest thing you've ever seen that happened on a trip?

RD Well [chuckles], I've seen a bird shit in a guy's mouth before, that was pretty funny [laughs]

MS As long as it's not you, right?

RD Yeah and guys fallin' all the time, that's always funny, as long as they get back up. That's hilarious, you know what I mean. Every fall's graceful. As long as they get back up it's a good thing. [phone ringing] "Yeah I can't talk right now, I'm doin' an interview at Homer's Wharf, yeah but my mother and Kaya's right at the statue, go meet 'em, I'll be there in a minute." Alright buddy, sorry about that.

MS Oh no, that's alright.

RD It's my cousin Leif. He's Lars Vinjerud's kid. He's my uncle. Yeah, yeah, fishin' family, we all fish. We're all pretty much, you know, you put the fun in dysfunctional. But you know that's the fishermen life, you know what I mean? Help me out here, what else.

MS No that's great. We're just collecting short stories and we appreciate it.

RD Yeah, no problem.

MS Thank you.

RD I wish I could find, I could think of a better story for you, but as far as like...

MS You know what we can do, we can always [interview ends]

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RD Year's ago, alright, when I was probably about sixteen, I left here, went to Florida and didn't know anybody, got a job on a longline boat. So I was on a longline boat, my first trip. You know I scalloped up here and so, you know, I'm a New England fisherman, I can take anything. So the one guy, his father had a boat too. The kid he brought out was too seasick to work, so I was like, "yeah I'll jump over there. I'll finish the trip up with your dad." And he passed the kid over here. So, I was out at sea for, like, 20 days. He's like, "Oh you'd do that?" I was like "yeah, I'll do that for you, no problem." I was young, I wanted to make a statement. So he was like, "I'll give you a bonus". I never seen that, but anyways they appreciated it.

So about two or three months later, out there, you know, I was shark fishin' and grouper fishin'. We was layin' on the hook, on the anchor. We'd sleep at night, you know, fish all day from the crack of dawn till like, you know, night time and I hear this loud noise. I slept down below on the boat, was like 45-50 foot. It was 80 miles off shore in this, like, little Clorox bottle, ok? In the Gulf of Mexico. And where my rack was you could actually see the waterline through the fiberglass, it wasn't thick like NOVY fiberglass, I mean it was Clorox bottle fiberglass, right? So and we had the anchor shoot, like a steel anchor shoot stickin' out in the bow where we had our anchor. So I'm sleepin' and I hear a boat get out of gear, somethin' loud, so I'm comin' up the ladder and there's a 90 foot steel hull shrimper like steamed right into us and went right through our wheel house and the only thing that stopped him from like shattering the fiberglass Clorox bottle, or my boat, was the anchor shoot. He hit the anchor shoot head on with his bow and it just bent it over and stopped him. By then whoever was sleepin' in the boat kind of probably woke up kind of took it out of gear. So now I'm comin' up the ladder and there's a shrimp boat over my head, right, the anchor shoot bobbin' up and down, backin' up, you know all their electronics there and stuff, this guy just rippin' the shit out. I'm freakin' out, throwin' XX at the boat 'cause I thought I was gonna die. And we ended up steamin' back in with half a wheelhouse. And then I came back up here. I was like, I'm done with these little Clorox bottles and I came back up here and started stickin' with the scallopin', you know the big boat stuff. And that's probably one of the, one of the best stories I've got as far as like our at sea tragedy, between almost sinkin' with the clam boats I was supposed to go on and that one, those are, and the other one, those are pretty much the worst that's ever happened. So I think that's about it. I can't really think of anything funny. I wish I could, I got a thousand of them, but

MS Well we'll get you back. So to use...