NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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STEPHEN FOUGERE

THE FISHING INDUSTRY IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, 1930-1987

INTRODUCTION

The Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island, 1930-1987, an oral history project, was implemented under the auspices of the Newport Historical Society and the University of Rhode Island Sea Grant Program.

Through question and answer format, the tape-recorded transcribed interviews document the fishing industry from the point of view of its complex traditions and changes. They provide a body of unedited primary source material focusing on priority issues of local concern and those beyond the geographic area under study.

Interviews were conducted by Jennifer Murray of the Newport Historical Society and were transcribed at the Center for Oral History, University of Connecticut. Narrators include representatives of the floating fish trap industry, the inshore and offshore lobster industries, the inshore and offshore dragger industries, the swordfish industry, the wholesale and marketing sector, and fisheries conservation and management.

Oral history enables us to learn about our heritage from those who usually don't write about it. It supplies what's often only hinted at in written historical documents. Readers and researchers using these oral history memoirs should bear in mind that they are transcripts of the spoken word and that the narrator, interviewer, and transcriber sought to preserve the spontaneity and informality inherent in such historical sources. The Newport Historical Society and the University of Rhode Island are not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoirs nor for the views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

Copies of tapes and transcripts are available for research at the Newport Historical Society. Copies of transcripts are also accessible at the library of the University of Rhode Island, Narragansett Bay. As stated in the release form which accompanies each transcript, the memoirs are to be used for scholarly and educational purposes only.

STEPHEN FOUGERE

"My grandfather was a fisherman. His father was a whaler." Stephen Fougere learned to become a fisherman from his father, a day dragger in Newport, R.I. Mr. Fougere left school at age sixteen to go fishing and became captain of a fishing boat by age eighteen. He provides detailed information about the fishing industry in Newport, R.I. from the 1930's to the present--the various fisheries which have comprised the industry, the people involved in it, boats and equipment used, grounds fished, and changes that have taken place which continue to affect the industry in important ways.

Mr. Fougere left the fishing industry in 1954 to work as Rhode Island State Conservation Officer, a position he held for thirty years. He possesses extensive knowledge concerning species scarcity and abundance, the effect of technological improvements on the fishing industry, pollution, and problems of fisheries management.

Tape I Side I

Biographical Interview
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- as fishermen
- Family heritage in fishing
- Newport day draggers
- Boats and engines

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Father's work helping Greek lobstermen in Newport
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Converted schooners used by New Bedford fishermen
- Paulina and her skipper, Sea Fox

Fougere's perception of schooners vs. modern steel fishing boats
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Tape I Side II

Fishing technology in Fougere's father's time, contd.
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- 1940's discovery of lobsters on the continental shelf
- Huge lobsters when that fishery first began-- average size has gone down
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Lobster program Fougere was involved in
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- What the tagging proved.
- Lobster groups, lobster habitat

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- Draggers rigged for harpooning Fougere worked on
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Swordfish longlining today
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- Japanese and the change in demand for tuna

The biggest swordfish Fougere ever saw
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- Day fishing
- Grounds
- Submarine net protected Newport Harbor during WWII

Scup
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- Increase in demand for scup
- Scup migration and spawning
- Dragging for scup
- Fougere's retirement work handlining scup
- Smaller migrations of scup
- Scup as gurry/ scup as an expensive desirable species

Menhaden seiners in Narragansett Bay
- New Jersey steam boats came for menhaden to supply processing plants

Tape 2 Side I

Menhaden seiners, contd.
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Fougere's work as R.I. State Conservation Officer
- Fish trap laws and regulations

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- The Santa Maria and her skipper who taught West Coast fishermen how to Seine tuna

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Tape II Side II (blank)

Tape III Side I

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Interview with Stephen Fougere, conducted by Jennifer Murray for the Newport Historical Society Oral History of the Fishing Industry in Newport, Rhode Island, on April 8, 1987

MURRAY: Is it all right with you if I tape this interview?

FOUGERE: It certainly is, Jennifer.

JM: Where were you born?

SF: I was born in Newport [Rhode Island].

JM: At the Newport Hospital?

SF: No. I was born in my grandmother's home on Van Zandt Avenue on May 28, 1929.

JM: You have a birthday coming up pretty soon.

SF: Right.

JM: Tell me your parents' names.

SF: My mother's name was Mary Cleary. She was born in Newport. Her mother and father came from Ireland.

JM: Whereabouts?

SF: My grandfather came from Tipperary. I'm not sure where my grandmother came from.

JM: Why did they come over?

SF: I guess they came over because of the potato famine at the time. I think that had something to do with it. I don't know too much about my grandparents.

JM: Do you know what they did for work over here?

SF: I know my grandfather worked for John Jacob Astor -- he was the butler -- in New York. I think the sinking of the Titanic had something to do with

his being in Newport. My grandmother and my grandfather were married in New York at St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Titanic did have something to do, I think, with my mother's side of the family being in Newport. After the sinking of the Titanic, John Jacob Astor was lost, as you know, and they came to Newport. My father came from Canada in the 1920s.

JM: How old was he?

SF: He was eighteen.

JM: Before we get on to your father, did your grandmother work at one of the estates, too? Did she work for the Astor family?

SF: No, she didn't - just my grandfather.

JM: How old was your father when he came down, did you say?

SF: He was eighteen. He was preceded by his brother.

JM: What was his brother's name?

SF: Ernest [Fougere].

JM: And your father's name?

SF: Stephen [Fougere].

Ernest had stopped off in Boston and worked on the fishing trawlers out of Boston. Subsequently, he came to Newport and bought his own fishing boat. He had a boat built, as a matter of fact. It was the Eddy F., a thirty-five

foot wooden boat, powered by a gasoline Lathrop engine. It was one of the biggest draggers around here. My father came afterwards and went to work for his brother, Ernest, fishing.

JM: Who was the Eddy F. named for?

SF: My uncle's oldest boy, Eddy Fougere.

JM: Why did they come down here?

SF: I guess things weren't that good in Canada. I know my father talked a lot about having a stepmother and ill-treatment. So they left home. I think there were six brothers in all. My grandfather was a fisherman. His father was a whaler. He owned a whaler, as a matter of fact. He died at sea. He choked on a chicken bone, they say.

JM: Do you think maybe he didn't die choking on a chicken bone?

SF: I mean, that's what I was told. At the time, I wasn't curious. I'd like to know the name of the boat today and where he fished out of and everything about it.

JM: Did your father know much about it?

SF: My father died in 1966.

JM: Did he tell you?

SF: Just casual conversations about the fact that he was a whaler and the fact that he died at sea. It

was supposed to have been eating chicken.

JM: How ironic. Such a dangerous occupation to die [eating chicken].

SF: Right.

JM: How did your father and your uncle learn the fishing trade?

SF: I guess the grandfather was a fisherman of sorts in Canada. I'm not sure what kind of fishing they did up there. But they had a background in fishing and hunting. They fished and hunted to live up there. They lived off the land. They came from Cape Breton Island, which is the Northeast part of Nova Scotia.

My uncle, having worked on beam trawlers out of Boston -- The epidemic of the influenza was around at the time. On the boat he was on, there was twelve men. I think five of those died with influenza. So he had quite a scare.

He came down to Newport and settled here. He liked it here. After he got settled and he had the boat built, he wrote for my father to come down.

JM: Where did he have the boat built?

SF: I'm not sure. I think it was at one of the local boatyards. I'm sure it was in Newport, but I'm not sure at what yard it was built. It was a nice

boat. It was one of the better boats. It was well-built - a good sea boat. It was typical of the dragger fleet that operated out of Newport at the time - between thirty and thirty-five feet. That was the average length of these boats. Most of them had gasoline power in those days - converted automobile engines. For quite a few years, that was the bulk of the Newport dragger fleet - small gasoline-driven boats.

JM: Where did your father and his brother live when they first came here?

SF: They were Pointers - 2nd Street. I was born on the corner of Van Zandt Avenue and Bayside Avenue.

JM: So you're a real Pointer.

SF: A real Pointer. Right.

JM: Tell me where you went to school.

SF: I went to school in Newport. I left school when I was sixteen. I always had the drive to go fishing. As soon as I was sixteen, that was it. I went on a boat and went fishing.

JM: Whose boat did you go on?

SF: I worked with my father to begin with. I worked on quite a few boats out of Newport. When I was twelve years old, I spent one summer lobstering with one of the old-time Greeks at Long Wharf. The name of the boat was the Four Brothers. The

captain on the boat was a good seaman. Of course, in them days, most fishermen -- All they had to work with was a compass and a sounding lead. That was the extent of the navigation equipment.

I guess the guy I worked for, the skipper -- I forget his name -- was in his late seventies or early eighties. His only problem was he couldn't see. So, at twelve years old, I was his eyes. He knew about where he was going, about where his lobster pots were, but he couldn't see them.

JM: Oh, how amazing.

SF: So I held the helm all day.

JM: You must have loved it.

SF: I did. It really got into my system about that time.

JM: It was just you and this man out on the boat?

SF: Right.

JM: What did you do then, where he couldn't see? Did you have a lot of responsibility?

SF: Just to steer the boat and to bring the boat alongside the pots. He'd pick up the pots and he'd cull out the lobsters and rebait the pots.

I remember trying to help him one time and coming up with about four lobsters on one hand. He was a good old-timer. He'd say, "You don't

have to do that, son. You're out here to run this boat, to steer the boat. I'll take care of the work part of it."

That was a good summer. I was only twelve, and I was making five dollars a day in those days. That was good money.

JM: It seems like a lot of people that I've talked to really didn't want to have an awful lot to do with school. They couldn't wait to get out and work. Was that pretty common?

SF: The emphasis in those days wasn't on education so much. I had no objections from my family. If I'd elected to stay in school, they would have gone along with it. But I had that yearning to go to work, be a fisherman, put my boots on, and head out to sea.

JM: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

SF: I have a sister who is thirteen years my younger.

JM: Did you live in that Point neighborhood all through your childhood?

SF: Most of my childhood, yes. My father finally built a house up on Malbone Road, which isn't too far from the Point. It was the family dream. We had plans of a house for many years. Of course, fishing wasn't that lucrative. It had its ups and downs.

The family was victimized by hurricanes. The 1938 Hurricane wiped him out. The boat was tied up. The name of the boat was the Wilfred P. It was tied up at Long Wharf. A soud'easter came and the boat sank. Of course, we had no warning of that hurricane, as you know.

I remember he and my mother picked me up. I was at school. They had the old Essex car. He dropped me and my mother off at home. He went back down to the boat to check the boat. By that time, the wind and the tides were up. He ended up losing the boat and lost the car. The car got stuck down there. He had to swim for his life.

JM: Yes. I was going to say he's lucky he made it.

SF: That's right. And he doesn't swim, really. But he had to do some paddling to get up Long Wharf. So that kind of set him back.

JM: Where were you in that storm, the Hurricane of 1938?

SF: I was in school at that time. In 1938 I would have been nine years old. I remember being in somebody's backyard, picking up horse chestnuts, because they were coming down pretty good with all that wind. I was about half-way home from school with a paper bag full of horse chestnuts when my father and mother drove up and picked me up.

So he got hit with the hurricane. The boat was a total loss. He had graduated from a deckhand with my uncle up to owning his own boat. He picked up another boat (a second-hand boat), which he had to do a lot of carpentry work on to get it functional. He was back in operation. I think the Red Cross, at the time, helped him out quite a lot. Within a year, he was back fishing.

Lo and behold, my father's dream boat -- He built the boat that was completed in 1947 - a fifty-two foot boat that he started from scratch. He went up into the woods and picked out the trees. He took the trees to the sawmill and had them sawed. The planks came from -- They were Norway... I can't think of the wood now. Anyhow, the planks came down from the state of Washington. All the oak -- He went up into Fairhaven in the back woods, where they have a lot of white oak. Right from the keel up, he built the boat while he fished the other boat. It took him two years. The boat was launched in 1947. That was one of the bigger boats in Newport. It was a fifty-two foot wooden boat. It was powered with a Caterpillar engine, a diesel engine.

I was going to say, when the 1954 Hurricane struck, wouldn't you know, the boat was on the

wrong side of the dock and at the wrong place. The boat sank. She was hauled up and repaired. That set him back, too.

JM: What a heartbreaker.

SF: Yes. Hurricanes were not very good to our family in that respect.

We were talking about where we lived. He did finally build a house on Malbone Road.

JM: Did he build the house himself?

SF: He did. He had a carpenter help him, but he built the house. My father was very handy.

JM: A capable man.

SF: Very capable. He was good around engines. As a matter of fact, he used to help a lot of the old-timers that had engine problems down at Long Wharf. A lot of the old lobstermen used to rely on my father a lot.

JM: The Greeks?

SF: The Greeks, yes. Of course, in those days, there were twenty-five or thirty boats down there. The most power they had was a one lunger engine. Some of them had sail - something to fall back on. I remember that. A lot of cat boats. They were colorful characters - very easygoing and good fishermen. They loved the water, too.

I remember walking down the dock in the

morning and smelling that coffee they used to brew. It looked like mud. Very strong coffee.

JM: Did you ever have some?

SF: No. I couldn't get that close to it at that time. I was only young. But I think I'd try it today.

JM: Did you ever go out on one of those cat boats when they used sails?

SF: No. But they had the gaff rig to fall back on. I was born just about after the sailing and the old steamer operation. But I used to listen with interest to some of the stories about what was before my time.

Schooners always fascinated me. A lot of the fishing fleet were converted schooners. A lot of the New Bedford boats used to come in here. They were originally sailing vessels, and they were converted. They put engines in them. Plus they were a great sea boat - well-built, heavily built boats. I was fascinated with the way they were built.

JM: What did they fish for?

SF: They fished for cod and what have you, out of New Bedford.

JM: Where did they go?

SF: These weren't the big Grand Banks fishermen; although, some of them, I imagine, were -

depending on the size. This one in particular, The Paulina, used to come in here. She was an old schooner, converted. And she was built as rugged as could be for a wooden boat. She had oak frames. They were six-by-six oak frames. They were about two inches apart, the whole length of her. Then, on top of that, she had three-inch oak planking. I remember. I was in my teens then. I used to say if I ever had a boat, I'd like to have a duplicate of that particular boat.

As a matter of fact, the skipper on the boat -- They called him the Sea Fox. He was a great fisherman. When the other boats were coming in because of the weather, he'd be going out. He always had some high-priced landings, catches. But he got in a storm out there and the boat was lost. I remember that. It stood out in my mind, because I never believed that that boat could be lost with a storm at sea.

JM: Where was he from?

SF: New Bedford. He was the highliner out of New Bedford. As a matter of fact, there's a life ring down at New Bedford Ship Supply. If you go in there, you'll see that life ring. It says "Paulina." That's the only thing they found [from] the boat.

JM: What methods would someone like that use?

SF: He was a trawler. It was a trawler. He fished for groundfish. He fished George's Banks and some of the canyons in the winter months - [illegible] Veatches Canyon, Atlantic Canyon. It was a great big boat. It was a ninety-foot boat - very wide. It was my ideal, if I had to have a boat built at that time.

JM: I wonder what a trip out on something like that would have been like. How long did they go out?

SF: They'd trip fish. They fished four or five days or six days. Then they came in. But he was a hard fisherman. He was a money-maker. But they say there's a sea for every boat.

They theorize that maybe when he was coming in -- He had a trip. The last word they had from him, he was heading home with a trip of fish. HE could have gotten in shoal water in Nantucket Shoals. They theorize that maybe the boat went down in the trough of the the sea and the keel was pushed up through her, which is a likelihood.

But on appearance and construction-wise, you would think she was built to take anything. A lot of those old-time schooners were. Plus the schooners were the best of the boats. I'd like to have been born in the schooner age, if I had a

choice. Today, it's all steel boats and a lot of machinery - a lot of electronics. We've come a long ways. But today there's fewer fish than there were in those days. There are more people after it.

JM: More machines after it, too.

SF: More machines. Right.

JM: What does Fougere mean in French?

SF: It means fern.

JM: Did your father speak French at all?

SF: That's all he talked. When he first came here, he couldn't speak English. His brother wouldn't allow him to speak French in the house, so he had to learn English quite fast. Aside from a few words, he spoke strictly English. If you met my father, you would never know that he came from another country.

JM: How about your mother?

SF: She was born and raised and educated in Newport.

JM: So there was not much of her nationality left?

SF: No, nothing other than we had a lot of Irish stews - corned beef and cabbage, maybe.

JM: All those good things.

SF: Right.

JM: Were your parents religious people?

SF: I was born and raised Catholic. We went to church

on Sunday.

JM: Where did you go to church?

SF: Saint Augustin's Church. When I lived on the Point, that was the parish.

JM: How did you get there?

SF: Walked. We walked everywhere in those days. I walked to school. No schoolbuses. I walked to the movies, walked to the stores. We had a grocery store not too far from the house. I made a couple of passes back and forth to there.

JM: What was the store that was near your house?

SF: Spier's Grocery Store. They go back a long ways.

JM: Did your parents talk about your future much with you?

SF: Not really. I recall when I went to Roger's High School. I think they had a planning program, where you brought things back to your parents. Well, this was before going into high school -- what subjects you would be taking.

No, they didn't have that much interest. There was no emphasis on education in those days.

JM: You were a child during the Depression.

SF: Right.

JM: Do you have memories of it being particularly hard?

SF: Yes. But I always ate well. My father always

provided. Believe it or not, we ate very little fish.

JM: Really?

SF: He didn't care for fish. Myself, I would have liked to have seen more fish. I think it's a good food.

We always had enough. And we had enough clothing. But it was hard times. I know when it came to pay the bills at the end of the month -- Of course, the rent wasn't very high in those days. But there were times he struggled to get the rent money.

My father was a successful fisherman. The only thing, in those days, you couldn't depend on getting money for your fish. You didn't know what you were going to get for them. There were times when they sold fish and they lost money - when they shipped fish to New York.

I remember, vaguely, New York boats coming into Newport. I don't know when they stopped.

JM: You mean the Fall River Line boats?

SF: I think that's what they were, yes. They landed at Long Wharf. Some of the local fishing trips were put on the boat - directly shipped to New York. I remember my father saying they shipped sardines in the winter, for example. When the

receipts would come back, they would owe money for sending the fish.

Most of the fish, in the early days, that they caught were sold to peddlers. There was quite a lot of peddlers that came to Newport to pick up fish.

JM: Where were they from?

SF: They would be from Bristol, Providence, Fall River, Warren. Castigliago's (one family in particular) had quite a few trucks right up until recent years. I think they still peddle, as a matter of fact. Between the local fish markets and the peddlers, is where the bulk of the fish were sold by my father and my uncle.

My father was the first person to sell fish to Parascandolo's. My uncle was the first one to sell to Bucolo. At that time, they were peddlers. They came down in small trucks and they came down to Long Wharf.

JM: Bucolo and Parascandolo?

SF: Both. Right. Bucolo had a fish market in Bristol as well.

Instead of going out fishing to catch all the fish you could catch, usually they had orders. The peddlers could only handle so many fish - and the markets as well. So they'd go out and catch

what orders they had. If they had an order for five barrels, we went out and caught five barrels of fish and we stopped at that point.

JM: Would it be for a specific fish?

SF: Yes. Of course, the fish run seasonal. The big seller in those days would have been the flounder (blackback flounder) and whiting to a certain extent. It depended on the season. The flounder was usually the staple in those days. I remember my father saying yellowtail flounder -- which is really the biggest seller around here now; it's in the biggest demand -- The only thing they were good for was lobster bait. Nobody wanted them. I'm sure you heard that.

JM: I've read it. I hadn't heard it yet.

SF: A lot of the so-called "trash species" of those days are delicacies today.

JM: What others?

SF: The monkfish, for example, is very popular today. We never saved or sold those. Hake is another. That was strictly a trash fish. I guess there aren't enough of those to go around today. And then you have your sand dab or "daylights," as we used to call them. That was strictly lobster bait. We'd put those in the lobster barrels. Today they're worth a dollar and a half a pound or

sometimes more.

In those days, you threw most everything away. You just picked out selected fish. Today, you save most everything. I guess the only thing they throw overboard today is the very small of the species and dogfish. There are times, I guess, dogfish are marketable with Europe. There is a demand for dogfish in Europe. Things do change.

I can remember lobsters being a nickel a pound and people not being able to sell them. I'd see hundreds of pounds carred up down in Long Wharf, alongside the boats, and they couldn't sell them.

JM: By "carred up" you mean in the lobster car?

SF: In the lobster car. Right.

JM: What did the waterfront look like?

SF: In general terms, you could say Newport was a lot of coal yards and broken down piers in my day. Quite neglected.

JM: Do you know who owned the piers?

SF: The Peckham Coal Company stands out. Bowen's Wharf area was all coal yards when I was a boy.

I remember when these peddlers would come down, they'd come down through these big coal bins and back up to the edge of the docks. The docks

were in disarray. It was picturesque. It was probably a painter's paradise. But it was neglected.

Fishermen were kind of looked down on more so than they are today. It wasn't that lucrative. People that liked fish were either Catholics or poor people. I think that was where the bulk of the fish went in those days. If it was a high-priced restaurant, they wouldn't sell fish; it was strictly steak. But things have changed.

I remember when the Pope came out and said the Catholics weren't going to have to eat fish on Fridays. We were very concerned about that, because that seemed to be the bulk of the fishing trade. But what happened, this weight-watchers situation and people being more calorie conscious and protein conscious, it seemed to go the other way. The demand for fish seemed to increase as the years went on. And the prices went up. Of course, it got to be more competitive. Technology today, with all the electronics -- there's no problem to sell the seafood today. The problem is catching it - having enough to go around. I've seen both sides of the cycle. I've seen where there was more than enough fish and no demand to where the demand exceeds the resource.

JM: It seems like it's happened so fast, too.

SF: I've seen it all in my lifetime.

JM: Did your father fish all his life?

SF: Yes - right up until when he died. He died of cancer in 1966.

JM: Did your mother work outside the home?

SF: Very little. No. She was a homekeeper.

JM: You had to be in those days.

SF: Right.

JM: Was it difficult at times? Being a fisherman can be kind of uncertain.

SF: That's true. There were times when my father had to go out and do some odd jobs. I know in the wintertime, for example, he'd be out shoveling snow and things like that to supplement what you couldn't do fishing.

JM: Did he go out all winter?

SF: Yes, he fished all winter. In the winter, they'd chase codfish. The codfish would come in closer. And herring and sardines. Sardines were always a big item in the wintertime. In cold water, the herring would come in and the sardines. He loved to chase sardines. Today, there's a scarcity of herring. In those days, there was a lot of them. I guess the Russians took their toll on the herring out here. We haven't recovered from that.

JM: How did he find his fish?

SF: As I said before, in those days, the fisherman had a compass and he had a sounding lead. That's about all he had to work with. It wasn't until not too long ago when they came out with the fish recorders and what have you. But I think the fishermen in those days had the instincts, too. They knew what to look for. You could see the birds working - follow the seagulls and things like that. They had a lot more instinct in those days. They had to use their instincts more so than today.

JM: That's too bad.

SF: Well, the fish were there. Today, there's so much competition out there. There's so many phases of the fishery that you really have to have the electronics today to compete.

JM: Do the birds change as you get further out?

SF: Not necessarily. Well, of course, you see gannets further out, in the warmer months. They change on a seasonal basis more so than distance-wise. [end of side one, tape one]

In the winter months, you see a lot of gannets close to the beach, chasing herring. They're a diving bird. They look similar to an albatross - very long, narrow wings with black

tips and the very elongated bill. They're caught in gillnets eighty feet down. So they do dive that far. They go down to get the bait. They're a winter bird inshore. But I've seen them offshore in the summertime.

Then, in the summertime, you have the terns. You see a lot of terns during the summer, which you don't see in the winter. And you've got your herring gulls and your black back gulls that are here year-round.

They were kind of directors of the fishermen in the earlier days. When the fisherman couldn't see what was under the boat or what was ahead of the boat, he always looked for the birds. They tell you an awful lot.

And the weather situation. Years ago, you had no weather reports, as you have today. Most fishermen had a barometer either on the boat or in his home. He knew how to read that barometer. They were pretty good with it.

I mentioned the hurricanes. Both of those hurricanes took their toll on my father. We had no warning of either one of those two hurricanes. But, for the most part, I remember the old-timers being very good at predicting the weather, for what they had to work with - cloud configurations

and the barometer. It seems like they could sense the weather sometimes. They were good at it. They just didn't turn on a radio and get an immediate weather report.

There was a time when North started, when they first started, and the boats were fishing offshore. The weather report came through twice a day - 11:20 and, I think, 4:20. It was on a special frequency. You'd hear all the boats jib-jabbering out there. But when it came 11:20, nobody was talking. They were all listening for that weather report. That means an awful lot to fishermen. It was a good thing.

JM: They were close enough to be able to talk?

SF: The boats?

JM: Yes.

SF: Oh, yes. They could talk between twenty and thirty miles very well amongst themselves, as long as there wasn't too much traffic.

JM: When you were a young man, if you would tell me what the fishing industry consisted of in Newport.

SF: You had the fish traps locally. Rhode Island was big on fish traps. I think in 1911 there were two hundred and eighty-seven or eighty-nine individual fish traps set along our coastline.

Draggers -- As I remember, there may have

been eight or ten boats at Long Wharf. That seemed to be the bulk of the fleet. My father was one of them, and my Uncle Ernest was another.

JM: Do you remember any of the others?

SF: Manual Bonas was another.

JM: Was he Portuguese?

SF: He was Portuguese, yes. He was a character. He was a hot ticket.

JM: Was he from Portugal?

SF: Originally, yes. His son works for the Government now. He's quite a character, too.

I remember one thing that Manual Bonas -- J. T. O'Connell, of course, had the marine hardware store. He was quite lucrative. As you know, he's a millionaire. Manual Bonas was in there one day, and he says, "You know, Mr. O'Connell?" He says, "I'm going to tell you. You know the troubles with this country?" He says, "You've got too many foreigners." [chuckles] He really said this. I always think about that. But that's the type of guy he was.

Another time, he came into the dock with his little boat. He says, "Hey, I go up to Padusa's and I catch two bush." That's the way he talked. A really colorful character.

Then there was Ed Grimes on the "On Time."

These were all the same type of boat I was telling you about - between thirty to thirty-five foot boat with the gasoline engines.

Norm Brownell. You've probably heard of the Brownells. He was a robust man - a very big man in his day. He ate a lot and he drank a lot of rum. A good fisherman.

Manuel Ferris, who I worked for in my youth.

JM: On a dragger?

SF: On a dragger. In the summertime, we went swordfishing. He was one of the old remnants of the rum running days. There are few of those around.

JM: From Prohibition?

SF: Right. I'm trying to think of the names. I can just picture the boats and the people. There was quite a family of people down there. They were all friendly but competitive among themselves. Rather than make a day's pay sometimes, you just wanted to beat the other guy, to come in with more fish. I think that's strong among fishermen. There's a lot of competition. Not that it's a tournament, but it seems like it's in the same frame of mind. Yes, that was a colorful place down there when I was growing up. It was really the City Yard. They had stones piled up. There

was always a couple of big piles of stones for the streets.

JM: Where exactly was the City Yard? Over where the Yacht Club is?

SF: Where the Yacht Club is, yes.

JM: On Long Wharf.

SF: Right.

JM: The Greek lobster boats were next to that?

SF: The lobster boats were tied up more into the corner and parallel with the street, with Long Wharf itself. They had moorings and they'd have a line running to the rail. They'd pull their boat in and they'd have a ladder. They'd step up on the ladder and pull their boat out on the mooring. That was lined up with these typical -- There were a few cat boats there, the old-time cat boats, about twenty-eight foot with the sail rig, gaff rig - one lunger engines. They're called "one lungers." It was a one-cylinder engine.

You'd see a lot of these old-time Greeks with these handlebar mustaches and the beards. They spoke very little English. They got by pretty well. I remember my father being aboard those boats, helping them out and fixing engines. My father was interested in that stuff. He served an apprenticeship of learning on some of these

problems.

JM: Do you remember any of those men (the Greeks) in particular, other than the one you already mentioned?

SF: The one in particular was Old George. He always had a smile on his face. He had one of these cat boats. Very few words. Like I said, they had a slow pace. They were never in a hurry. I think they lived to be a hundred and twenty, some of these people. I don't know. They were there for years and years. Friendly. They kept to themselves a lot, amongst themselves. They lived in some of the shacks above where the Newport Shipyard is now, down towards where Leo's Last Stop is. They lived in those buildings. Most of them were bachelors, as I recall.

Ernest Papadoulias was a big family man. He was quite a character. A very hard fisherman.

I know when I went to work for the State, he had a friend that liked short lobsters.

JM: Short lobsters?

SF: Undersize lobsters. He was one of the first people that I arrested. When I went to work for the State, I kind of laid the law down. I said, "Look, if you behave, we're friends. If you misbehave, I don't even know ya."

I'll never forget him, standing in front of the judge, pleading guilty and the tears coming down his eyes. We had no problem with him after that.

JM: How did the draggermen and the lobstermen get along?

SF: I would say, in those days, there was no problem at all. Of course, there was a lot more room out there then. The lobsters, in those days, seemed to cling to the broken bottom. The bulk of their fishery was on wrecks or broken bottom. Of course, draggers wanted to stay on the smooth bottom. At certain times of the year, when the lobsters would migrate onto the mud, the lobstermen would flag their pots. They'd put buoys on them with flags so that the draggers could see them. Most of the good lobstermen, the acquainted lobstermen, would know where the draggers dragged. They knew their ranges as well as the draggers. They'd stay away from where they dragged.

Clarence Bennett is an old-timer from Wickford. He's somebody that would be interesting to talk to. He fished out of Wickford. He'd come down West Bay, in front of Weir Rock. I remember seeing a lot of pots there. But they all had the

flags, and you could drag right by them. He knew where your ranges were. He was just to the left or just to the right of your ranges. That's the way it went in those days.

Even today, the professional lobsterman makes it his business to find out where people drag, and he doesn't want to set in conflict. But there's a turnover in the lobster industry. There's a big turnover every year. People go into it, they're kind of rusty or green at it, and they don't know just what they're doing. That's where your conflicts come, more so than with the professionals.

JM: That's now.

SF: Right. Plus another thing, too. There's a lot of competition for space out there. Years ago, if a lobsterman set a hundred pots, it was a lot of pots. They had the winch head. That was it. They didn't have the hydroslave that they have today. I know some of the boats out here now, in order to make a living, are setting twelve or fifteen hundred pots. The ocean is big, but it gets smaller after a while - when you multiply the number of pots by the number of people setting pots, plus the other phases of the fishery. They're all competing for the same ground, really.

It's a space problem out there.

JM: How many pots did they need to make a living then?

SF: I think a hundred pots was a lot of pots when I was a young boy. It was an awful lot of pots. And they caught a lot of lobsters.

JM: How big where they? Has that changed?

SF: Inshore, I don't think the size of the lobster... It's governed, really, by the legal size. Once they become legal, they can be cropped off. Offshore, there was another lobster fishery that was more or less discovered late in the 1940s or early 1950s, where, on the edges of the Continental shelf, there was another animal out there. When they first discovered it, there were some huge lobsters out there. Twenty-five or thirty pounds was a common lobster. Maybe a trip of lobsters would average between ten and fifteen pound lobsters. But since they've worked on that fishery out there -- and that was mostly draggers to begin with; they never set pots out there -- the average size has gone down.

We had a program that some of my people and myself initiated with the cooperation of the dragger fishermen that worked on the canyons in the winter. They used to bring in the female lobsters. We'd pay them. We had a fund. Well,

they did it for nothing to start with, but we saw a promise in the program where we thought the berried lobsters from offshore were helping to augment the inshore lobster populations. I believe it did. There were thousands of female lobsters brought in and released here.

We tagged them. We had a tagging program. The tagging program proved that the lobsters -- They did go offshore eventually, but they left their spawn here. They hatched out the eggs before they left.

JM: Were they berried when they were picked up?

SF: These were the berried female lobsters that were brought in, yes. We did that for a number of years. A lot of the fishermen were very supportive of that.

I have a feeling, from what I saw of the lobster fishery, that, as I mentioned previously, most of the lobsters were caught on hard bottom in the early days or broken bottom or on wrecks. Lobsters today are caught anywhere out here on a muddy bottom. I think it may have something to do with the animal that we brought in from offshore, because he lived on muddy bottom offshore.

JM: That's amazing.

SF: I think that may have something to do with it.

JM: Going back to the early inshore fishery, there were the fish trap companies, the draggers, the lobstermen. You mentioned swordfishing. How was that done?

SF: It was strictly harpoon in those days.

JM: Did you know how to do that?

SF: Yes. We did that in the summer months - about the 4th of July. As a matter of fact, while we were dragging, we were usually rigged in the summer. In the event we saw a swordfish, we were ready. We'd have the pulpit on the bow of the boat, with the harpoon all ready. There'd be times when it was more of a sport. It was kind of a combination of sport and a commercial venture to go out on a Sunday, maybe, and take the family out (which my father did and most everybody did) and go out and look for swordfish.

JM: Did you often get one or more than one?

SF: Very often, yes. As a matter of fact, I was with my father one day when he harpooned thirteen swordfish within sight of the Lightship out here. That isn't very far. The Lightship was approximately where the Tower is now. We put seven swordfish in the boat that day. Six of them were cut off. He had worm-eaten shoe on the bottom of the keel. The line would get caught and

he had to pull the dart out of the fish. He had a problem there.

I spent a couple of summers and that's all we did at the time - swordfishing. That's how I made my living in the summertime. I fished with Bert Prebble, a Block Islander who had an awful lot of experience swordfishing. He fished out of Block Island. He kind of taught me the ropes. I spent a lot of time up the masthead - the topmast in them days. It was an extension put on the mast. The higher you went, the better you could see. He taught me how to look, where to look. There was quite a lot to it.

JM: How do you look?

SF: You don't want to look too far. It depends on the weather. If you get a slick day, you can see a swordfish a long, long ways off.

JM: What do you see?

SF: You see the fins. The swordfish has two fins, generally, that show - its dorsal fin and tail fin. Whereas the shark, you usually see just the one fin. The swordfish has a very curved fin. That's how you can distinguish a swordfish from a shark.

The point of seeing is that you train your eyes. You can look out a ways from the boat, but

you don't want to look too far, because you'll be going by fish closer to the boat. It's a proven fact - the more eyes aloft (up in the mast), the more fish. You'd be surprised how many fish you can go by and not actually see. That's why a lot of the bigger swordfishing boats used to put as many men up the masts as they could get. It really paid off. The more eyes, the more fish you would see.

I recall being up there on occasion and you'd get tired. You start off in daylight and you're hanging on up there. I was dozing off more than once and looked down next to the boat and saw a fish. You turn quick and try to catch the fish, of course. Sometimes you do.

I enjoyed swordfishing. It was more of a sport, in a sense - the challenge of finding one and harpooning it and putting it in the boat. It was fun.

JM: You just learned by doing it?

SF: Yes. Some of the old-timers had a lot of experience at it. I never had the opportunity to harpoon one. They used to let me harpoon the sharks when I was a kid just for practice - the harpoon without the dart. My father was good at it. He could throw a harpoon very well. I'd see

him hit a swordfish that was almost out of sight and nail him.

JM: Amazing. So you sight swordfish. And then, the same person who does that harpoons it? Or does someone else?

SF: No. We had a steering mechanism way up the masthead, way up the top. The guy that's looking down at the fish could actually steer the boat. If somebody saw a fish, the harpooner would get up on the pulpit on the bow. It's an extension of the bow. The guy that was steering supposedly knew enough to put the sun in back of him and never take his eyes off the fish. In other words, all he's doing is pulling the ropes to steer the boat to put the sun on his back and to intercept the fish at the right time. The harpooner would get up in the pulpit. When the time was right, he'd throw the harpoon. Those were the two key people. When you harpooned a fish, usually fish are in schools. Swordfish are no exception. Where you see one, there will be others. You'd harpoon that fish and have a keg on it. As soon as you'd drop the keg, off he'd run, towing the keg. Then, you'd make a big circle, keeping reference to the keg at all times, but start looking for the second fish. That's the way

they operated.

Of course, inshore fishing, the way we did it, is kind of small time. Off of George's in the summertime, when the swordfish got down there -- The larger swordfishing boats went at it. They'd have two or three dories working - men pulling fish all the time. It was a big operation.

JM: Did they harpoon them or did they use a longline?

SF: It was strictly harpoon in those days. In looking at some of the older statistics, I think a half a million pounds of swordfish in New England in the summer would be a lot of swordfish. These would be harpooned fish.

JM: But when you think of how they were caught, one-by-one --

SF: That's right. Individually.

JM: So you catch it and then you bring it up on the boat after it's worn itself out?

SF: Right.

JM: And then what happens? How do you keep it?

SF: We dressed them, and then we iced them. You'd cover them over with a canvas. At the end of the day, when you were through fishing, it would be the time to start dressing.

JM: And then bring it in. Then what would you do with it?

SF: They were sold locally here.

JM: Right away?

SF: Right. Unless you were out for two or three days, then you'd ice them in the hold.

We went into Block Island, for example, overnight a lot of times. Sometimes, if we had a fresh swordfish, one of the restaurants on Block Island would be glad to take it off our hands.

JM: You would cut it all into steaks.

SF: No, we wouldn't do that. They took care of that. The only thing we took off was the head, the entrails, and the tail. We washed the fish down with saltwater and then iced it down. Today, some of the longliners have a saltwater ice system that they use. It keeps the fish very well. But they have to go so far for the fish today.

Have you talked with Phil Rhule?

JM: No, I haven't. I have heard of him, though.

SF: He's quite a fisherman. Of course, he's done an awful lot of swordfishing and the longlining. The last trips that he brought in, he was half-way between here and Ireland -- that's how far out he was -- in order to make it worthwhile. Even some of those trips were brokers, because he had so much expense - fuel expense and what have you.

JM: Are there many swordfish? Do you ever see them

out here now?

SF: Occasionally. But they don't seem to come inshore as they used to. I don't understand why, other than maybe the feed isn't here.

JM: What do they feed on?

SF: In those days, there was a lot of butterfish around in the summertime and small hake and whiting and mackeral. We still see mackeral. I have a hunch that the abundance of bluefish has a lot to do with some fish scarcities in migration. The bluefish are cannibals out there. We've got more bluefish now than we've ever had - in the last four or five years. I think it interferes with other fish. I just think they don't want to mix with bluefish. Bluefish kill for the lust of killing.

JM: I don't blame them to stay away from the bluefish.

SF: Right. So, without butterfish -- For example, there were years that the giant tunas -- Whale Rock (not too far from Beavertail or Castle Hill) -- there were quite a few giant tunas caught there every summer. They don't come in there anymore.

JM: How big do you mean by "giant"?

SF: Seven or eight hundred pounds. They call them horse mackeral. When I was a boy, they weren't worth anything. It's the Japs that buy them

today. I remember seeing horse mackeral or bluefin tuna floating in the harbor here, just decaying. They were only good for catfood. The sportsmen would go out, bring them in, have a picture taken, and then drop them overboard. They'd come up belly-up. Today, they're worth eight or ten dollars a pound.

JM: What was the biggest swordfish you ever saw?

SF: My uncle had one one day that weighed four hundred and seventy pounds. I remember that. What fascinated me about that particular fish was the length of it. It wasn't really that fat. It was a very long fish.

JM: About how long would you say?

SF: The tail was up the end of the boom, and the head of the fish was laying flat on deck. The sword seemed like it was going up into the foc'sle. It was a very long fish. But they usually average two hundred pounds. If you get two or three fish, you can almost multiply it by two hundred. I think we got fifty cents a pound, which wasn't bad money for fish in those days. We always figured if you had four fish, you had four hundred dollars.

JM: Tell me about the seasonal nature of your father's work. Did he go out for the day or did he go on

trips?

SF: Mostly day fishing. He did some trip fishing out of New Bedford during his time. That was the operation - Get up in the morning.

JM: What time?

SF: Usually, you're out around sun-up or just before. Make a decision as to where you think the fish are going to be that day. We did a lot of fishing around Point Judith - anywhere between Point Judith and Brown's Ledge, out front. A lot of fishing was done in the River. There were windy days when you couldn't get outside of Castle Hill that we'd go up the River and fish and make a day's pay.

I remember during the war -- I think back on it now -- when they had the submarine net across between Castle Hill and Kettle Bottom. I don't know if you were aware of that.

JM: I had heard about that.

SF: The net would open at a certain time in the morning. They'd close it up. And then, at a certain time in the afternoon, they'd let you in.

JM: So you had to adhere to that.

SF: You had to, yes. They just wouldn't open it up for one boat. It was just a certain time of the day.

JM: It must have caused problems for fishermen.

SF: They kind of regulated their schedule to a certain extent if they wanted to go outside.

JM: When did they open the net? It was the submarine net, wasn't it?

SF: The submarine net. Right. I was quite young then, but I remember that quite vividly.

JM: What did they fish for in the River?

SF: Flounder, whiting, hake, and butterfish. Most of the species we got out front here would come into the River. Sardines in the winter. Herring. Some codfish. The codfish more or less held offshore. But occasionally you'd get a codfish in the River. The staple would probably be blackback flounder, winter flounder and flukes in the summertime. Of course, we caught a lot of flukes in the River. In those days, the flukes were very big.

JM: How big?

SF: I think in a hundred pound box of flukes, there would be about eight or nine flukes. So they'd average ten or eleven pounds.

JM: You don't see that now, do you?

SF: You don't see that, no. The fish are much smaller now.

JM: How about species like scup? Were they all caught

by the trap industry?

SF: Scup is the staple of the trapping industry, as you probably know. Without scup there'd be no fish traps today. The demand for scup has gone up considerably in recent years. The value of scup has gone up. In the spring months (late April, early May), the scup make a migration along the coast. They come in to spawn. That's when the fish traps do their best. After spawning, the scup seem to go onto the harder bottom. They start feeding. Between that time and when they go onto this bottom is when the draggers get a crack at them. And then, all summer long, the scup are very hard to find. They're doing their thing in crevices and wrecks and on broken bottom. The price goes up in the summer. That's where the handline fishery comes in. That's what I've been doing the last couple of years, since my retirement. I've been chasing scup - rod and reel fishing, commercially.

JM: Out on the boat?

SF: Yes. I enjoy that. It's a lot of fun.

Yes, scup used to go into our River. The last few years, we haven't had the scup migrations locally. They go by the coastline. The fish traps have done fairly well. But I guess with the

demand for scup, there's a lot more pressure on the fishery. I know the pair trawlers, for example -- these are draggers that operate with one net, two boats -- have had some very large catches before the fish traps catch them in the spring, when the fish are heading inshore.

So, between the handliners, the fish traps, and the draggers, there's a lot of pressure. Although, the fishery is in good health - at least where we fish. Now, in Massachusetts, I fish Buzzard's Bay. There are a lot of small fish. There's an awful lot of small fish - medium size fish. So the fishery's healthy. But, for some reason or another, they haven't been going into Narragansett Bay like they used to. Years ago, there was scup there all summer. That would be one of the fish that we'd work on.

I remember, for example, catching those things and not being able to sell them in the summer. You'd have to sell them for gurry. You were lucky to get a penny a pound.

JM: Who would buy them? Was gurry used for bait?

SF: Gurry was more or less chicken feed. It was sold to the people who pulverized the fish and dried the fish. And it was sold as chicken feed. Today, that fish would be worth a dollar and a

half a pound wholesale.

JM: Was there much menhaden seining?

SF: Yes. That was also a very big business when I was a boy. There was always a fleet of menhaden boats. They were steamers. They had steam engines in those days. The operation wasn't as modern as it is today, but it was the same principle. They set large, huge seines for the menhaden. I guess the plants down in Sandy Hook, the processing plants -- They came out of Sandy Hook - the bulk of the fleet. But I remember them being around all summer.

JM: They were New Jersey boats back then?

SF: That's right. Yes.

[end of side two, tape one]

These large boats were coming up and taking menhaden. The sportsfishermen were at odds with them.

JM: They were upset about the striped bass, weren't they?

SF: Right. Yes. They felt that by taking the pogies they were competing for the forage for the striped bass. But it is a fishery that dates way back. There's plenty of pogies around. I guess today the market isn't there and the price isn't there for pogies. That's why the last couple of

summers they haven't been up the Bay to the extent that they were. There's still plenty of pogies around.

JM: Did you ever go out on one of the fish trap operations?

SF: Yes. As a matter of fact, when I worked for the State, we used to reinforce the laws pertaining to fish traps. We had to see that they were set properly. Each trap has a permit. It has to be set in a specific location and in a specific manner. They're regulated by dates as well - seasons and so forth. So we enforce the regulations.

JM: Did you go out to work on any when you were growing up?

SF: No. Strictly dragging. I worked on the docks.

I remember when the mackeral seiners used to come into Newport in the early spring months, right about now (mid-April). There was a fleet of boats that chased the mackeral. The bulk of the boats came from Gloucester. I think there was about twenty-five boats. Most of them were ex-submarine chasers - World War I vintage, hundred and ten footers, converted. There was quite a fleet of those that were converted to fishing boats.

There was one in particular, the Santa Maria. Now, this wasn't a sub chaser, but it was one of the better boats. The skipper of that particular boat was the best seiner around. There was many nights that he'd go out and set his seine and catch enough fish to fill two or three other boats. He'd call the boats over.

I remember being sixteen years old. There were so many mackeral in Newport this particular day that Parascandolo asked me if I would help him unload, and I worked on the dock. There was a million pounds of mackeral landed in Newport between two docks that day.

Anyhow, this skipper of the Santa Maria -- I forget their last name - Genevieves or something like that. He's the one that went to the West Coast to show them how to seine tuna. The seining operation for tuna originated on the East Coast. In those days, they used poles over there. The bigger the school of fish, the more poles they'd have on one hook. Sometimes they'd have three men on one hook, hauling the tuna. But he started the seining operation for tuna fishing.

JM: People ate a lot more mackeral in those days.

SF: That's right. You had mackeral canneries. And you had the ethnic people, the old-timers, that liked

fresh mackeral. Today, it's not that important. I think they're trying to redevelop the mackeral fishery, because the mackeral are there. There are a lot of mackeral that go by here.

JM: So your early experience was mostly going out with your father.

SF: Well, I started with my father. When I was eighteen, I was captain of a boat that the Parascandolos owned.

JM: What was the name of that?

SF: The Nancy.

JM: Were the Parascandolos situated on the waterfront by that time? Or were they still [peddlers]?

SF: Yes. They had bought the dock. They were in operation then. As a matter of fact, the reason I worked for the State -- The 1954 Hurricane, I was running their boat. My boat, The Nancy, was having an engine overhaul by George Condon, who had a marine engine repair shop right on the wharf. The 1954 Hurricane kind of wiped him out. So there was going to be a long delay to have my engine fixed, which was in his shop. I was asked if I was interested in working for the State for the interim time. I said, "Yes, I think I would." I was married and had a child by that time or a couple. So I said, "Yes, I'll take a

job for a couple of weeks." I ended up working thirty years.

JM: What was the job?

SF: I started off -- In those days, we were game wardens. I was a conservation officer, working on the patrol boat.

One day, I went to the captain of the boat and made it to lieutenant. The last ten years, they put me in the office as chief. I enjoyed the job, but I didn't enjoy being in the office, to tell you the truth.

JM: I'll bet.

SF: But I always kept a hand in fishing. I fished part-time. I always had a boat of some sort.

JM: Where did you meet your wife?

SF: Bristol. My wife comes from Bristol.

JM: How many children do you have?

SF: We had six. I lost a son in an automobile accident.

JM: Sorry about that. I read about that.

SF: I have four daughters and one boy left, Michael [Fougere]. We have eight grandchildren - seven grandsons and a granddaughter.

JM: Are any of them involved in the fishing industry in any way?

SF: My boy, Michael, is working for the State as a

conservation officer. He's not overly zealous about fishing, but he likes the water. He's a good boatman. He's had experience fishing. He worked with me and other people. He's on the marine end of the conservation work. He enjoys that.

End of Interview