checks. And of course, she wouldn't take them. This is for the weeks she was in the hospital. So finally, she took the checks, and long after she died, I'm going through the payroll book . . . the checks were stuck in the back of the payroll book. [She] never cashed them.

JM: They don't make them like that anymore.

GM: No, she was something.

[End of side two, tape one.]

JM: It's January 4, 1987. This is my second interview with Mr. George Mendonsa. Before we get started on the fishing industry, there are a couple of questions that I didn't have time to ask you about your family. The first is, where did you meet your wife?

GM: I come home to Newport in July of 1945 and the war was still on. My younger sister had gotten married while I was away, and I met her husband for the first time. He was stationed here at the Torpedo Station in Newport. After a few days he mentioned to me that his mother and father were coming from New York to visit him here in Newport and wanted to know if I could get them lobsters and clams to have a clambake. I said yes, I could get all the stuff. After a few days, he mentioned to me that I ought to pick up a little more stuff -- that a cousin

was coming too. So his mother and father and the cousin came to Newport. Well the cousin was a beautiful twenty year old blond [chuckle]. So I met the cousin and she went back to New York after that week here. That's where I spent the last few days of my leave in August -- in New York. That was my reason for being in New York when the war ended, plus flying back out of La Guardia to go back to my ship in San Francisco. About a year after this, I married that girl. That was my wife. That was how I met her.

JM: And her name?

GM: Her name was Rita Helen Petry. So my younger sister and I married cousins.

JM: That's pretty nice. How many children do you have?

GM: I have a son that's thirty-four, and a girl that's thirty-one. They're both adopted. I adopted the boy when he was nineteen months old. After we filed an application to adopt another boy, the Children's Friend and Service called me up and wanted to know how come I wanted to adopt another boy -- I already had a boy. They worked on me for a while, and I couldn't understand why I was being called up all the time and not my wife. They did ask me

what I had against girls. [Laughs]. How come I wouldn't adopt a girl? And I said I had nothing against girls, that it was very successful with the little boy, so I figured we'd get another boy. Well anyway, they said to me, "Well supposing if we told you we have the sister to that boy." So I said, "If you got the sister to that boy, we'll take the sister." So they're two beautiful kids.

JM: Oh, that's wonderful. What are their names?

GM: Well, Ronnie, the boy's Ronald Mendonsa, and the girl is Sharon. They're both married. They both live in Portsmouth. Everyday my wife goes to lunch with the daughter. The daughter is down in the Islands now on vacation, and my wife is going nuts because she has no one to play with now for lunch breaks.

JM: Do you have any grandchildren?

GM: Yes, we have three boys from my son. The oldest is about eleven and the youngest is around five. They're all crazy, the three of them .

JM: [Chuckle]. Well, it's got nothing to do with you, I guess. . . [Laughs].

GM: Oh yes, I make them wacky. I think they think I'm a little wacky too. So we're even.

JM: Did your son follow your work?

GM: Yes, he's working with me. We got in partnership down there with the Bucolos in 1946. At that time, between my family and the Bucolo family, I was the youngest of the whole group. Then years afterwards, my son come into it. Now the older group -- my father, my older brother and the Bucolos have all died. So my son took over one of the jobs of the Bucolos -- shipping the fish and selling the fish. That's what he does down there. He's been there, he's been doing that job now for about five years. I guess everyone thought that I was going to take that job over, but I couldn't do that. I gotta be on the water. If I thought that shipping and selling the fish was more important, maybe I would lean that way. But no, I want to be involved in catching the fish.

JM: You only go this way once. . .

GM: No, I could never stand at the dock and watch the boat go out. As a matter of fact, it's going to be a sad day when that ever comes -- that I gotta stand there . . .

JM: In those early years before the war, what was the role of the Portugese people in the trap fish industry?

GM: Before the war, in the trap fishing, there wasn't that many Portugese. There was a lot of

Nova Scotians and Newfoundlanders. At Price's Neck -- that little island down there -- my father's crew were all Portugese. At the Sakonnet River Trap Co. there wasn't any that I know of or can remember. With Tallman and Mack, there was about four Portuguese men that were really the four top men there -- like the captain, the riggers, and that stuff. The rest, the majority of the crew was different nationalities.

JM: What nationalities were they?

GM: Well, I guess Canadian. There was only about four Portugese in Tallman and Mack. And Coggeshall Brothers and Sakonnett River Trap Company, I don't think they had any, or very few of them. But they've all died.

JM: How about that neighborhood you lived in where you said it was mostly Portogese people. What did they all do for work?

GM: I guess there was a lot of people that worked down the Avenue on the estates. They were gardeners. The Newport Portugese were mostly gardeners. And, of course, in those years in the lobster industry, it was damn near a hundred percent Greeks.

JM: Yes.

GM: I can't think of a Portugese that was in the

lobster industry back then. Now there's a few that go lobstering, in the younger generation.

JM: What other fisheries were important here before the war, during the '30's? There was the lobster, and the trap fish industry. How about menhaden? Was there much?

GM: Yes, there was a lot of menhaden caught in Rhode Island waters. But most of the boats that came here that caught menhaden here were from out of town. They were from New Jersey and Long Island where they had the factories where they processed the menhaden. The Sakonnett River Trap Company had a boat that in the summer months when it was slack -- the slack season catching fish in the trap -- they'd go menhaden fishing. But I don't remember about that. All I remember was hearing about it. But I guess they did a lot of their fishing, too, down in Long Island Sound where the fish meal plant was, where the fish was processed. That was probably about the only in-state fish company that went menhaden fishing. But there was a lot of it done here. And I guess, I don't know about that far back, but say ten years back, they used to take pretty close to forty million pounds of pogies [menhaden] out of Rhode Island

waters a year. Now there's all kinds of restrictions on that fishery. As a matter of fact, the boats that came here from out of town, they've gone. In recent years, they've gone down to the Gulf of Mexico menhaden fishing. The reason being, that in the Gulf of Mexico each year they'd take about a billion and a half menhaden a year, whereas the rest of the Atlantic coast would produce maybe half a billion. So I guess in the Gulf of Mexico, the volume of fish was there. There is still some fishing done for menhaden here -- what they call purse seining. It's mostly to supply the lobster industry with lobster bait. They do pretty good.

JM: How about swordfish? Was there much of that?

GM: Yes. There's a lot of small boats that used to go out of Newport, and they used to pick up a few swordfish. They used to harpoon them.

JM: Did you ever do that?

GM: No. But I've probably seen six or seven swordfish caught in the traps. I haven't seen one in the traps in over twenty years now. They didn't have to go too far. Those small boats that used to go harpoon the swordfish would go off of Block Island and go off of Nomans. That was more or less considered

inshore. Today they got to go hundreds and hundreds of miles after the swordfish.

JM: Why is that?

GM: I guess they must be being depleted. And now they got a different system for catching swordfish. They have what they call a longline. It's a long, long line with hooks about every six or eight feet with bait on it. They run this longline out for miles and miles. They're caught by biting the hook. This type of fishery catches a lot of the small pups -- little tiny swordfish, like ten, fifteen, twenty pounds. I think that's hurting because these fish are not getting a chance to live long enough to become big fish. A lot of the young pups are being caught by this long line system. That's going to hurt in time. It's got to hurt.

JM: Is that out on the Georges Banks?

GM: Oh yes, even further out, way off. These longliners go out sometimes for six, seven weeks, eight weeks at a clip. As a matter of fact, I don't know whether they're kidding or not, but they say they're halfway to the Azores. It's a long time that they spend out there.

JM: What do they do with the pups?

GM: Well, they're dead on the longlines. . . I don't know if there's any restrictions on the minimum size that's allowed to be taken. It's not in my type of fishery. But I know a few years ago you could see small swordfish steaks on the market. But they make some long trips and they have to go a long, long way for them.

JM: Was there any beach seining done here?

GM: Yes, there was. I done some of that -- shore seining -- used to call it. In the later forties and fifties maybe early sixties, we used to go shore seining at sunset. And you'd go up the bay somewhere with a skiff, couple of guys -- maybe three, four guys. You'd always work in the lee of the land because the bait would work to the lee of the land. And you had to work on a beach where it was perfectly clean because you couldn't pull one of those seines ashore on rocky bottom or tough bottom where there was hangups. So like Mackerel Cove and Bishop Rock --

JM: Where's Bishop Rock?

GM: That's up just north of the Naval War College a little way. And up along Prudence, there was a lot of shore seining done in the upper Bay. Then the fight come along with the sports fishermen.

JM: Was that for bass, that you were shore seining in the fall?

GM: Yes, bass -- during the summer months. But this was something that you had to do extra, because you couldn't make a living at it. Once in a while you'd get a halfway decent day's pay out of it. It was something extra you did. I guess we was always pushing and wanting to do something. We used to go up there quite a bit, up the river. Of course, we've been fighting with the sports fishermen long before I was born.

JM: When did it start?

GM: Well my father -- I can remember going up to the legislature when I was real small. In those years, they had a Fishery Committee in the Senate and a Fishery Committee in the House. They would have a public hearing and we'd go up there. In those years, we were more successful fighting the regulations than we are today. They don't have any Fisheries Committee in the Senate or House anymore. They have a Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council. I was appointed to that when it was originally formed.

JM: In '77, weren't you?

GM: Did you hear about that?

JM: Yes.

GM: The mess I got in?

JM: Yes, I'd like to talk about that.

GM; I got a letter from the Governor's office saying that I'd been appointed to the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council when it was originally formed.

JM: Right after the 200 mile limit was established. Is that right?

GM: Yes, I guess it was.

JM: And what was the role of the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council?

GM: The Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council had more power than any council up and down the Atlantic coast. I think in most states their Marine Fisheries Council could make recommendations to the Legislature. But the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council could make regulations and make them stick. They had the power to do that. While I was on the Marine Fisheries Council, over the years, I must have voted on at least 75 different regulations. When the Council was originally formed, the Legislature said that there must be at least two commercial fishermen on the Council. After years and years of voting and setting regulations, finally the striped bass

issue come up. That was a battle. At the Council meetings, of course, the sports fishermen always used the argument that conservation was necessary. They kept fighting for conservation. Their argument was always to fight for conservation, but everything that was being proposed, and everything that they proposed would only be regulations that would hurt the industry and not the rod and reel fishermen. In other words, the commercial fishermen -- like us trap fishermen and the seiners -- probably 85 to 90 percent of the striped bass we caught were small fish. We very seldom caught big fish -- 30, 40, 50 pound fish. So everything that would be proposed would be to set regulations on minimum sizes like eighteen inches, twenty inches. Finally, one year, they were shooting for a set of regulations that you could not take striped bass under twenty-four inches. That would take eighty-five, ninety percent of our catch away from us. And it would continue to allow the sports people to catch the big fish because that's the only thing they're interested in catching anyway. The trophies, the pleasure, I guess the satisfaction or the thrill of catching the striper is in the big fish by the

rod and reel fishermen. So anyway, at one of the council meetings, I said, "If the striped bass are in trouble like you people claim they are, why don't we all stop taking them?" And the audience, which was ninety-nine percent sports people hollered back, "Go ahead Mendonsa, you're in a position to do something about it. Go ahead do it." So we left the meeting that night. There was no regulation set, but we come back a month later and the same thing all over again. So I said the same thing. I says,"You guys keep hollering conservation." (And I had proved to them that there was not a need for conservation.) I said again, "If the striped bass are in trouble, why don't all of us stop taking them, because you people take the most fish." And it's true -- the commercial industry didn't take ten or fifteen percent of what the sports people took in striped bass. So again they hollered back, "Go ahead, do something about it." So anyway, Francis Manchester was a commercial fisherman on the council. He made the motion that nobody in the state of Rhode Island could have a striped bass in their possession. I seconded the motion and it became regulation. Well the sports fishermen in that hearing room went

jumping up and down like yoyos. They shafted themselves with that argument and they never would have believed that the commercial guys would have did what we did. Then I got a letter from the Conflict of Interest Commission. Oh, first of all, just before this vote, the state advised us guys that we should go before the Conflict of Interest Commission to get an opinion.

JM: Who got that started?

GM: The Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Director of Environmental Management was the chairman of the Fisheries Council. We went before the Conflict of Interest Commission and they come back with an opinion that didn't say I would be in conflict. They said that I would be a probable conflict. That was the decision they gave me. I said, "Look, I come up here to get a ruling on how I stand before I vote on this striped bass issue because it's coming up." And they says, "You are a probable conflict." We had Hinkley and Allen -- law firm out of Providence. I said to the lawyers, "Jesus, I didn't get any satisfaction here. Probable conflict -- that doesn't tell me anything." So he says, "Well, that's how they do it."

JM: I bet you felt like being a probable conflict [laughs] at this point.

GM: I says to the lawyer, "I didn't get any satisfaction here. What can be done?" He says, "You want to take it to court?" I says, "Yes, we have to." So we went to court, Superior Court. And we're up there and I'm sitting in the courtroom. The judge and the Conflict Commission lawyer, they're going back and forth and my lawyer's back and forth with the judges sitting up there. Finally the judge said to the conflict lawyer, Rae Congdon, the Executive Director of the Conflict of Interest Commission, "You know this man come here before you to get an opinion on how he stands and you people say he's a probable conflict. Do you tell a person if they're not in conflict?" And they said, "Yes, we tell a person that comes before us if they're not in conflict." "Do you tell a person if they are in conflict?" They says, "No, we tell them that they are probable." So the judge looked at her, and turned around to my lawyer and he said, "I don't know why you brought Mr. Mendonsa before this court because he has not violated any laws of the state of Rhode Island. Therefore, this court cannot pass judgement on him. Until he

violates the laws of this state, that's it." So we walked out of the courtroom still with no satisfaction. Then my lawyer says to the judge, "I brought Mr. Mendonsa here before he does become a criminal, before he does commit a crime." The judge says, "I can't pass judgement on him because he has not violated any laws." That was it. The following month, when the striped bass issue come up again, we voted and it became law. Then I got a letter from the Conflict of Interest Commission saying, "Mr. Mendonsa, you violated the conflict laws of the State of Rhode Island. You are to appear before the Conflict Commission."

JM: What law did you violate?

GM: Here's what happened: the Legislature said there must be commercial fishermen [on the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council]. I went back before the Conflict Commission -- again with the lawyer -- and I said, "I have voted on 75 or more regulations over the years. I'm a commercial fisherman. I'm on the Council. The Legislature said that there must be two commercial fishermen on the Council. I catch every species of fish that swims in this state. I sell every species that swims in this state.

How can I be on the Fisheries Council and vote on regulations without worrying about being in conflict? Plus, I been before the Conflict Commission, and you said I am a probable conflict. I been to the courts, and didn't get any satisfaction there either. The Conflict Law reads, if you make $200 dollars on any one issue, that is enough cause to be found in conflict. I voted on a regulation that did not put me at an advantage of any citizen of the state of Rhode Island or my competitors. I voted on a regulation that took the right away from myself to catch striped bass. How can this be a conflict?" Well anyway, the Conflict Commission says, "You're guilty and you're fined $5,000." So between the fine and the lawyer, it cost me $15,000. That's how the Conflict Commission works.

JM: That's terrible.

GM: Then I met with the rest of the fish industry in the state of Rhode Island and with different fisheries' organizations. I said to them, "You know, I've been fighting this thing alone. This problem now belongs to the whole industry in this state -- whether we're going to have commercial representation on this Fisheries Council."

JM: Not only Rhode Island.

GM: Yes. The rest of the fish industry agreed with me that now it was a fisheries problem. I told them, "My attorney up here says I got twenty days to appeal this to the Supreme Court. It's going to take about $2,000 to $2,500 to take it to the Supreme Court, so you guys better come up with some money." They said, "Oh yes, it's the whole industry's problem now." I said, "Call me. I have twenty days to make the decision." Nobody ever called. Then the lawyer called me at the end of twenty days and says, "George, what're you going to do about this thing, the deadline's coming up?" I says, "Drop it." And that's what happened to it. Another thing, too, Francis Manchester is in the exact fishery that I am -- he's a trap fisherman. He also caught striped bass, but far less than what I caught. I was found in conflict. Francis Manchester was not found in conflict. He's a trap fisherman, and he's the guy that put it in motion -- to put a ban on striped bass. He was not in conflict, and I was in conflict.

JM: Why wasn't he?

GM: He caught less. That's the only reason.

JM: Wasn't someone else fined too?

GM: Pasascondolo, Mike. And Mike even caught less striped bass than Francis. But Mike and I were fined. I was fined $5,000. I think Mike was fined $1,000. He did the same thing I did. The only thing, I guess, I had the biggest mouth that the sports people didn't like. Another thing I found out going through the courts and through the Conflict Commission -- a commercial fisherman that has to appear before any board or any commission or even the courts in this state -- if this commercial fisherman is involved over a dispute that involves sports people, the commercial fisherman is doomed. He doesn't stand a chance because everyone that he has to appear before for judgement is either sentimental or emotionally on the side of the sports people. They will not believe a commercial fisherman. He's doomed. That's what happened to me.

JM: When did the trouble with the sports fishermen start over bass?

GM: It was during my father's time -- long before I was born.

JM: What did the sports fishermen say then?

GM: They were saying the same thing -- that conservation was needed and that the striped bass must be saved. Finally, I stopped going

to the Council meetings. Then the quahoggers, the lobster fishermen . . . something would come up at the Council meetings involving other people in the industry. They'd look up at the Council members there, and there was no commercial people on the council to represent them. Then they started blowing their tops and hollering, "Where the hell's our representation here?" The only people they're facing on that Fisheries Council now is sports people. So they start hollering. But when I was looking for support to take this thing to Supreme Court, they didn't show up there either. And yet I voted. I did a lot for them when I was on the Council. Finally, I went to Governor Garrahy's office, and Chafee and DiPrete after he got elected. I took this problem to both of them. They just stood there shaking their heads that they couldn't believe what had happened, but they didn't do anything about it either. I sent letters to Chafee about it, too and he said that they were after me. But nothing was ever done there either. I told them there's no way a commercial fisherman can serve on this Fisheries Council -- absolutely no way. So one night about 10:00 o'clock, I get a telephone call and this fellow says he's

calling me from the Governor's office and that he wanted to notify me that I had been replaced on the Fisheries Council -- that my time had expired. That was a two year position and I had been on there five, six years I guess.

[End of side one, tape two].

GM: I was never officially reappointed. Neither was the rest of the members on the Council. I went to a Senator, on the committee that reappointed Council members. That Senator, Joe Chaves, said to me, "Look, don't worry about it. Up there, they overlook that and they never reappoint anybody. As long as you've never been replaced, you're still an active or a legal Council member." So then when they did call me that night and they said that my time had expired -- that I was being replaced -- well my time had expired about five years before. I should've been reappointed maybe three times. So [chuckle], I gave the guy a bad time anyway that called me from the Governor's office. The next morning, I'm down in the lunchroom having breakfast before we're going out fishing, and I'm reading the Journal [Providence Journal]. There it is in the Journal -- "Commercial Fisherman Replaced on the Council." It was already printed in the

Journal before they even called me. I told the Governor, "In the state of Rhode Island there are 77 different councils, commissions, committees -- all people that were appointed like I was appointed because of my knowledge as a fisherman. Every one of these people are going to face the same problem that I had to go through. Any of these people with any kind of expertise or knowledge will be found in trouble if anyone ever files a complaint against them." And he says, "Well yes, you're right." But they never did anything about that either. And like I said, "How many bankers are there on the banking committees up here?" They said, "They're all bankers." I said, "Well that's nice."

JM: Don't the sports fishermen have a pretty powerful lobby?

GM: Oh yes. That's why I say the commercial industry is doomed. For years the American commercial fisherman was after the Federal Government when the foreigners were out here fishing -- that something had to be done because they were taking an awful amount of fish. And these were enormous boats. But the Federal Government never did anything about it. And then finally, years and years later, the

Federal Government, with the 200 mile limit, did set some regulations. But they're still fishing out here. Not as strong as they did, but --

JM: The foreign fishing vessels?

GM: Yes, the foreign fishing vessels are still working here. And now that they realize that the fish has been depleted some, now they're setting all kinds of regulations that are burning the commercial American fishermen. When the 24-inch regulation was set on striped bass, we knew we'd lose about 80-90% of our catch. We'd catch the stripers, when they were migrating south -- heading back to the Hudson and the Chesapeake. We'd set nets in late October, November. That fall I didn't know what to do. Striper's about the only thing that makes it pay for us to fish that time of the year. That fall we set two nets just to make a longer season for the men and myself because I don't like to hang around the dock either all winter. So we set the one net, and we're loaded with striped bass -- beautiful striped bass. I called the National Marine Fisheries Service and I blasted them that they didn't know what the hell they were doing with all the recommendations on striped bass. I

told them that I was releasing anywhere between 30 to 50 thousand pounds of striped bass a day. And they said to me, "We don't believe you." I says, "Well look, you get the hell down here in the morning and come out and I'll show you the striped bass." So the National Marine Fishery Service showed up at five o'clock in the morning. Then I got a hold of the Department of Fish and Wildlife of the State of Rhode Island and they came out. We hauled the first net that day and we had 30 thousand pounds of striped bass. They stood there looking. They couldn't believe it. We released the stripers -- all alive. We went to the second net and we had 20 thousand pounds and we released them. Well -- no, the day they went out there there was a total of 30 thousand -- there was 20 and 10. The day before that there was 30 and 20, which was 50 thousand. Well anyway, the day that they went out, out of the two nets, we released 30 thousand pounds. And out of the 30 thousand pounds, we saved 300 pounds that was over 24 inches -- which was legal. 300 pounds out of 30 thousand. Here's a report that the fellow from the National Marine Fishery Service made that day. He went out with us. Also, here's pictures that were taken by the National

Marine Fishery Service of striped bass in the net. I made him do this. So if you want to take that report with you.

JM: Yes, I would and those too, if I could copy those. So the National Marine Fishery Service said that the striped bass population was dangerously depleted?

GM: Yes. This Gary Shepherd -- the fellow who made that report up for the National Marine Fishery Service -- that day he looked at what was going on. Of course, I was blowing my top at all of them. They sit in an office somewhere and they don't know what the hell is going on. They believe the sports people. And I told them that the sports people are just trying to stop the commercial people from catching the bass. So anyway, this Gary Shepherd said to me, "What an opportunity this is to tag striped bass. You fellows went through that 30 thousand pounds and got the ones that were legal to keep and the rest all went alive. Not one fish was killed. This would be a great opportunity to have a tagging program." And I says, "Yes. . . In the work you people do in studying striped bass, how do you get stripers to tag them?" He says, "Oh, once in a while we get them from a rod and reel fisherman." I says, "What can you

get from a rod and reel fisherman? They'd bring you what, maybe 2 or 3 fish at a time to tag? It's useless." He says, "We never thought there was anything like this available." Then last year they come back to me wanting to know if I wanted to get involved to catch striped bass to tag for research. And I says, "Look it doesn't pay for me to put a net in the water that time of the year to catch striped bass, because these nets are special and I got to concentrate on catching other fish -- setting different locations with different type of nets. If I'm going to set a net to catch striped bass for you people, you're going to have to pay me." So anyway, they did. They come back and they asked me what I wanted, and I gave them a figure. So this past fall, we set a net and we was catching striped bass out of the one net. We were measuring them, tagging them and releasing them. And of course, the National Marine Fishery Service was the one that was really behind this plus the state. We had a biologist that was out there every day with us from the state, that was keeping all the statistics on the measuring and the numbers. They all had serial numbers -- every fish had a different number. One day,

alone, we tagged 2,000 fish. This biologist went back to his office and he was all excited about the numbers and all the fish that we was tagging. He called the National Marine Fishery Service down in the Chesapeake, where the main study goes on about the stripers. He told them that we tagged 2,000 fish. And they said, "You're full of bologna. It's impossible." He says, "Well, we did it." The next day, one of the big wheels down there called up and said, "We understand you people are saying you tagged 2,000 fish?" And I says, "Yes, we tagged 2,000 fish." " Well, it's impossible to do it in a day." I says, "Well, you're right. We didn't do it in a day -- we did it in a morning -- in about three hours [chuckles]." So anyway, I heard just recently that our tagging program was probably one of the most effective tagging programs that was ever done on the study of stripers. But we was tagging the stripers last fall, and the sports fishermen were already catching them down Narragansett Pier a day or two later and pulling the tags out of them and sending the tags into the Department so they could get the dollar reward or whatever comes with it.

JM: They [scientists studying striped bass] were

tracking the striped bass to their spawning areas?

GM: Yes. They're trying to understand. Down the Chesapeake, they've been saying there's a problem down there with the stripers. They're also saying there's a big body of stripers in recent years in the Hudson River. Our argument was -- "What the hell, if the Hudson's got a lot of striped bass, why shouldn't we be allowed to take them?" And they said, "Maybe the stripers we're taking here are from the Chesapeake."

JM: What are they saying the problem is with the stripers in the Chesapeake?

GM: They just say they're down or pollution or something. Down there -- the law on the Chesapeake -- they could take 12 inch striped bass. Up here, we were 16, and different states had different [laws]. But down there, where the volume of fish was caught, they had the easiest regulations on the stripers. And that's probably where they should have had the stiffest regulations. That's where they spawn and the whole bit.

JM: Do you think it's true that they spawn either there or in the Hudson?

GM: They spawn in both places. This tagging

program will prove . . . We tagged somewhere between 5,000 and 6,000 fish last fall. If they picked up, say for instance, 1,000 tags in the Hudson and maybe picked up 200 or 300 tags in the Chesapeake, then they can say it's a 4 to 1 or a 5 to 1 ratio in one place or the other. Then they'll use that same ratio to say the fish that's in Rhode Island waters are 4 or 5 to 1 from the Hudson or the Chesapeake. So if the biggest volume of fish that's caught in Rhode Island are from the Hudson where there is a big body of striped bass, maybe the regulations will ease up a little bit and they'll concentrate on protecting the Chesapeake fish until that body of fish builds up more. Another point in the argument is that the small fish have the best market value. They come out with a regulation that says that the big fish are contaminated with PCBs because they've been swimming in pollution longer. If that's the case, why not save the big fish and catch the little fish for market? A small fish, like a fifteen pound striped bass -- the female will lay somewhere around 15 to 20 thousand eggs. A big striped bass -- 30, 40, 50 pound striped bass -- is capable of spawning 5 million at one time. So, if you're talking

conservation, why continue to slaughter the big fish? Not only that, I have charts at home that were made up by biologists that study the bass and the biggest male striped bass is somewhere around 28 to 30 pounds. I guess either the males die off or they don't grow any bigger. So any striped bass that you hear of 30, 40, 50, 60 pound striped bass are all the female fish. This is what the sports fishermen are slaughtering. And these are the fish that's capable of spawning 5 million at a time. So it's just a -- they just want to eliminate the net fishermen from taking bass. As a matter of fact, I can remember when Massachusetts had the same argument that we used to face here -- it was over 40 years ago that Massachusetts put into effect the law that said that there can be no taking of striped bass by net. Now in those years, the ocean out here was full of striped bass. I saw on top of the water one time over a hundred acres of striped bass all boiling -- it was into the millions and millions of pounds of stripers. I just stood there in the boat looking at them. Over a hundred acres of them. Down in Massachusetts, they stopped the net fishermen over 40 years ago and now they're still

hollering that conservation is needed. So they can't blame the net fishermen for the depletion of striped bass.

JM: Who do you think is to blame, or is there anyone to blame, or is there depletion?

GM: Well, two years ago when the law was 24 inches, I set two nets -- the year I took the National Marine Fishery Service out. That fall, I estimated I released 175,000 pounds of striped bass. In the whole lifetime of the Mendonsa family -- setting traps -- the Mendonsa family never caught that many striped bass in one year. This was '85. Last year, I only set the one net, and I figure I released around 30,000 pounds, that was all tagged. And if I had set the two nets last fall, I know there would've been a lot more fish.

JM: You said that when you proposed that no one be allowed to take striped bass --

GM: The law was that no one could have a striped bass in their possession. The reason that it was done that way was - we knew we was going to lose the battle -- the commercial guys. It was getting to the point that if we was going to lose the battle, we was going to drag the sports fishermen down the drain with us. The sports fisherman could still go out there and

fish. If he was caught catching a striped bass, he could say, "Look, I'm bluefishing. I can't tell a striped bass not to bite my hook." And if a conservation officer caught a rod and reel fisherman with a striped bass, he could say, "I caught this in Massachusetts or I caught it in Connecticut."

JM: Yes, or somebody gave it to me. . .

GM: Yes. So when we set the regulation that you couldn't have a striped bass in your possession, they didn't expect that. They knew that they were burnt. Boy, there was some excitement up there for about a year after until that was overturned. And of course, it was overturned after we were all found in conflict. When we were all found in conflict, then the sports fishermen on the Council reversed that regulation. The law now is that you can take one striped bass per person of over 33 inches. Again, they're taking the big female. And the Board of Health in the state of Rhode Island come out and said that the striped bass has a high PCB count -- they're not fit for human consumption. Therefore, there is no sale of striped bass in the state of Rhode Island. But the striped bass caught in Massachusetts is allowed to be sold.

JM: I guess they get cleaned up [chuckle] when they swim over the state line.

GM: [Chuckle]. Yes. The Board of Health in Rhode Island -- they set no sale of striped bass to keep the contaminated fish from coming in from other states -- which is a lot of bologna. [Laughs]. As a matter of fact, a few years ago, we had about 45,000 pounds of bonitas in the freezer -- over in New Bedford. The Food and Drug Administration come down the wharf and they said to me, "We're going over to the freezer and we're going to test your fish for mercury count." This was when the problem with the swordfish and the mercury [happened]. So they went over and they tested the bonita and they come back, and they said to me, "The bonitas have a high mercury count. You cannot put them on the market." And right there, the very moment that they come back and told me this, we're unloading bonitas off the boat, and we're selling them. So I said to the Food and Drug Administration, "You can stop me from putting those bonitas on the market, but I'm going to eat them -- I'm going to go over there and take bonitas and I'm going to eat them." He looked at me. I said, "If any of my friends want to eat bonitas, I'll give bonitas to my

friends. But I won't sell them." So what did they do? They went back over to the freezer and they seized the 45,000 pounds of bonitas. And we would continue to catch bonitas and sell bonitas. Then finally they went over there, they got the bonitas out of the freezer, they dug a hole in the ground with a bulldozer and they buried the bonitas. Ever since that day, we've been catching bonitas and selling bonitas -- and they buried $25,000 worth of fish on me that we never got a penny for. Ain't that something? Then they come down the wharf a year later and they said to me, "Mr. Mendonsa, you've got some bluefish there. We want to test bluefish." I said, "Those bluefish have already been sold." Then the three of them went off. One Saturday they come back to me and the man says, "We'll pay for those bluefish." I said, "You ain't getting nothing off this wharf. Furthermore, get the hell off the wharf." And I did -- I kicked them off the wharf. And this is the whole problem now with this PCB in striped bass. It's a lot of bologna. Like last fall, now, over Block Island in November, they caught a lot of big striped bass -- 40, 50, 60 pounders. They slaughter them over there.

JM: They call them cows?

GM: Yes. They're all the big female fish. These fish are only a matter of about 4 months away from spawning. Every one of them is carrying probably 4, 5 million eggs. Well now the law says you can take one fish. So they go over to Block Island and they fish over there. There's a lot of fishermen over there from up and down the coast -- Connecticut, New Jersey, Maine, Massachusetts --

JM: Sport fishermen or commercial?

GM: Rod and reel -- they're commercial sports fishermen.

JM: Yes, they sell a lot of their --

GM: They sell them all. So they go over there. Last fall, they're over there. Now they got one fish over 33 inches, which is legal. One individual can go over there and catch four, five fish -- big fish or ten fish -- and all he has to do is put a tag on it with a phony name and ship it across on the ferry boat. The state knows this is happening and they can't do nothing about it. I went to the last Council meeting and they said that law is a problem of the Board of Health -- the PCB law. You can't sell them. But here's fish coming over on the ferry boat. They all got tags on them,

probably phony names of each individual -- with one name per fish so they won't get caught. That's how they're doing it. Probably when they come over on their own car, they carry one fish in their car. This is going to lead to an explosion, probably the next Council.

JM: Who are they selling them to?

GM: Oh, they're being shipped out of the state. Connecticut's got a law -- well they did a few years ago. I don't know what's happening now since I've been off the Council, but when I was on the Council, the Connecticut law was that no striped bass caught in the State of Connecticut could be sold in Connecticut. But any striped bass caught in any other state could be sold in Connecticut.

JM: [Chuckle]. That's ridiculous. That must be so frustating.

GM: Oh yes. Drives you up a wall. So anyway, the Department, they're after us again to get involved in another tagging program this coming fall. I can make it bigger by setting more nets. If they can make some money available, I think we're going to get involved again. I think they were very, very happy with it.

JM: I want to come back to all of this and bring it into a lot of other things we're going to talk

about, but let's go back now. I want to ask you one question about just before the war when so many of the fish were being wiped out offshore. How were they catching those?

GM: Just before the war, the pressure that was being put on by the American fishermen would never hurt a thing out there. There was no comparison to the pressure that's being put on today, even by the American fishermen. Today you got bigger boats and there's more boats, but before the war, they were taking just a very small percentage of the fish. I don't know whether I mentioned this in the interview the other day or not, but during the war, the German submarines were out there and they would go alongside the American fishermen and take their diesel fuel and take their provisions. The American fishermen got scared. They were afraid that the German subs might start sinking them, so there was very little fishing done for about four, five years during the war years. After the war -- and that's when I come back and really got involved with Tallman and Mack -- it was unbelievable, the fish. The nets were full of fish. There was so much fish you couldn't sell them. You couldn't even handle them all. But I say that those four, five

years really built up the fish stocks out there.

JM: What fishing methods were they using offshore?

GM: They were using what they call dragging -- same thing you got today.

JM: Was that an otter trawl?

GM: Yes, that's an otter trawl. But of course, it was smaller nets and smaller boats.

JM: How big were the boats?

GM: They were mostly sixty, seventy footers. The boats you got now, even though they may be say eighty feet, ninety feet long -- it sounds like they're only about fifteen, twenty feet longer, but they're about triple the boat. You know, the beam and the power and the whole bit.

JM: So in 1946, your family bought Tallman and Mack.

GM: Yes, I got out of the Navy. My other brother that was in the Navy got out before I did. I come back to Newport just before Christmas of '45.

JM: How did you happen to go into the Navy? You'd been in the Merchant Marine?

GM: No, I was only in the Maritime Service. There was a Maritime Service School down in New York. I was 17.

JM: Where was that?

GM: On Hoffman Island. It was just off of Staten Island. This was before the war. I got involved with couple of my buddies here in Newport. We all had screwy ideas, I guess [chuckle]. We only lasted there a few months. It was called a Maritime Service, but it wasn't a government service, so they couldn't make an enlistment stick. We walked away from it after two or three months. Then we come back to Newport. It was shortly after that, the war broke out. I didn't have to go in the service -- I was fishing. Farmers and fishermen were exempt from going in the service. But after a while, I got fed up, and I said, "I'm going." And I went. I'm not a bit sorry. I'm glad I did go, to tell you the truth. My brother come home probably somewhere in October, November of '45. Then my other brother, the oldest one that had been away in Connecticut all these years, come back that fall. Then I come home just before Christmas and Tallman and Mack was up for sale. That was right in our line of work. I went to Boston to get discharged. I got discharged, I think it was the 5th of January of '46. The 10th of January, we bought Tallman and Mack. I was only out of the Navy four days when we bought Tallman and Mack with

the Bucolos.

JM: How did you get together with the Bucolos?

GM: The Bucolos used to come to Newport and buy fish. They used to buy from the trap companies in the Newport and Sakonnet area and they used to take a lot of fish into Boston. They were buyers and sellers.

JM: Where were they from?

GM: They were from Bristol, Rhode Island. We got involved with them. I remember the Bucolos, after a while, were kind of leery about buying into it.

JM: How come?

GM: Well, they were never involved in the fishery end of it. They were buyers and sellers. I remember one night, we went to Tallman's house. We said to Tallman that we thought the deal was going to fall through. You know we didn't think . . . the way the Bucolos sounded. . . We told Tallman that we wanted to get involved in Tallman and Mack. The people that he had working for him were in their seventies -- the important people. He had trouble that year, running the company with the help he had. Also, they feared there was going to be hard times now that the war was over. Because they did have a lot of hard times for years and

years and they were very successful during the war years. They figured, now's the time to get out. We told Tallman that if we could get 25% of the company, we'd run it. Tallman said, no -- he wouldn't go for that. J. T. was involved and --

JM: J. T. O'Connell?

GM: Yes, he had 25% of Tallman and Mack. Even when we bought the company, J. T. pleaded with us to let him have one share just so he wouldn't say that he was completely out of it. For years afterwards -- well, we turned that company right around. They had a lot of junk down there. My brothers and I put in some sweat down there. I met J. T. a few times. He said, "Tallman always said that if he could've got the Mendonsas, he never would've sold the place." I didn't say anything. Finally, I don't know if it was at J. T.'s sister's wake or Tallman's wake -- I'm talking with J. T. and he said the same thing. He said, "You guys did a hell of a job with that place. Tallman always said that if he could've got you guys, he never would've sold it." Then I told J. T. Boy, was he hot. I said, "Now that Mr. Tallman is dead . . . we offered a deal to Mr. Tallman." J. T. just stood there looking at

me.

JM: Anything with money attached to it, he --

GM: No. That was one of the first companies J. T. owned, or was part of. At that time, I guess, J. T. wouldn't sell anything. He'd buy and keep, but he'd never sell anything. As a matter of fact, that whole gang -- Tallman and John F. Mack and J. T. -- they were in a lot of things in Newport. They were in Peckham Coal Company together, they were in the Viking, I know, and I guess even the Sakonnet River Trap Company (George Lewis' outfit). They were all stockholders in all those things. They were involved in everything together. They must have been a chummy group.

JM: Yes, they must have been. What was included in the sale?

[End of side two, tape two.]

GM: In the sale of Tallman and Mack was the Spring Wharf. They had two boats there. One boat was named the Chester B. Tallman and the other one was the Vigilant.

JM: Were they steam?

GM: One was steam. The Vigilant was a steam boat. She was built in 1894, so she was old. They had what they called Festival Field out on Connell Highway. There was 32 acres of land

there that belonged to the company. So that was it -- the wharf and the land out there, the nets, the fishing locations.

JM: That were all licensed.

GM: Yes, they were all licensed by the state [the fishing locations].

JM: What was the Chester B. Tallman? Was that a diesel boat?

GM: Yes, she was a diesel boat named after Cliff's father. As a matter of fact, when Cliff started getting older, I used to ride Cliff. I said, "Cliff, (he used to look at the Chester B. and he was kind of proud) if you want a boat named Clifton Tallman, you'd better start putting it in the will." He used to think about it, but he never did do it. [Laughs]. I used to work at it but he never went for it.

JM: What was he like?

GM: Cliff was a tall thin man. He was a good looking man -- good shape for a man his age. I remember up in the galley where we used to feed the crew, there was a rafter that went right across the galley. Cliff stood about six feet tall. This rafter -- you could walk under it and it wouldn't hit your head. They used to hang pitchers up there. They were stainless steel coffee pitchers or milk pitchers. Cliff

had to be in his sixties -- he could kick the pitcher off the nail and catch it. For a man that age, it was pretty good -- kicking over six feet high. He was the type of a guy that sometimes you felt like telling him where to go. But if you ever needed anything -- he was the type of a guy that if you were involved with a traffic violation or problem up the City Hall or the police station, or anything like that, he'd go right to bat. He loved that. He loved to get involved with people and use his influence. Like our crew down there -- they were always in some kind of trouble and he could get everybody off the hook. He must've been quite a lover. . . I better not say this. . . [Laughs].

JM: [Laughs]. Oh really? Don't stop at the good part.

GM: [Laughs]. I won't mention any names, but I guess he and his wife never had any family. There's a few offspring around town that were Tallman's offspring. As a matter of fact, I'd say less than ten years ago, a girl showed up down the wharf. She was about my age. She said to me, "I understand you knew Mr. Tallman." I says, "Yes, I knew Mr. Tallman." And she says, "I'm from Ohio. My husband is

stationed here at the Navy base. I just found out recently that Tallman was my father." I said, "Geez, another one." [Laughs]. (I said to myself.) She says, "I'm trying to find out who my mother was. All I know was that I was born in Providence." I said, "I don't know." I mentioned to her a few people that were still alive at that time -- older people that might be able to help her. She was really interested in trying to find out. She said, "I know Mr. Tallman is dead." I told her that Mr. Tallman had a nephew. He was up in New Hampshire or Maine somewhere. She said that she had already met this guy -- the nephew. He didn't know anything, [she] couldn't get any information out of [him]. I did steer her to a few people, and she left her name and the whole bit with me if I ever dug up anything about who her mother might be. So Mr. Tallman was a rascal, I guess. [Laughs].

JM: When you bought the company, did the crew come with it?

GM: No. I think the first year we fished there, there was maybe four or five guys that were there during Tallman's time that fished with us in 1946. A couple of guys were the riggers. Of course, Captain Joe Costa was well in his

seventies. He was a smart fisherman, good fisherman.

JM: Who was he?

GM: He came from down around Goodwin St. Down where D. J. Sullivan is. He lived down that area. Capt. Joe Costa had about five sons. Every one of them is older than me. Most of the sons have died off. As a matter of fact, I guess there's only one in Newport today. That's Freddy Costa. He fished [for] Tallman and Mack. He ran the traps for Tallman and Mack for years and years.

JM: What was the fishing like after the war?

GM: After the war, there was a lot of fish. There was no money for fish. I can remember sending a hundred pounds of fish to New York for like \$4.00. And \$4.00 is 4 cents a pound -- that's a hundred pounds of fish. The box alone at that time was close to a dollar. You paid for the box. The truck into New York was about another dollar. So on \$4.00 -- by the time you paid for the box and ice and freight -- I can remember sending a hundred pounds of fish to New York and getting fifty cents back.

JM: Oh my God.

GM: There was absolutely no prices.

JM: Were people not eating fish?

GM: No, not like today. I'm a Catholic, but when the Pope come out and said we could eat meat on Fridays, we thought that was the end of everything. But from then on it went the other way. People started consuming fish. In recent years, too, the foreigners that came to this country were big fish eaters over there in the old country. I think they educated the Americans about fish. Another factor, too, was maybe twenty-five years ago when we wasn't happy with the Fulton Fish Market, we started sending fish down south, down to North Carolina and Virginia, sending it direct -- bypassing New York. Everything used to go through New York and they used to send it down south. That's when we found out that the biggest consumers of scup were the colored people.

JM: Really?

GM: Even the truck drivers that go down south said, "Geez, you take a truckload of fish down south and you get in the middle of those colored people -- Jesus Christ, they'd empty the whole truck." It was just about that time, I guess, that the standard of living for the colored people was improving when they had a few bucks in their pocket. They'd start buying those porgies -- they loved those porgies. That was a

turning point -- when we found out that the colored people were the big buyers of scup.

JM: Is that where the Fulton Fish Market had been sending them?

GM: They were sending them down there.

JM: What was bad about Fulton Fish Market?

GM: Fulton Fish Market was probably the crookedest operation in this country. You go in there with a truckload of fish and you back up. I forget what the rate is now, but they charge you so much for unloading every box of fish off that truck. The truck driver you have down there -- he'd just better keep his mouth shut. Because they'd go into the truck. The people that you're shipping to, they're standing right there and they're watching all the fish come off the truck. And those unloaders unload the truck and when they see fish of value, they'll open up a box and they'll pull a couple of pounds out of every box. They have their own boxes there. They're packing them [in] their own boxes. When they unload that truck, if they receive say two hundred boxes of your fish, they'll still unload two hundred, but they'll walk off there with half a dozen or ten boxes of fish that they've connived. The guy that's receiving your fish, can't say nothing

because the next day if any fish comes in there, his fish will never get unloaded. Not only that, if he talks too much, he'll float down the Hudson. I can remember years ago I read an article where they estimated at the Fulton Fish Market there's twenty million dollars a year stolen. That's a tough gang there. As a matter of fact, years afterwards, the city of New York built a new market. They built it in Manhattan around Yankee Stadium up there where the produce market is. I guess the idea was to keep all these trucks from going down through New York City all the way down to the southern end to the Fulton Market. Those trucks could come into the northern end of the City and unload all their fish and produce without hitting all that traffic. They built a big beautiful market. After it was all built and ready, do you know that the racketeers in the city of New York would not allow that market to be opened? It never did open. That shows you the power they had. [Chuckle].

JM: How many millions did it cost?

GM: I don't know, but it was a big, beautiful market -- they had a beautiful system there. Another thing, too, is in New York, we used to send fish in barrels with water for certain

species -- delicate fish. You'd put them in barrels and you'd put a lot of water so the fish would float.

JM: What are the delicate ones?

GM: Well, like mackerel and squid and butterfish. You wouldn't pack them dry like you do in a box because of the weight -- they'd bust. The quality of the fish was better when it was put in water and ice. These fish would come in these wooden barrels and were sold around the city. These guys would collect all those barrels after they were used. Then they'd sell them back to us. Years afterwards we got some plastic barrels. We didn't have any wooden ones, so we put fish in plastic barrels and we shipped it down to New York. We very seldom did this, but the fish that we had this time -- we figured we better do it this way. We'd gotten into all boxes. So the fish went down in barrels and they were unloading it off the truck and they saw the plastic barrels. The truck driver was standing there watching them and they'd roll the barrel back to the back of the truck and they'd let it drop from the back of the truck onto the cement pavement. When the barrel come down with the weight of fish and water, the barrel just split. There was

fish all over the pavement. And they'd roll another barrel back and do the same thing. The truck driver said to them, "Look, you guys are busting all the barrels. I'll take them off if they're coming off the truck hard." They said, "Will you get the hell out of the way, we'll unload this truck." The whole thing was they sent us a message. I mean that was sending us a message. Do not send plastic barrels down here because we're in the wooden barrel business. That's what the message was. [Chuckle]. So that was the end.

JM: You can't get clearer than that.

GM: Oh they're tough.

JM: Do you still use them?

GM: No, we put everything in boxes today. Those wooden barrels -- I don't think you can get them anymore. They used to come from Europe with salted herring and that kind of stuff.

JM: Certain countries had to fish further from home with all the new technology after the war. Did that hurt you -- the way they were fishing so intensively on the Georges Bank?

GM: The fish that was caught on Georges Bank didn't hurt my type of fishery. Well, it did hurt in the codfish -- we don't see codfish anymore. We used to catch codfish in November. The

codfish we caught used to migrate south coming from way off the coast of Maine and off of Georges. They'd come down this way in the fall of the year. The codfish got depleted. Now we don't even fish for cod in November. I could probably eat all the codfish that we could catch now.

JM: And how much did you catch before?

GM: In November, we used to catch twenty, thirty, thirty-five thousand pounds a day. We used to catch a lot of cod. But then, that was after the war when those five years built up the stocks. We had a period there for about fifteen years that in the fall of the year we used to catch a lot of fish and that was part of it. The fish that we catch is all fish that migrates. In the winter months, the fish will spend most of the time in the Gulf Stream down south. The waters in the Gulf Stream are warm. The fish will go off into the Gulf Stream and go down deep into those warm waters. That's where they spend the winters. Then in March, when it starts warming up, the fish will come up out of the Gulf Stream and migrate north along the coast. The biggest percentage of these fish will migrate all the way up here, but most of them don't go beyond Cape Cod.

They come up to this area. Those early years, those foreigners were working mostly on Georges which hurt us in the fall of the year on the cod. But the other species -- the scup, the sea bass, the squid, the mackerel, the butterfish, bluefish -- all these species come from the south. Maybe a few bluefish and the mackerel will go beyond the Cape. They'll go all the way to Maine. But the scup and the squid and all those species will stay right in this area. They'll spawn here and feed here and then in the fall of the year they'll migrate and go back south again. So they didn't hurt us as far as the southern fish goes until later years. Then they finally started fishing on these other species. You can see where the fish is down some.

JM: There was a lot of industrial growth around here at that time. Did that effect you at all? Runoffs into the estuaries and places where some of those fish spawned?

GM: I don't know. I don't think industry is hurting the waters here in Rhode Island. I think that's what you mean -- pollution. One of the biggest problems in pollution is the housewife. All the dyes and detergents the housewife is putting into Narragansett Bay is

worse than what industry is doing. But of course, they can't pick on the housewife because the housewife is where the vote is. So they pick on industry. Like the sewage -- of course it's not nice to see sewage in the Bay, but --

JM: Do you see it in the Bay?

GM: Up where the sewage plant is that dumps out in the Bay there -- most of that sewage is not nice looking. It's not nice to go into the Bay, but I say that that stuff is not as bad as the detergents and chemicals and the dyes the housewife uses. All those products that my mother had used to get our clothes clean, but it was nowheres near as strong as the stuff they got today. I think if they put some regulations on those things, it would be a lot better for the Bay and the housewife could still do her housework without having any problem.

JM: Were there any regulations at that time about catching small fish or spawning fish? Did people have a concern or awareness about the future?

GM: The only fish that had regulation was striped bass. There was a sixteen inch minimum. There's always been a regulation on bass. Of

course, there was always the regulations on lobsters. When I was on the Council, of course, the regulation on lobsters at the time, I think, was three and a sixteenth [3 1/16] between the eye socket and the shell. They may start talking about increasing the measure on the lobsters. I voted to increase the lobster measure. I got hell about that from all the loberstermen. But anyway [chuckle], I used to go lobstering years ago -- my brothers and I. I can remember just going fifteen or twenty minutes from the dock here. One year we had a hundred and eighty traps out there. Out of those hundred and eighty traps, the most we had in one day was nine hundred and thirty pounds of lobsters. As a matter of fact, that one week with those same hundred and eighty traps, we caught five thousand pounds. You can't do that today. I think if my brothers and I went at it we could still catch a few lobsters.

JM: Did you pull them all up by hand?

GM: Oh no. It's all winches. Today, these lobstermen, they're going offshore maybe a hundred miles to get that kind of lobster. All those years, these draggers used to come from offshore and you could get a lot of big lobsters that you could buy for fifteen cents a

pound. The big lobsters had no value. You don't see those big lobsters anymore. After the war up until 1970, for a period of roughly twenty years, there probably was about twenty boats that were working on the lobsters -- draggers -- otter trawls. They were coming in with five, six thousand pounds of lobsters, ten thousand pounds a trip.

JM: They trawled the bottom for them?

GM: Yes. They weren't caught with lobster traps. This was the same net they use for catching fish -- the draggers. For a period of twenty years, these guys were catching lobsters and I'd say that close to twenty-five, thirty percent of these lobsters were egg-bearing lobsters. Now I'm talking against the fish industry. This is not nice. These fishermen were coming into Newport and unloading these lobsters, and like I said, twenty-five percent were egg-bearing. They were brushing the eggs off which was illegal. Today you're feeling it. You can go ten, fifteen years doing something bad to the industry, but it won't be felt for a good ten or fifteen years because you're cutting down on the numbers that are reproducing. When the numbers are cut away back, then you feel it. That's what happened

to the lobster industry -- it was the fishermen. But this was not done by Rhode Island fishermen. It was done by Massachusetts men out of New Bedford. When I was on the Council, they started talking about increasing the lobster measure. We increased it a thirty-second of an inch for a period of three or four years -- built it up just a fraction until they got it up to its present size. The reason I voted to increase the lobster measure, which had probably been a regulation for fifty years or more, was the fact that if a lobsterman caught a lobster early in the season and it was legal at that measure at that time -- with that new increase, that lobster that just missed the measure, he'd have to return back. Now he felt bad about throwing it back because of the new increase in the measure, but when that lobster would shed in June, that lobster would increase three quarters of an inch in size. It would increase probably ten to fifteen percent in weight. So now, if I return a lobster months later in that same year, you'd catch it or I'd catch it. And if that lobster would sell for a dollar, now we're getting maybe a dollar fifteen or a dollar twenty for it because of the increase in size. I'd catch some that you

threw back or you'd catch the ones I threw back, but it would average out. Another factor was when these lobsters would shed in June -- lobsters at that size would shed maybe twice a year. They would increase maybe ten or fifteen percent in weight each time they shed. That's when the females become fertile -- when they shed. They figured about ten to fifteen percent at that size would reproduce. So I felt sometime during the year I would give that lobster that break of increasing in size. Fifteen percent would have the chance of reproducing and then I'd catch that lobster. I felt that the industry, the guys, wouldn't lose anything and that's why I voted for it. When I did vote for it, I had a son and two nephews and three other men that were working for me that were lobstering. The following morning I come down and I told them what I did. So on the Council, the conflict -- the way they shafted me -- they thought I was not concerned about conservation, that I was being greedy. But I told them that one, too, about the lobster measure. But that didn't help either.

JM: Too bad they don't have more people who stand up for what they really think.

GM: Yes, there'll be an explosion one of these