

Interview: William (Bill) P. McCann
Occupation: Fisherman
Port Community: Pope Island, New Bedford, Massachusetts
Interviewer: Azure Cygler
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Catch Share Oral Histories Project – NOAA Fisheries
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Interview

[00:00]

AC : Okay, today is the 28th of September, 2012, my name is Azure Cygler and I'm here with bill McCann, and we're doing a phone interview. And Bill if you could just say that you agree to do this interview, in your own words?

BM : Yeah, with the convincing of my wife, I agreed.

AC : (Laughs) You were slightly coerced?

BM : Coerced, yup.

AC : Well, I'll make it painless. If you could just give me your full name for the record?

BM : William P. McCann

AC : And where you live? You don't have to give me your actual address, but just the town.

BM : Wareham, Mass(achusetts).

AC : And what home, what is your homeport.

BM : Well, that's a good question. Pope Island, which would be in New Bedford.

AC : New Bedford, okay. But that changes seasonally, or...?

BM : No, that's pretty much ten months out of the year. A few months of the year we head up to the Gulf of Maine, sometimes we fish out of Gloucester, sometimes out of Portland.

AC : Okay, and Bill are you in a sector or the commonpool?

BM : Uh, Sector 7.

AC : And if you don't mind my asking how old you are, for the record?

BM : Sixty-two.

AC : Okay, and if you could give me a little of context of where, how you came to be in the New Bedford area, and your family structure, children, that kind of thing? That would be great.

BM : Well, family, I have plenty of those. Let's see, I have five kids, three boys, two girls, three grandchildren, and I got into fishing back in (19)'75, after I got out of the six-and-a-half years in the Air Force.

AC : Okay, and was that...

BM : Out of necessity to make a living.

AC : Okay, what, was there an appeal to you, did you know someone that fished?

BM : Well actually I was working in the post office on the night shift and I was on an island up in Maine, Pete's Island off of Portland. And I would ride with a lobsterman back and forth because he was doing lobstering part-time and working at the post office also; so I would hitch a ride back and forth with him on the boat. And when summer came around he wanted somebody to start putting his lobster traps into the water, because he didn't have the time, so I volunteered.

AC : That was, that's all she wrote?

BM : Kind of. I kind of worked for the guy for like a month, and at the end of it he threw me a \$100 bill, and said, "Thanks a lot, I don't need you no more." And I was a little upset about it, so he kind of made arrangements. He knew a guy that was fishing that was looking for people and turns out it was an old classmate that I grew up with. So he hired me, and after fishing for a couple weeks I saw the potential of work, you know you get paid by how much effort you wanted to put into it, so that got me hooked.

AC : Wow. So you're from Maine originally, you said?

BM : Yup.

AC : Okay, which part?

BM : Portland, Maine.

AC : Oh, Portland, okay. And what type of fishing do you do now, Bill?

BM : We do mostly monkfish and skatefishing with large-mesh gillnets.

AC : Is that inshore or offshore?

BM : Uh, both.

AC : Both. And what dictates that, just the fishery, it's...

BM : Season.

AC : Season?

BM : Seasonal, okay, so that keeps you home sometimes, and away other times?

BM : Well, the advantage is you can fish two, three days a week and still make a paycheck, and be home pretty much most every night. So, it has that advantage. And it's non-allocation, groundfishing, skates, there's no allocation so you can go pretty much as much as you want, with how many days you get for monkfish and then A days you can buy cheap, to go skatefishing, so necessity, you know. We change with the...when codfish starting getting scarce years ago we started going dogfishing, and then when the dogfishing would close down we would start going monkfishing and then when they started regulating the monkfish real hard, then we'd change to go skate fishing, and so we just keep changing to whatever we can find for loopholes.

AC : Okay now, have, since joining the sector has that changed your decisions in terms of what you fish for, and how you fish?

BM : A little bit, but mostly we're still doing the monks and the skates. Groundfish, we'll do a little bit in the summertime, and then whatever I don't catch we just sell it. So, it's extra income, which helped bail us out as far as paying off boat debts, it's a little cash infusion. But, that was the first year, this year, people aren't really buying a lot of allocation because they're not really catching the fish.

AC : Okay, so you've always done a little bit of monkfishing and groundfishing, sectors haven't changed that? Is that right?

BM : Right, right, originally I was, for the first day, twenty-some odd years I was totally just groundfishing, and then I think it was like in (19)'89 and 1990, we started dogfishing, and we kind of did that for five, six years, and then we started going monkfishing and we've been doing that ever since. So, since (19)'95, we've been doing it about seventeen years.

AC : Okay, now have you always been the captain on the boat, Bill?

BM : No, the first year I fished I was the deckhand. After that, after about a month of fishing, I told the captain, it's like, "Hey, I want you to teach me everything you know because I want to be a captain in a year."

And he looks at me he goes, "Yeah, right." And a year later I had a boat.

AC : Wow, did he look at you in awe when you made that leap in one year? Was he astounded?

BM : Not in awe, because it was his job and boat that I took, because he quit.

AC : Ah, okay. And how about crew members, how many do you have on the boat?

BM : I have three sons, an ex-brother-in-law and I think, a Spanish kid.

AC : So five crew?

BM : Yeah, between the boats, though, we fish two boats.

AC : Okay, okay, now, so do your sons, would, one of your sons would run the other boat?

BM : Yes, my oldest.

AC : Okay, did you do the same thing, did you teach everything to him in one year?

BM : Yeah, well, no, he started when he was like ten or twelve, going in the summertime with me, gets into your blood. And then I think it was in his late teens when he started taking a boat.

AC : Wow, so he's in for life, you'd say?

BM : Well, he's forty now, so he's been doing it for twenty-three years, and then my middle son went to College of Culinary Arts, and didn't care for it too much because you couldn't make much money at it. He used to fill in on us fishing in the summertime, so that got him hooked, so he's been with me for probably

eighteen years. Now my youngest son would fish for us in the summertime to pay for college and then after a year, after doing the four years of the college he really couldn't find a job to pay the bills so he came back to fishing.

AC : Wow, so forget about Thanksgivings at home, just have Linda come on the boat, you're already all there (laughs).

BM : Well, we would do that too, we'd have Thanksgiving on the boat and then at home.

AC : Oh wow, very nice, very cool. And how about your friendships, Bill, do you find that most of your friends are other fishermen, or outside of fishing?

BM : Well, actually, I really don't socialize much besides the family and work.

AC : Okay, mm-hmm, that's, that's plenty.

BM : Yeah, and we really just don't go out, mostly it's just her family, my family.

AC : And do you feel like living in Wareham and sort of working out of the New Bedford area, that the community understands what you're going through and the changes and the hardships fishing has presented, or is the community sort of out-of-touch with what fishermen are facing?

BM : The community in Wareham is out of touch, New Bedford is well aware.

AC : Okay. And how about some of your longer-term life plans, do you feel that since sectors started you've had to change those plans? For instance, retirement, or, you know, refinancing a home, or those kinds of big things. Do you feel like that's..., sectors have influenced your decisions in that regard?

BM : Um, no, not really. Just another tool, it makes it a little easier to manage, you know, again most people that are dragging or targeting groundfish are really, they're the ones that are suffering more, I have alternatives, you know? But like you have some boats that don't fish the groundfish even though they have it, they'll go squid fishing, or they'll go whiting fishing, or shrimping, you know, they'll, you got to be [flexible], you got to kind of do it all. So, just to keep busy, because you can't leave the boat sitting, tying at the dock, they break down while they sit there. So, and you don't make any money when they're sitting at the dock, so insurance and upkeep, it's really expensive.

AC : Okay, yeah, sure, and boat insurance, do you have that for both of the boats?

BM : Yeah, I've got to come up with about \$3,000 every month just for insurance on the boats.

AC : Wow, and now health insurance, Linda mentioned that that's now provided through her work, is that, that covers you as well?

BM : Yeah, fortunately because it went up to over \$2,000 a month.

AC : Okay, yup. And this was just recent though, right, that she was able to secure insurance through her job?

BM : Well, her job is recent, this is her second year now, and yeah, she just got it.

AC : So prior to that you guys were just sort of doing a direct pay?

BM : Well, actually we were kind of like on Mass Health, because my income was less than my mortgage payments.

AC : Gotcha, yup.

BM : So, it has helped, with the sectors, for me.

AC : Now why did you choose to join the sector, and could you tell me a little bit about that?

BM : Well, because NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service) forced us to. If you didn't join a sector, you were part of the commonpool. And if you go into a sector, there is basically no Days at Sea to go fishing, you just go catch what you're allocated. And with a commonpool, you wouldn't get, they were dropping it from forty days a year to go fishing down to twenty days. And, if you went anywhere in the Gulf of Maine, it was 2-to-1, so, in reality I think they'd give you down to twelve days a year to go fishing. So how you going to make a living that way? And also you don't get any allocation so you can't go sell any fish, or you can't go buy fish. So you're done, if you didn't join a sector and that was the whole purpose, because NMFS wants everybody in a sector.

AC : Now did you feel your allocation was fair, or was it under what you feel like you should have received?

BM : No, because the years they picked I wasn't targeting groundfish. Now back in the (19)'80s, late (19)'80s, I was doing a million pounds a year, of fish, but with the years they picked I was 100% dogfishing and monkfishing, and there's no allocation for any of those species, and skates, same thing. You know, we landed millions of pounds of skates and monks, but there's no allocation for that, so

when they were, it's just doing the groundfish and, you know, I went fishing for a couple of months a year. The only reason I got any allocation at all was because of those two months in the summertime what we were landing in the Gulf of Maine.

AC : Gotcha. Now do you feel like your sector is set apart from others in any way, is it functioning better or worse, or is it different in your eyes?

BM : It's functioning better because of the sector manager, she does a great job.

AC : She certainly does.

BM : And everybody will tell you that, all the members.

AC : Yeah, yup, I've heard that outside, as well. Could you give me a little bit about your opinions, relating to the pros and cons of sectors in general, sector management. What are your thoughts on that, are there goods and bads about it? Certainly you mentioned the commonpool's really no option, but, for sectors, what are your assessments of that, of the management tool itself?

BM : Well, it would work a lot better if there was more fish to catch, obviously. And it all comes down to bad science. It's not the science that's bad, it's the data coming in from the science, you know? It's just not, it isn't getting enough fish to make it work, and it's all coming from tow surveys and you have inept people running these boats who don't know what they're doing, and they're very arrogant about it.

AC : Right, this is the NMFS trawl surveys, you mean?

BM : So, I mean..., well you have fishermen that go on the boat, say like on the *Bigelow*, the *Albatross* and they'll do a tow and they'll haul back, and the shoes aren't even polished up so the..., tells you automatically the doors aren't even touching the bottom. If the doors aren't touching the bottom, the net's not..., it's off the bottom, so you're not going to catch any fish. They use rock hoppers to catch yellowtail, and everybody who fishes knows you don't do that, because you're not going to... you know, you got a big rollers a foot in diameter, rolling on the bottom, so all the flats, just, you know, go, basically rolls right over them. So, it's just, and that's the problem, and they won't admit to it.

AC : Now have you tried to do co-operative research, research projects yourself to improve the data? Is that something you've been involved in?

BM : Yeah, we have, but they won't basically deal with fixed gear.

AC : Ah, okay.

BM : They set their agendas, I mean I've done some research programs on monkfish tagging. We tagged over 1,000 fish in one year, we also did some deep water tagging, we also did gillnet, different types of gear modifications, or AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species?), so we're well-involved. We do research days we lease.

AC : Mm-hmm, do you see that going anywhere, that data that you've contributed to, is it being used?

BM : Yeah, it's helped a lot, but most of the work we've done has dealt with the monkfish, because that's basically what we target. So we have a long history, I mean I've fished, I was the first boat to fish down in North Carolina targeting monkfish. I fished from there all the ways up to Canada, up to the Madeleine Islands, and Prince Edward Island. So, and we've also fished the deepest in the, on deep water than anybody in the States. We went down over 1,000 fathoms, on my own expense, for research, looking for different species and stuff.

AC : Wow, okay, and has this just been over the years, or have sectors changed how you, how much research you're doing? Or have you just always...

BM : Just the rules have, because they put limits on everything, on like the monkfish, and so forth, so what was the sense, and they told me – NMFS told me – that I could not put a gillnet in the water without using a Day at Sea, so, well obviously I'm not going to go try, if I didn't get a limited amount of days, spend it, doing any kind of exploring, trying different gears, you know? Trying to find other species because of the fallback.

The sectors helped because they did away with the Days at Sea to go fishing, so I wasn't worried about, you know, one day I wouldn't get home and the next day I might, so I would continue, I would stick out the trip maybe a day or two longer, making the trip a profitable trip, instead of worrying about burning all of my Days up and then having no Days. You know? Then you couldn't go at all, but you get the allocation, you know how much you can catch and then you just go do it.

AC : So there's some strategy behind it in terms of...

BM : Yeah, I couldn't fish year-round with what allocation I have, but I could fish for two, three months with what allocation I have, and that's all I normally do anyways. Rest of the year I'm targeting monkfish or skates.

AC : Gotcha, gotcha. Now, when I talked with Linda the other day she mentioned that everyone seems to know each other within the Sectors 7 and 8? Is that your assessment? I mean, do you feel like it's a tight-knit group, or...?

BM : Yes, now, that has changed...that has changed a lot between the fishermen. It has kind of unified the fishermen. I think that these sectors were the biggest mistake that NMFS ever made by coming up with this plan because it kind of unified the fleet. The draggers work with the gillnetters and the other different gear types. Well up till now, because now they get to know them, we get to know each other. Before, in the past we didn't talk to each other.

AC : I see, that's an interesting observation, no one's ever said that before, that's an interesting point. And it's, do you think it's for other sectors, not just for yours?

BM : Yes, that's correct, yeah it's for all the fishermen, are unified.

AC : Hmm, and did you, were there friendships made at the personal level, for you?

BM : Yeah, before we would never talk to a draggerman, and now I have a lot of them that I call my friends.

AC : Wow, very cool.

BM : So then, you work better together, too. Share information, never would do that in the past.

AC : Right. Now, how does a, what is a typical day, for instance, in the current month, say October, what does a day look like for you? Can you walk me through what you do on a typical day?

(20:20)

BM : Well, right now I'm not really work...uh, fishing, I'm repairing, I'm working on the boats. I do a lot of my own maintenance, and I do a lot of fibreglassing, carpentry, I have my own machines, which I could, I'll hire somebody by the hour just to run the machine, to weld, because I don't weld. But as far as electrical, plumbing, mechanical or fibreglassing, carpentry, whatever, I do all the work, because I can't afford to pay anybody else to do it.

AC : Gotcha, and is this, these skills you've picked up through your years of fishing?

BM : Yeah, well that and I was an aircraft mechanic in the Air Force for six-and-a-half years, and there was a Crew Chief, so I had to learn the whole plane, so you learn hydraulics, so you learn [undistinguishable], you learn fabrication, you learn part of the engine, then you deal with oxygen. Also, and then when I got out I went

- to automotive school, got my degree for an automotive mechanic so that gave me all the background for working on a boat, because, basically, you've got to pretty much know everything there is to know, as far as mechanical and electrical to make sure you get home, every, all the time.
- AC : Sure, you're pretty...you have to be self-reliant, no doubt.
- BM : Absolutely, figure things out, and alternative ways to repair things, you know?
- AC : Mm-hmm, now, based on your experiences in your sector, would you recommend someone starting out today that they join a sector?
- BM : Absolutely. Even if you don't get much of an allocation, you can at least lease the allocation. So, if you were in the commonpool, you couldn't, you know. And then when they automatically shut down a certain area when the quota, or their aims for that commonpool is being close to being caught, they just shut it down out of the blue, or reduce it to a ridiculously low level, that it wouldn't even pay the fuel bill. So basically you're out of business. But you at least still have the option of leasing certain species that if you want to try to target, like redfish and pollock, they're cheap. You can get all you want for practically nothing, for pennies.
- AC : Mm-hmm, and have you, how has leasing worked for you, have you done a lot of it since you joined?
- BM : Well, I'm not really targeting the groundfish, so what I have for allocation covers me, you know?
- AC : Okay, do you lease fish from people? No, you do?
- BM : No, I haven't, yeah, again, I have in the past, the first year I leased some pollock, because I was going to go target the pollock at the time, but, I really wasn't getting, that's where the pollock are, are in the closed areas, so we can't get at them with fixed gear.
- AC : Sneaky little fish.
- BM : So, and they know the fence, I mean they know, the pollock, and they kind of run it. Now, it's because maybe there's not a lot of traffic there and they kind of sense that, so they kind of take up residence in areas where it's all quiet, you know? The fish tend to know, but you know, you go on one side of the line, it's, you fill the boat. You go half a mile away, you catch nothing, it's amazing, I mean just by feet, it's where you set your nets, when you catch something or you don't. And it's the same thing with the dragging on the surveys, you know,

maybe ten years ago the fish were in this area, but due to the water temperature or the weather, the way the wind's blowing, they're not there at that particular time. They're maybe a mile away, you know? But, when they do the surveys, they do distinct certain tows in certain areas, and that's it, no...no change in the routine, you know?

AC : Sure. That would be an interesting study, too, to research those boundaries of closed areas and see what fish behavior is.

BM : Well hopefully they're going to be opening them up here, it looks like this May.

AC : Okay. Now, Bill are you involved in the fishing community in other ways? For instance attending meetings or fundraisers or things like that?

BM : Well, I'm on the Board of Directors on the Northeast Seafood Coalition, and a member, also on the Board of Directors for Sector 7, actually I'm the President on the Board of Directors. I'm also on the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Team, have been since they first formed the team, over twelve years ago, it's been awhile.

AC : And that's just a, that's a regional body, or a regional team, or is it national?

BM : This is Northeast New England area.

AC : Northeast, okay, yeah.

BM : Um, I think it's from North Carolina up to Maine.

AC : Okay, and any sort of broader community, school boards or town councils or anything like that?

BM : No, I don't have the time.

AC : (Laughs) I hear you. And how about shoreside infrastructure, Bill, and your perception of, even within your time fishing, have you seen that change in the New Bedford/Fairhaven area, in terms of fishing infrastructure like ice houses and you know, haul-out facilities, has that all changed over time?

BM : (Laughs) Absolutely, yeah.

AC : How so?

(26:05)

BM : And who, [a lot has] gone. I know there's only one ice house or maybe two, one for eastern fisheries, and fuel, well, everybody has to have the fuel, but there's less of them because the boat's are sitting at the dock, you know. It's like Linda was talking at the meeting with John there the other day and the fact of how many boats she had in both sectors were like forty boats and how many boats were fishing was eleven. You're basically talking 75% of the fleet in Sectors 7 and 8 are tied to the dock.

AC : Wow, and is that just not profitable?

BM : If, you know, these boats aren't working, they're not fishing, they're not being repaired, the crews aren't working, yeah, it's bad.

AC : Now have sectors influenced that in any way, for better or for worse?

BM : It put more crew members out of work and captains. The owners basically, most of the owners are in their sixties, like me, and they're basically ready for retirement, but since they owe so much money to the union they can't sell their boats and retire. So it's a catch twenty-two, so they just sell their allocation every year and that's their retirement fund.

AC : Hmm, that's an interesting point.

BM : The boats that aren't working, you know, because they're selling their quota, if the crew's not working, so you've got those people looking for work doing something else, the captains, and they can't find, there's, you know, too many people who are looking for the fishing jobs, or what's actually fishing.

AC : That's a good point, and then the crew impacts, do you find more people coming to look for work, more crew knocking on your door, per say?

BM : Every week I see somebody looking for work.

AC : Really?

BM : Oh yeah. But, you know, I had a, it's basically family, it's all family, you know? And that's why I continue to do what I'm doing, to keep my family employed. I keep changing, you know, I find different loopholes, I always have, where, and I'm willing to travel. We used to travel and down to Carolina in the wintertime to dogfish just because we could pay the bills that way. So, I always find a way. Always have, so I don't worry about it.

AC : Right, so loopholes...right, gotcha, that sounds like that's the case. Now, loopholes you mean, sort of, like you said, travelling farther distances for periods of time, like going down to...?

AC : Targeting different species too, that are worth, fell through the cracks. Like skates, I found a loophole in the skates five, six years ago where you could target, fixed-gear could target the skates on a B day, when we had A, B, C days. And no, not too many people were using their B days, couldn't figure out what to do with them. Well, under-utilized species was skates at the time, so, and we were allowed 20,000 pounds of wings per trip, not per day, but per trip. So, we started targeting skates because there [are] a lot of them out there, down, and we could, we were catching 20,000 pounds of wings a day. So we would fish three days a week and land over 60,000 pounds of wings. So, it was hard work, physically, doing that kind of volume for a cheap fish, but it kept, we didn't have to use a day, we could use a B day or an A day, so it gave us more days to go fishing.

AC : Gotcha, that's a good strategy for survival, essentially.

BM : Yeah, it's just, same with the dogfish, we used to do, when we were dogfishing, we used to do 30-35,000 pounds a day, five days a week. The only reason we didn't go six or seven is because the cutting houses said they needed a break. So they needed a couple of days off in between. But we used, the first time we started dogfishing we landed over three million pounds in eight months. That was when I was learning.

AC : What year was this, roughly?

BM : What year was that? Um, (19)'89, '90?

AC : Now how about your income, would you say it's changed since sectors started? You don't have to give me numbers, but percentage-wise, is it higher or lower, or is that something...how have you accounted for those changes if there are changes?

BM : My income has increased, basically because of the allocation, because now I sell a fair amount of it. Then it helps, too, originally it helped me to pay down the gear bill. I owed a lot of money around town, and I was on the verge of bankruptcy, actually, and those little injections of cash and I could pay off my debts as far as local debts. So then I could hang new nets, and new nets catch the fish and before it got to the point I had old nets, a lot of holes in them, we weren't catching a lot of fish. And once we started hanging new nets, because we had the money to do it, my effort, pound-per-effort went, a little more than doubled, which doubled my income.

AC : Now would, this seems counter-intuitive, wouldn't it be that the fish... the nets that were older would sort of blend with the water more, or wouldn't smell as new, or...I guess this is a side-note but what's the reasoning behind that, that's very interesting to me.

BM : Well, the reason is, it's basically the brand-new nets always fish better than the old nets because the old nets get torn up, the meshes get monofilament, they get breaks in the mesh, they get a lot of different holes, and they seem to always find those holes, you know? So it... otherwise it's like, a gillnetter's like a chain-link fence on the bottom of the ocean, you know, they keep trying to go from here to there, but they can't get there because of the monofilament, but anything below ten fathoms they cannot see the monofilament. But they can kind of feel the vibration of it sometimes, you know, and they'll, pollock will follow it like a wall, so you have to kind of like zig-zag a lot with pollock because they'll run along the fence, but if you zig-zag they never run into it. If you zig-zag it, they run into it, and then monkfish you bag it, like a bag, you tie it down so when the tide goes one direction, the other direction it forms a bag, and so they kind of get, so they also they don't fall out when you're picking them up because it forms a bag. Different types of fisheries, same like with flatfish, you know, different styles for what type of species you're targeting.

AC : Sure, that's fascinating, wow, that's...I hadn't heard that before, that's really neat. So after you were able to purchase new nets you saw a big increase in your catch.

BM : Definitely, yup.

AC : And how, what's the lifespan of a typical set of nets, assuming there's no...

BM : A couple of years.

AC : A couple of years, okay.

BM : But then you can re-hang it.

AC : Okay, which means, what does that mean?

BM : Rehangs it runs about, maybe one-third, or I'd say no, about half the cost of a new net. So a new net runs over \$300 but you can rehang it for about \$150.

AC : And you use approximately how many nets, roughly?

BM : Well, between the two boats, oh, 300.

AC : Oh wow, so that is a big expense, times 300 apiece.

BM : Oh yeah, I've got over \$100,000 invested in nets and ropes and buoys and high-flyers.

AC : And every couple of years you have to do some sort of either re-hanging or repurchasing? Holy cow.

BM : Yeah, we've..., what do we spend, \$20,000 some-odd thousand a year, on the nets? Re-hanging? More?

AC : Wow, my goodness.

BM : Yeah, so we spend probably \$25,000 every year and if you count the buoys and high-flyers, ropes, the anchors and so forth, then you got to add in another \$5, \$10,000 on top of that. It's expensive.

AC : Yeah, it certainly is. Now, in terms of income in your family, again I'm asking, I guess I'm asking these questions, they're trying to get a sense of just, you know, money is a part of our overall well-being, you know, obvious if we were more financially...

BM : Obviously.

AC : Yeah, so that's sort of where this, where these questions are coming from. I'm sorry if they seem a bit personal, um, but in terms of income, and again you don't have to give me numbers, but how is, what percentage do you feel you contribute versus Linda and has that changed? Has there always been a contribution from both of you towards your family?

BM : Well, yes and no. Basically, Linda was probably fifty-fifty when we originally were together in the beginning, but when she got pregnant and then had our daughter, within a, what, a year or two, she lost her job. She was making over \$50,000 a year at the time and I was doing probably the same or better, fishing, so she lost that job, so then that put a little strain on it. And it took her quite awhile to actually really get a job, she didn't get a job until a couple of years ago with the sector. So now she's the bread-winner. Alright? I mean she works for me, but I pay her sometimes and those times I wouldn't it only depended on if the money was there. And the way the fishing has been I went the last three or four years a couple of years ago without paying her because I couldn't afford to. And that's why I do all the repairs because my pay for all the repairs is zip, so you can't beat the price, you know?

AC : That's right, a bit of wear-and-tear on your body and yourself, I'm sure.

BM : Well, I get paid by not having to pay somebody else to do it. So I might not actually get a paycheck, but I save the company a lot of money and expenses. Otherwise we would've been bankrupt a long time ago. And her job definitely helped at the same time. And that was a big pay boost.

AC : And now has Linda always done the books for the business, for the fishing business? Has that changed recently? She always kind of been the one to balance the books?

BM : No, she, within the first year or two she started doing it, which freed, actually because it freed me up, because before I used to do all the bills, all the payroll, all the settlements, and she took all of that over. So that freed me up to do a lot of other things, kind of expanded since then.

AC : And you said that's been within the last two years, did you say?

BM : No, she's been doing it now...sixteen years. (Laughs)

AC : Oh, so within two years of when you guys met.

BM : She could probably tell you how many days too.

AC : (Laughs) We women are good that way, we can remember time when it comes to our men. Just a few more, Bill, if you have a couple more minutes?

BM : Okay.

AC : These questions are relating to well-being, and again we kind of, I touched on that with income, but well-being encompasses a lot of different things, we're happy when a lot of things in life are balanced. So this is trying to get at how you feel overall, your general outlook on life, your sense of well-being, do you feel that that's better or worse, or has that changed at all? Specifically relating to sort of sectors, within the last two-and-a-half or so years. What's your sense of your overall outlook and well-being on life?

BM : Well, before the sectors I was pretty close to going through a nervous breakdown. I was on the edge I'd say. And, we had a few incidents where we had a flooding damage on *The Shamrock*, and basically I was told I couldn't put the boat back in the water and go fishing until I repaired it, and we were talking about a \$30,000 repair, which we didn't have the money, so basically everything to me was collapsing. And at that time I more or less went through a nervous breakdown and we found the money, once Linda helped me find the money. Basically a lot of credit cards and a lot of borrowing and got the boat fixed and

back in the water, so the sectors have taken a lot of stress away, you know, because the added infusion of the cash, being able to sell the product, the groundfish. Because over the last few years I haven't really been groundfishing so it really didn't matter to me, so kind of like a little shot in the arm, giving me something that I wasn't using anyways, you know? That took a lot of stress away from me.

AC : Do you feel like that did the same for other fishermen in your area too, or was that just a unique case for yourself? To take the stress away for a lot of other people you know?

BM : Well, yes, and no, some people it's worse, you know, because they..., or say certain people geared up on permits and bought a lot of permits for Days at Sea, so they could go fishing every day if they wanted to. Well, those permits might not have had much allocation, so now it's really the Days at Sea are, you can buy a Day at Sea for \$8 right now, okay? (Laughs). So, when they first started this Day at Sea stuff, before the sectors, a Day at Sea for my size boat was anywhere from \$700 to \$1,000 a day, okay? So you couldn't catch enough fish to really pay for it, unless you were really hitting the fish big. So now you don't need a Day at Sea, but the guys who geared up for it are kind of screwed, you know? So they created more stress for them. And they went into debt to buy those permits, now they got to pay for those mortgage payments on all those permits. So it's a wash, it's, you know, some people did it, some didn't do it. The ones who owned only one permit and then just have an allocation, well, say nobody thinks they have enough fish, and, - which we don't – I don't know. Everybody's different.

AC : I got you. And is it something you guys talk about amongst yourselves within the sector, about the allocation, and, you know, is that a discussion topic that you...?

BM : No, not really, it's just wheeling and dealing, more so now, instead of buying, basically people are trading fish for a fish more so. Like me, I mean, say if I want to go target the groundfish, I basically need Gulf of Maine species, Gulf of Maine cod, in particular. Well, one of my permits that I have used to be on a dragger. So I have flounder, a few, that I can trade because I don't target flounders at all, I rarely catch any. So I can trade those flounders for some Gulf of Maine cod, say, to get more. Or, I'm one of the only ones in my sector that has a lot of redfish, most of my people don't have any redfish whatsoever, so I'll trade them redfish again for other fish, instead of just selling it, you know?

AC : And did you come, did you guys come up with that option, to just trade fish for fish, or was that always an option within sectors?

BM : It's always been an option, it's just, everybody was in a panic that first year, nobody knew what was going on because it happened so quick. And it was kind of like shoved down our throats, you know? And there was miscommunication, people didn't understand, people were buying the whole quota because they figured that was all they could do. Everybody was trying to sell all their fish or none, so people would buy stuff that they didn't really need, and it was just getting left on the table. While they're thinking, "Well, that's okay, I'll just carry it over to the next year, fish it the next year."

Well, and then at the last minute with thirty days to go, NMFS comes out and tells everybody, "Oh no, you only can carry 10% over, so whatever you don't fish, you lose it." This year people are not buying a lot of quota because they can't carry it over if they don't go catch it. So that has changed dramatically this year.

AC : And what's your sense of the future? What does the future hold for New Bedford and Fairhaven, and maybe even just the fishing industry as you know it, is it bright? Is it not so bright? What's your sense of that?

BM : It's bright for a few, okay? People that have all the permits, the boat, like Carlos Raphael, he never made so much money in his life, you know? He has a lot of boats and landed a lot of quota, you know? All the small guys? They're just looking to sell out and retire. There's no young kids coming in. There's no way, even my own sons can't afford to buy me out, and I can't afford to just give it away because that's my retirement, you know? So an average permit and a boat nowadays is say \$500,000, but you can go buy a boat for \$50,000 or less. The problem is you won't have permit with it. I know a guy with a forty-five foot boat that just turned down \$700,000 for his permit, because he just wants to sell the quota every year and use that instead. So who, what bank, or what kid could afford to go out and mortgage, you know, borrow money for \$700,000 or \$1,000,000 on a boat and permit these days? And even the allocation really isn't enough, you couldn't make the mortgage payments. You know, so I don't know where, how it's going to go, really.

AC : Now, in terms of what you see for yourself as well, you mentioned there's been a lot less stress with sectors for you, have you seen any physical or mental health issues in the community of late?

BM : Yeah, a lot more divorces.

AC : A lot more divorces.

BM : Yeah, yup, definitely.

AC : And is that due to, what's that from, do you think?

BM : I think it's from the husband being home a lot more than he used to be, and financial stress, what happened. I mean isn't that the number one reason for divorce in the country? Financial stress? Well, there's a lot of financial stress right now, besides the reduction in allocations, they also increase costs on the food and operating expenses, even the lobstermen, they're feeling the pinch because of the increase in the fuel and the increase in the bait cost, bait has skyrocketed. So it's not just the groundfish fleet, it's the fishing industry in general.

AC : Okay, hmmm. Now is there something else, Bill, that I haven't asked that you would want to add in the last couple of minutes here of our interview? Something about your experiences, or sectors in general?

BM : You mean the old war stories? Oh, I've got too many of those after thirty-eight years, you know?

AC : I would imagine.

BM : People don't, can't believe this stuff, just like "Deadliest Catch" – "Is it really like that out there?" it's like, "Yeah".

AC : Do people ask you, do they ask you if it's like that? Like the general public?
(Laughs)

BM : Yup, yeah, like the "Perfect Storm", yeah, I was in there, been there, done that, you know.

AC : Wow, now I just thought of something if I could add just one more question. How, if you have an interesting situation, just being a fisherman and all that you've seen and experienced, but then add on to that, that your wife is also in the business. Not necessarily on the boat with you, but very much tied in with what you do, and aware of that, and that's very rare. A lot of women are a little more removed and kind of have their own lives, essentially. How is that, what are your thoughts on that? Has that been good for you with Linda being the sector manager and your relationship?

BM : Yes, essentially, yeah, it has. Because before she wasn't really involved, and just figured I was bitching to bitch. Now she understands why I was bitching.

AC : Gotcha, and do you guys talk about fishing a lot in your personal time?

BM : Yeah, yup. If I have certain questions I'll call her and she'll find the information out for me, one way or another she'll call whoever she needs to call who'll get me the information. And if she has a question that she doesn't understand, wants somebody to explain it to her, she'll call me and I'll explain to her, "Well, this is how it works." So we're good for both, each other, we educate each other all the time.

AC : That's excellent. And now the last thing if you would want to add one of those war stories just for posterity's sake, for the record, is there a story that stands out in your mind, or an experience that you would want, say your grandchildren who might listen to this, to hear?

BM : Well, the most hair-raising experience I had was, what they call the "No Name Storm" that came up on, actually on my oldest daughter's birthday, November 22nd, we were on a forty-four foot wooden boat outside of Chatham, and at the time the seas were 100 foot and 80 mile-an-hour winds. We punched the windows out, I think that was my third time I punched the windows out and, we had a helicopter come out and meet us, and they was flying over our head, and as soon as he showed up he said, "You will allow your crew to abandon ship" and everybody stayed with me at the time, and we came off a wave with nothing on the backside, we came down, we cracked the hull, the keel was dropped down and relocated, it shifted to one side. We did a lot of structural damage to it, but all said and done, we did make it, and got to Hyannis harbor, and that was a pure miracle because one of the planks down below was cracked and had raised up through the hull about an inch-and-a-half and it was a two-inch plank, so we were half-an-inch from going down, fast.

AC : And were your sons on the boat, or one of them?

BM : No, they were too young at the time, but my ex-brother-in-law was on the boat, and a ex-...let's see, my ex-, my sister's ex-husband was on the boat, and my brother Peter was on the boat with me. So, basically since then my brother Peter got out of it, and my sister's husband immediately quit fishing and my brother-in-law kind of got out of it for quite a few years, my...yeah. And he's back working with me now

AC : What year was this, Bill, roughly?

BM : What's that?

AC : Do you remember the year?

BM : Yeah, oh boy.

AC : You said November, was it...?

BM : Somebody wrote a book about it, "The No Name Storm", it was one of them. I punched the windows out like three times, we went through like three different hurricanes, that weren't supposed to be, like, hurricane-force winds, you know.

AC : Now you stayed in, why was that, why you stayed in fishing after that big storm after others decided that was enough, why was that?

BM : Why? Stupidity I guess.

AC : (Laughs) "Passion".

BM : Well that was the first time of all the times, because I've always, I'd always find a way to survive and, or fix something or whatever. Just call it cockiness, or just self-confidence, I guess, you know?

AC : Gotcha. Wonderful note to end on, if you could just hold on the line for one second and I'll wrap up here. Again thank you very much, Bill, for interviewing with me today, and it's the 28th of September, 2012, and I'm here with William McCann and this is Azure Cygler, and thank you again.

BM : Alrighty, thank you.

END INTERVIEW

[00:52:53]