

Interview with Kevin Norton [KN]

Occupation: Fisherman

Port Community: Scituate, MA

Interviewer: Angela Wilson

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Catch Share Oral Histories Project – NOAA Fisheries

Logger/Transcriber: Elizabeth Wetterhahn

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Scituate, MA

Interview

[00:00]

AW: Alright, for the record, this is Angela Wilson. I am here with Kevin Norton in Scituate, MA on February 16, 2012. If you could just state for the record your name and address?

KN: Kevin Norton. 8 Sangay Lane, Scituate, MA, 02066.

AW: And your homeport?

KN: Scituate, MA.

AW: And your vessel name?

KN: *Yankee Rose*.

AW: Are you in the sector or common pool?

KN: Sector.

AW: And you're in Sector 10, is that correct?

KN: Sector 10.

AW: And if you don't mind me asking, how old are you?

KN: 42.

AW: 42. To begin, can you just tell us a little bit about yourself and your family? Where you're from, how long you've been here, if you have kids or a wife, your educational background, how long you've been fishing... that sort of thing?

KN: I live here in Scituate. I've been here now for... I grew up here and I left for a few years. About fifteen years. I've been fishing full-time now for fourteen years. I fished as a kid, and then I left because there was no work. That was when things were slow. And then I started fishing again about fourteen years ago full-time on the *Yankee Rose*. That was under the Days at Sea program. I went to Scituate High School and that's pretty much my educational background. I have four children and I am now currently divorced.

AW: And so you started fishing when you were in high school?

KN: Yeah. Well, even earlier than high school. I was offshore lobstering when I was 16, 17, 18. Then I worked on a few different crab fish boats. A few herring boats.

AW: And does that mean that your family fished?

KN: No.

AW: So your dad or any of your family never fished?

KN: No. I didn't have any history....

AW: So you're the rogue fisherman?

KN: Oh yeah, the rogue fisherman. I moved out here from the city so....

AW: And what type of fishing have you done?

KN: Mainly groundfishing on a dragger.

AW: Groundfishing on a dragger?

KN: Yeah. 90-95 percent of it.

AW: That's about it?

KN: Yeah, pretty much.

AW: Except for the offshore lobstering when you were younger?

KN: Offshore lobstering a little bit.

AW: A way to break into it?

KN: A way to break into it, right.

AW: And what areas do you fish in?

KN: I'm fishing basically, in the last 14 years, primarily just the Gulf of Maine.

AW: Gulf of Maine?

KN: Yeah.

AW: And do you hold any positions within the sector? Treasurer, Secretary?

KN: I don't.

AW: You don't, okay. Has that changed at all? Were you more involved before sectors started?

KN: I was. First year... well, I didn't actually take issue with it. The first year I did go to a lot of meetings. I was involved a lot.

AW: The first year sectors started?

KN: The first year sectors started. And I'll be honest, this year... I don't even go to meetings anymore. I'm just... I'm disgusted. I'm saddened. It's a joke. It's just a complete joke. You want a little background... last year when sectors started, and I have four children, I have to work, I have to work a lot. And I decided at the beginning that what I [would] do... a few boats in Scituate tied up... I leased all their quota, and I went fishing for the year. Then I came... one guy, I paid him 90 grand for his quota. And then I bought the quota from the *Silver Rose* and I basically just went and I just put my head down and went fishing. And by the time it was all said and done, between paying for the fish, the price of fuel, the assumed discard rate, the gut weight, all the crazy little things that they threw in there... I pretty much worked for free, you know? One thing I lost... I went down to about 150 pounds, from stress alone. I mean....

[04:13]

AW: 150 pounds of....

KN: I lost about 40 pounds in....

AW: Oh, you lost...?

KN: Personally, yeah... I mean... I wasn't sleeping. It was horrible. Last year was horrible.

AW: And that was the first year of sectors?

KN: Yeah. I mean, I was basically fishing for free. A few times we pulled checks out of it, but the last two months of fishing... me and my stern man, my stern man, he doesn't have kids, but he has a mortgage. We work for free and... we had bought fish that we had to catch and, you know... it all... just kind of turned into, I thought it turned into a game. The fish buyers knew that we had to land a certain amount of fish by the end of the season, or we'd lose it... so they dropped the prices.

AW: Really?

KN: I mean, we were getting... if you were to look back to the year before sectors started... yellowtail flounders in February, March... they're a \$2 item.

AW: Yeah.

KN: We were getting 60 cents for them.

AW: And how much were you paying for them... the fish... like \$1?

KN: I paid 70 cents.

AW: So you were actually losing money...?

KN: I was losing, I was losing money, yeah. We were doing other things like cutting skate wings and stuff that were groundfish items. Or even... but we were still putting in 12-14 hour days for nothing, you know? It was my own fault that I... it wasn't my own fault... I can't say it's my own fault. I knew the amount of fish that I was given from NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service)... I couldn't make a living on it and so I thought it was a good idea for... since so many people had so little fish... let one boat get it and, you know... a lot of money but, they aren't giving us enough fish to make any kind of a business plan.

AW: So how much were you allocated?

KN: The *Yankee Rose* was allocated about 25,000 pounds a year.

AW: Okay. Everything combined?

KN: Codfish, yeah... everything combined.

[06:06]

AW: Okay.

KN: We were doing about 100,000 pounds a year. And it was still a part-time job... it was before sectors started. You know, 800 pounds a day. You could fish the yellows and that was

it. We were doing about 100,000 pounds a year. They dropped us down to 25 [thousand pounds].

AW: And how long had the *Yankee Rose* been fishing 100,000 pounds in a year?

KN: Well, probably in the last, 6 or 7 years. You've got to remember, the quota system around here... at one point, we were down to 30 pounds of cod a day.

AW: Right.

KN: And then we went up to 800 pounds of cod a day, 250 of yellows... and blackbacks were unlimited, grey sole was unlimited, haddock was unlimited, and we were able to put some fish on that boat, you know? Now, I mean, in the summertime, grey sole on the water, I think its 1,700 pounds. That's 2 days of fishing for the summer. That's the problem now is... boats staying tied up for 3 months at a time, 4 months at a time.

AW: So what do you now to compensate?

KN: I'm working, doing some carpentry work.

AW: Doing on land or...?

KN: On land. I can't... there's nothing I can do. I'm probably, I'm probably working 9 months of a year on land now and 3 months, maybe 3 months... I don't even know if it's that much... at sea.

AW: And before quotas?

KN: It was probably half and half. You know, we had Days at Sea program. At least with the Days at Sea program we were able to make a living. It wasn't a great living.... In the Days at Sea program, I always understood that it was set up because we were rebuilding the stocks. You know, we were giving up a lot for a future in the Gulf of Maine and what's happened is we did give up a lot. We went down to very small amounts of quota. I know I did scientific research on the boat. It was 3 days a month... a couple different companies. We just completely laid off the groundfish. And what's happened now this year? We laid off the groundfish 'til the stocks were 100 percent rebuilt, I don't care what scientific work says. You couldn't throw that net over 2 years ago for more than 5 minutes and fill it with codfish. Then you'd move over and fill it with some yellowtails and come home. Now what's happened in this whole sector program... management program is all these big boats being kept out of the Gulf of Maine because it was unaffordable for them to fish here. You couldn't have a 100 foot dragger on the Middle Bank getting 800 pounds a day. But now you can, they can catch as much as they want.

AW: 'Cause they have big quotas?

KN: They have big quotas 'cause, you know... and they've leased a lot of quota and they have the money behind them to do it. I mean, they weren't stopped like we were. We were stopped for years.

AW: So do you feel like you guys sort of gave up fishing certain species and... knowing that in the future, you would be able to, it would be rebuilt and then now that it's rebuilt you can't?

KN: Now that it's rebuilt? It's wiped out.

AW: It's wiped out again?

KN: Yeah, and overnight. In a matter of... one season this year. The big boats have moved in, and it's wiped out. Hopefully it's not for good. Hopefully, hopefully they didn't do 10 years worth of damage.

AW: In one season.

KN: In one season. But they might have. Very well could have.

[09:13]

AW: Because before that, it was all small, small local boats.

KN: Small local boats. There was the big fleet out of Gloucester and another big fleet out of Scituate. But we didn't have... you know, I'd say we had 3 gillnetters and 4 draggers that were full-time boats. You know, 7 or 8 boats. It had definitely already gotten smaller than what it was 10 years ago, 15 years ago. But now? Now it's a joke. I don't think there's one guy in Scituate right now that can survive another year of this. I really don't. There are a few people that are probably... that are using their own money and that are going to have to... are going to see what happens. But if you didn't... everyone's sitting down and doing their taxes and looking at their books this year. And there isn't one person that can keep a crew and can pull a paycheck out of it. There's nobody.

AW: So how has it hit your pocket book?

KN: Oh I... we were laughing last year and the year before, saying it was probably going to be a part-time job and now its... I mean. I tell you... I love fishing. I love being on a boat. I don't even want to go. I mean, you have to deal with the observers. You have to deal with... the observers aren't as bad as everybody says they are. They aren't. I've had a few minor issues with observers, but you have to realize that, you know, like I had one a few weeks ago. Let's call it 10 days ago. We steamed out, I steamed outside here, I tried a tow, there was no fish because it's been wiped out. Even 7 miles outside of Scituate, we had a dozen boats that were 80 foot boats.

They've wiped out this whole area inside. And that's an area where all of us small boats, on windy days, which a lot of the winter is... we can't go that far. It's gone, it's wiped out. There isn't a fish there. So I left there, steamed up to the Middle Bank. As soon as I got a few miles from Middle Bank, I could see on the radar all the big targets. And all the big boats moved up there. So they've been there for, I don't know, like Thanksgiving to like January. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They just keep rotating in and out. There's a dozen big boats there. It's just... you know. There's only a certain amount of water inside here that you can tow, towed all day for 400 pounds.

AW: All day?

KN: All day.

AW: 400 pounds?

KN: 400 pounds. And the other side of it too is the bigger boats use larger gear. They're using roller gear. And they're dragging rocks everywhere. So all these safe areas where we were fishing, there's another boat the *Scarlet Anne* in Scituate... I mean, destroys net 4 days in a row.

AW: Because of rocks that weren't there before?

KN: Not there. I mean, we know the bottom out there, you know? The big boats, they don't... I mean, the amount of horsepower they have, the amount of gear that they have, they just drag stuff everywhere. We haven't seen those guys before in here. It's unaffordable for them to be here.

[12:18]

AW: And that way, it sort of allowed the stocks here to be plentiful?

KN: Yeah.

AW: Yeah.

KN: Yeah.

AW: And it was sustainable?

KN: It was sustainable. I mean, every once in awhile you'd have a big boat pop into the bay. But they would do a tow and they'd have so much fish that they'd have to leave. There was a 4,000 pound trip limit. They couldn't stay. And you know, there's also been a lot of games were played too... a big boat without an observer. This has always been an issue, but they can come into the Gulf of Maine, put 30 to 40,000 cod on... steam 15 miles to the southeast, now its

Georges Bank cod. I mean, so all that fish in the Gulf of Maine isn't even being classified as Gulf of Maine fish, you know?

AW: So they're classifying their fish as...?

KN: They're jumping all over the place, you know? I mean, I've seen them do it. I've watched them do it. I've seen them do a few tows inside and steam right to the southeast, you know? And it's, they left... with this whole sector thing, they left too many open doors for larger boats to just make a fortune. I mean, these guys aren't burning any fuel. They're going out of Boston and Gloucester and they're steaming to the Middle Bank, 2 hours, compared to their 24 hour steam to Georges. And they're catching, you know, five times as much fish and they're right there and they're just banging back and forth. You know, at 800 pounds a day, you could have every boat, all the boats in Scituate go out in the bay. And everybody got their 800 pounds. You're looking at at least 5 to 6,000 pounds of fish. These guys are doing that every 15 minutes.

AW: Do you think that right now people could go out and get 800 pounds?

KN: No. I don't. Steve's boat was just out for almost 20 hours the day before and they got 1,000 pounds. But they didn't have their 800 cod.

AW: Now do you suppose they'll land here?

KN: No, they'll land in Gloucester. A few of them will land in P-town (Provincetown).

AW: Yeah.

KN: They're New Bedford boats. Boston boats are in and out of Boston. Those guys very rarely ever fished inside. Like I said, the problem is, we're the ones who suffered. Those guys didn't suffer. You know, times were bad around here and they were offshore. And now all of a sudden it's rebuilt inside and it's wide open for them to come in and just wipe it out.

AW: 'Cause they've got their fishing history...?

KN: They've got their fishing history, you know, they have the money to buy quota when they go over.

AW: So are these boats large corporate run boats or are they...?

KN: I don't know.

AW: ... individually run?

KN: Probably, they're individually owned. I mean, on one point I don't blame anybody jumping on it and making some money in the fishing industry. It's been a lot, it's been... there's been a lot of ideas for a lot of people. So, you know, when I first started seeing them, like I said to myself, "Well, you know what, they have as much right to be here as we do. They have federal permits, they can be here." But now after seeing, just after a month, what's happened.... I mean, it's crazy. You know, I was going out here; we were leaving at 5:30 in the morning. We were going out and doing one tow. We were picking up probably around 2,000 pounds of cod and some yellows, and come home. And we were doing that day after day. Those guys never left. They were just fishing 24 hours a day. Now, I'm on a small boat and I'm doing 2,000 pounds in a 15-20 minute tow and going home. And we leave, come home, unload, go home and go to bed, go back the next day and they're still there.

[15:48]

AW: Yeah.

KN: Day after day after day. How much fish are they putting on board? I mean, that's why it was sustainable in the Gulf of Maine, because that's what we did. We went out, got our fish, and came home. The fish got a rest. This is constant pounding on them.

AW: Now what do you think were the best years for fishing here in Scituate?

KN: In Scituate? Probably the last, the last 2-3 years before the sectors started. So... up until, what is this now '12? '12, '11, and '10 we've had sectors.

AW: Yeah.

KN: So like '08 and '09. '07, '08, and '09.

AW: Yeah?

KN: Yeah.

AW: It was pretty good?

KN: It was good.

AW: And people were making money and everything was alright?

KN: We were making money but we were still doing things. We were making money but that's when they, we started to make money on the Days at Sea program, but then they went 2 for 1 on the days. So every hour you used, they charged you two. So they dropped us down to 44 days and it was every hour with that. We went for 12 hours, they charged us for 24. We went for 24, they charged us for 2 [days]. So everything on your clock was times 2.

AW: So it was more of a 2 Days at Sea program rather than a Days at Sea program.

KN: Right. And that was the other thing about the Days at Sea program. They could shut down our boats. There wasn't, you know, there wasn't a whole lot of information. They said that there was, but there wasn't. And they told us if we didn't do, then we would be stuck in the common pool, which then there'd be no fishing.

AW: So how about sectors? Sector management?

KN: Sector management?

AW: Yeah, I mean, was that also first time doing it?

KN: Yeah, first time doing it, you've got no choice. I mean, if you didn't jump into a sector, pay the money and get into a sector, then you were going to be forced to fish in this common pool. Which they said, you know, was going to be 4 to 1 Days at Sea counting and you were only going to be allowed 250 pounds of codfish a day.

AW: Do you think that you would ever leave sectors and go back to the common pool?

KN: If it was, if the common pool was enough that you can make a day's pay and fish well, I definitely would. I'd walk away from the sectors in a minute.

AW: You would?

KN: Oh yeah. I'd get away from sectors in a minute. Like I said, I'm, you know....

AW: And have you looked into it?

KN: I've looked into and it's not, there's not enough there for me to survive. It's about the exact same.

AW: It is?

KN: It is. It's about the exact same, except that I'd be using more fuel in the common pool than the sector. At least now I can go out and take 2 or 3,000 pounds a day, compared to being stuck with whatever the limits are. I know they keep changing.

[18:16]

AW: And so in your opinion, what are the benefits to being in the sector?

KN: The benefits of being in the sector...?

AW: Yeah.

KN: ... is the fact that you're not, you're not catching big bags of codfish and having to dump them in the water. You can actually take them home. That's the one thing I like about sector fishing that I didn't like about the Days at Sea program, where you can do a 5 minute tow and have 5 or 6,000. You're not picking 800 out and dumping the rest over. It is, it is a better theory, but the problem with it is, I mean, the problem, and this is just my theory on it, the problem is the Gulf of Maine can't have this much pressure on it.

AW: And so have the sectors changed the way that you fish?

KN: The way, the way that I fish?

AW: Yeah.

KN: I think, yeah, I definitely go a lot less.

AW: You do?

KN: Yeah. I go a lot less. I mean I fished every, usually, even if I had to like lease Days at Sea and the other stuff in that old program... I mean, I fished a lot. Especially December to March, I was out every day. 4 months a year, I fished every day. And then in the summertime we put in some time. But now, maybe we're going once every 10 days.

AW: Once every 10 days?

KN: Maybe in March we'll start going a little bit more, towards the end. 'Cause what's going to... I know what's going to happen at the end is, guys in our sector are not going to catch their fish. So, that's when I'm going to... I did the same thing last year. Guys are not going to be able to catch their fish and they're going to have to fear losing it. So they're going to start saying "Can you please catch my fish for me? Just go get it."

AW: Now when does your new season start?

KN: It ends March 31st.

AW: March 31st.

KN: That's when it ends, so... a lot of guys haven't been able to catch their....

AW: So you think that they'll just give it to you or you think you'll have to buy it?

KN: Oh I'll have to pay them for it. I'll give them....

AW: A little bit though, not a lot?

KN: Yeah, not a lot. You know, I'm not going to give them \$1.30 for 5% when I'm getting \$2 for them.

AW: Right.

KN: So hopefully I can make a little bit more money this year. But then again, if the fish show up late and those big boats show up there, I may get one day, a one day shot at it.

AW: So do you feel that the small boats lease to other small boats instead of the big guys...?

KN: No.

AW: ... in your sector specifically?

KN: In our sector? No, I wouldn't say that because there's, there's a half a dozen guys in our sector that, you know, you can put your fish out on an email on the board and then their fish [go] to Maine and to places where bigger boats bought it. It would be nice if it stayed just in one sector, but you know....

AW: You can't choose who you want lease to, right?

KN: No, no and, you know, I don't blame a lot of these guys too for.... I know one boat in Scituate got \$1.40 for his codfish a few weeks ago and he had about 15,000 pounds that I was hoping to get, but I couldn't pay \$1.40 for it. But he put it on there and it sold in one day. And I'm sure that's a big boat that went over and needed to buy quota.

[21:12]

AW: Yeah. Now have you seen the, the waterfront change here? Like the local community and fishermen here. Has that sort of changed over the last few years?

KN: Well, there's just no more fishermen left. I mean....

AW: Where did they all go?

KN: A lot of boats are gone. They're just gone.

AW: They sold out?

KN: Sold out. And you know, I think the saddest of it too is there's no younger generation. I'm the younger generation.

AW: Yeah.

KN: I'm the, really younger generation. There's just nobody.... There's a few kids on the pier that are in their 20s, but I mean, they're just doing it 'cause they like it. But they're going to figure out sooner or later that they can't....

AW: Well, what advice would you give those young men?

KN: Go find another job. I'd tell them to get out of this right now. You know, I, I probably would say.... I should have gotten out of this. I had a few opportunities to get out of fishing. I thought it was going to pay off hanging in there. And now, I don't know what to do. The reason I'm continuing to fish is 'cause I don't want to sell my permit to a big boat.

AW: Out of principle?

KN: Out of principle.

AW: So basically you're fishing out of principle right now?

KN: I'm fishing out of principle right now. I want to, I want to keep... I want there to be at least a few draggers out of Scituate harbor. And I would probably, if you came down here again in two years, that there would probably, instead of 6 boats, there'll be 2 boats. And 2 of the boats that are doing it are guys that have money, not from fishing.

AW: So they can afford to....

KN: They can afford to do it. They can afford to go out.

AW: So it's more like a hobby for them?

KN: No, they work. They work it like it's a full-time job. But I don't think at the end of the year, I mean for me, I mean, last year I cashed out all of my retirement accounts that I had last year to pay my mortgage. To pay my mortgage last year.

AW: Really?

KN: Yup. Yeah, I had to so as of right now, I'm probably in the worst financial position I've ever been in since I was out of high school.

AW: So, it might be a redundant question, but, so your future plans have changed?

KN: Yeah. I mean, my future plans are just completely up in the air. I mean, I don't, I don't think that they're going to fix this problem this year. I mean, now they're talking another

reduction, 60%. I've heard all kinds of crazy numbers but a 60% reduction in codfish. I mean, that puts me down to, that puts me down to a number of, just doing it in my head I would be able to make about \$5,000 next year. What good does that do?

AW: After you pay all of your expenses?

KN: After I pay my expenses. If I, if I just fish the quota that I have for next year from what they're saying for reductions.

AW: And how much of a reduction in income would you say that is from before sectors?

KN: Before sectors?

AW: Yeah.

KN: I don't know. We were making between \$50 and \$60,000 a year.

AW: And now you're making 5 [thousand].

KN: Yeah. This year I think we made under 20 [thousand]. Every year it's getting worse.

AW: You made under \$20,000 fishing?

KN: This year.

AW: Last year you mean? 2011?

KN: Yeah, 2011.

[24:09]

AW: And in 2009, you made \$60,000?

KN: Probably, yeah. And that was, even when we were making some, when we made that, that was, we were making that, but we knew that we could be making 200. But we were doing it for... we were still conserving fish, conserving for what we thought was going to be our pay day when we started fishing again.

AW: Now can I ask you a personal question?

KN: Sure.

AW: Were you married, or I mean, did you get divorced after sectors started?

KN: I'm not going to say that this was the cause of my divorce.

AW: No, but I mean....

KN: Yeah, this has caused a huge amount of stress in my life.

AW: So did you get divorced after 2010?

KN: No, before.

AW: Before?

KN: Before. But, you know....

AW: Fishing is hard for any relationship.

KN: It is. It is. It is. The stress of it now for me is, I mean it's just constant. I mean, I've been lucky to find a little bit of work. I mean, times are tough right now. Plus, I mean, you work, I mean, you know. If you're in the fishery it takes a lot of years of fishing before you can really start to get good at it. I mean, nobody just jumps into fishing and is a good fisherman. There's a huge learning curve. There's a 10 year learning curve before you can start consistently making money.

AW: And a loophole of learning, also depending on where you're fishing out of.

KN: Right, right. And now, I mean, that's where I was. I was really starting to, I was figuring out what I was doing.

AW: Did you start out as a deckhand and work your way up?

KN: Yeah, yup.

AW: And one of your colleagues had mentioned that here in Scituate, you know, throughout the generations you've sort of had like sort of a built in apprenticeship program with the fishing industry here?

KN: Yeah.

AW: So like young guys would come in and they'd work on deck, they'd work their way up to captain, and eventually become boat owners?

KN: Right.

AW: And is that sort of what happened to you? Did you work your way up?

KN: Right. That's exactly, yeah, that's how I got....

AW: And he also mentioned that, you know, certain practices that just aren't tolerated by Scituate fishermen, such as, you know, throwing away a lot of fish unnecessarily or, you know, targeting an area where you know you shouldn't be fishing because of bycatch and things like that?

KN: Right.

AW: Those aren't tolerated?

KN: They're not tolerated, no. We've always done, we've policed ourselves very well, you know what I mean? And everybody was taught that way. And everybody was taught, you know, what to do and how to fish. And, you know, a few things that we were taught.... I mean, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association) probably would have probably frowned upon, you know what I mean? Even with like, I mean, I know I got in trouble. I had my catch seized in I think it was '09 'cause I was over my codfish, you know? This was something that, you know, we've caught a lot of bigger codfish. All of our boats are designed to... we have these zipper cords in the bag so we automatically just bang them out and go. We know how many meshes to count up so we can count our 800. That way the fish isn't getting killed.

What happened was, it was a freezing, freezing cold day. It was like 20 below zero on the ocean. And I did a quick tow up the Middle Bank, hauled back and we had, I think we had about 3,000 pounds of codfish. And it instantly froze like hockey pucks. As soon as they hit the air, they were like hockey pucks. So we pulled it up, we dumped it on deck, we threw the deck hoses on it, and we could hardly cut them. We had to thaw them up to cut them. I knew nothing was going to survive, so I took the fish home with me. And whatever day of the week it was, say it was a Friday, I just, I was just going to go out the next three days, and target just flounder. I knew where the codfish were I wasn't going to go anywhere near them. And I was going to unload my 800 pounds a day, for three days in a row, use up the cod, and just fish flounder for the next three days.

And I got boarded on the way in and they seized the catch, it was Christmas Eve. It was, you know, here we go again. I have 4 kids, it was Christmas Eve, they took the catch, they made a huge, gigantic show of it and I went to NOAA. I went to my meeting and the guy had asked me if I did anything wrong, and I said "Absolutely not." I said "For me to dump that much fish back in the water, dead, is disgraceful." I said "When I had a perfectly, in my head, way to do it. And you can tell me that I was wrong all day long but I don't care. I was right. I did the right thing, you know?" And I ended up, it ended up going away because it happened right as sectors were starting and they were going to this new management program of not throwing fish over, and killing fish and.... So, I probably got a little lucky that I didn't get a \$50,000 fine on top of it.

But, you know, it just goes to show situations like that, that's us fishing, that's us being responsible, being responsible fishermen. And that's what I told NOAA, "I'm being a responsible fisherman." We didn't dump all that fish over, floating around the boat for 2 hours while I pick 800 pounds out of it. That's disgusting. And then go back out and do it again the next day? And just pick your 800 out of it and dump all the dead ones again? They don't, they don't, they don't, they don't listen to us. You know, that was one of the, you know, Steven called and I talked to him last night and he asked "You mind doing another interview?", 'cause I've been through this.

[29:38]

AW: You have?

KN: Yeah. And I said "You know, I will do it, I will." 'Cause he knows where I'm at. He knows I've just thrown my hands up in this year. You know, I've just, I've lost interest.

AW: You have?

KN: Yeah. And it's sad, 'cause I love it.

AW: You do.

KN: You know, my kids, my kids love it. You know, I have three boys; they love it. Every time I come down to unload, they're down at the boat. They love sitting in the truck when the boxes come up.

AW: And how old are they?

KN: 10... 12, 10, and 7.

AW: And you have a daughter, also?

KN: I have a daughter, too.

AW: And how old is she?

KN: She's 12.

AW: 12.

KN: 10, 7, and my youngest is 4.

AW: And if your sons came to you in 10 years and said "Hey, I want to be a fisherman like you dad!" what would you say?

[30:21]

KN: They're already asking. And I told them, "No." I would love to tell them "Yes" 'cause, you know what? I think it's a great job. I really do. It's a job where it's really hard work, but if you, that's what I learned when I really started fishing, it's a lot of hard work, but if you don't mind working 7 days a week, just going at it you make a lot of money. And there aren't a lot of jobs out there where you can push forward and make what you want to make. But I would tell them, I would tell them "No." I mean it's, all the stress it's caused me. I mean, I would have lost my house last year if it wasn't for my retirement account and the other job I had. What's going to happen this year?

AW: Have you had any, any health problems because of the stress?

KN: Not health problems, but I mean, I'm smoking twice as much as I used to. You know, I don't drink or do drugs. I just don't do those, but I have seen that side of it. A lot of these guys are drinking all the time and they're, you know? It sucks.

AW: They have land sickness?

KN: Land sickness. These guys would love to go out fishing and work. You know, and then, here's one other piece of it, I know I'm jumping around a little bit.

AW: That's alright.

KN: The health insurance, last year, after they, they dropped us. The Commercial Fishermen's Partnership dropped us 'cause the average age of the fishermen was 52 years old. So they said we we're, that they couldn't have it anymore, Harvard Pilgrim for health insurance.

AW: Oh, you guys had your own...?

KN: We had our own health plan.

AW: Oh, you did, here in Scituate?

KN: Well, no, the whole....

AW: Oh, the whole sector?

KN: No, the whole Northeast did.

AW: Oh, the whole Northeast did.

KN: So they dropped us.

AW: Scituate specifically?

KN: No, they dropped everybody.

AW: Oh, they did?

KN: Yeah, 'cause they said the average age of the fishermen was 50-something, so they couldn't carry us anymore, so....

AW: Because there are no young guys?

KN: There are no guys.

AW: Yeah.

KN: So I think we were paying, at the time we were paying, I was paying \$800 a month for my health insurance, for me and my ex-wife, well, my wife and kids at the time. So now that, now they said "Oh, don't worry about it. We're going to get you on something and we'll take care of you." They had a plan. They had a fishermen meeting with Congressmen and Senators. It was a big show they put on to help us out. So now the kids are on Mass Health, they get assistance from the state. My wife's on that, gets assistance from the state. And I'm on a plan where they, they, it's like a, I pay a little bit but it's the same thing, assistance from the state.

So it's like what I've said, so they've taken our... now we can't work, now we're on state assistance health insurance. So I mean, what's next? I mean, I have always worked, paid my bills, paid my own health insurance, you know. And you know, it wasn't a big deal for me because I was upset about the whole program and I said "You know what, if they're going to take everything away from me, then take my health insurance away too and put me on state health insurance. I don't want to pay for it." You know, like my, Kristin and the kids, I mean, they got terribly embarrassed by having to use the Mass Health. You know, and she didn't want to use it, she didn't want to let the schools know we were on it. I said "Listen, what are we going to do? It's just part of life right now. They took our insurance away. We can't afford the \$2,000 a month alternative. This is where we're at." And that was a huge thing last year. For my kids and.... It was huge. I mean, it was like they were branded poor or branded like....

[33:56]

AW: Because they had to go on state assistance for health insurance?

KN: Yeah, right. And we just, it's gotten a little better now, but it's things like that are....

AW: And do you feel that way still?

KN: I feel, right now, I have a little bit.... I feel like they owe it to us because they've taken all of our pay away. And not allowing us to work. So if you don't want to let us work, fine then. Pick up our health insurance bill. But this is a big problem, this is like, it's not, this is....

AW: It's not like you don't want to work or can't work?

KN: No. If they told me right now I could go back fishing and gave me enough stuff that I could make a living at it, I would have no problem paying my health insurance. But right now, at \$10,000 a year what can I afford?

AW: Now do you own the boat that you work on?

KN: As of this year, I will own it. I will own it.

AW: You own it?

KN: Yeah. I'm still, there are still, there is still an owner of the boat who is 70. He still has a piece of the boat. We've slowly been working it so that I own it this year.

AW: And you've been slowly basically purchasing the boat...?

KN: Right.

AW: ... over the years?

KN: Over the years, over the years. And you know, to be honest, I wish I never did now. I mean, what am I going to do with this thing next year? What am I going to do with it?

AW: Now does he, or do you have insurance on the boat?

KN: Yeah. Very little.

AW: Minimal?

KN: Minimal. That's the other side of it. I mean, if we get hurt we have no life insurance. We get hurt, there's so many different accidents in this that it's like... it just doesn't work. And you wanted to really think and be a responsible parent. That's not, it doesn't work.

AW: Have you thought about switching species?

KN: Switching species? I have. I've thought about it. And I think this year, this year I'm, especially with the reduction in codfish, I might have to do that, you know. But you know, one of the other reasons why I work on a day boat on a groundfish boat, it's nice, you can still have a family. And when you start getting into the squidding and the fluking and all the other.... I'm

gone. I'm out of the picture. And I don't want to do that to my kids. And I was offshore when things shut down here. I was jumping on a few big boats and going to Georges in the off months, when we had closures here. In the last few years that I did it, my kids got mad at me.

[36:14]

AW: 'Cause you spent so much time away?

KN: I was gone for 10 days, home for a day, gone for 10 days. They were mad at me, you know? They almost, my youngest wouldn't even talk to me anymore. I'd come home, I'd think they'd be excited to see me; they wouldn't even talk to me. That killed me.

AW: So do you think that you will have to do more land work this year?

KN: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm looking at 10 months of land work, 2 months of fishing. Especially with the changes that they're throwing out there.

AW: And you said you used to go to meetings. You don't go anymore because you're kind of apathetic now. You don't care anymore?

KN: I feel like, I feel like, like these interviews, like the meetings, like we all, everybody talks, everybody has great ideas and nothing gets done. Our sector's just as bad. The people in it are just as bad. You know, the organization's horrible and it's because....

AW: Within your sector?

KN: Within our sector. And it's because everybody, nobody's making any money. There's no push it's....

AW: So everyone's sort of just feeling defeated?

KN: Defeated. That's it, totally defeated.

AW: So you feel like you have a voice, but just that no one's listening?

KN: Yeah. I went up and talked to, when they had Scott Brown here and they had Keating here and they had representatives here to work with us. And I talked to them and I said all the stuff and I told them what I thought was going to happen and what I thought should be done and they were very interested and all that. You know, now it's all happened. It's exactly where I thought it was going to be, if not worse. And nothing's been done. Now they're just saying what they're going to do is they're going to reduce again next year.

Yeah, I mean, a few guys wanted to go down to Washington, D.C. last year and I was going to go and I said "You know, I'm not going to go stand in front of... with a sign. I'm not." What does it do?

AW: And so you mentioned that a lot of folks have left, or I mean, sold out, you know. Guys have totally left the fishery?

KN: Yeah.

AW: What happens to them? What do they do? Where do they go?

KN: One guy's up in Maine. He bought a farm. I think he's just kind of... that's what he's doing. I don't know if he's making any money. There are a few guys that have become, that have become mechanics. Because as fishermen, you've got to, you know, become mechanics. A few guys have just disappeared. I don't know where they've gone. I haven't seen them in forever.

AW: MIA?

KN: Yeah. The sad part is the little pool we have here right now....

AW: Yeah.

KN: In the 5 or 6 guys that we really have left, really, of the true fishermen and they've, this year, get killed again. What's going to happen next year, you know? And you know, the shitty part is that they're going to put their permits up for sale and another one of these big boats or corporations is going to buy them and then it's just one less, you know? That's my out too. Not that I ever want to do that, but I can't get out of it. I can't get all my money back. But I have that as a back door. But that means my boat, my fish, my future with like having it, like I said, keeping a boat in Scituate, it's not going to be that fish will be on some 100 foot dragger out of wherever.

[39:44]

AW: Now when that happens, will you go work on those draggers?

KN: No. I refuse to do that.

AW: The principle?

KN: The principle of that.

AW: Now would you say that your friends are fishermen?

KN: Yeah, they're all done. I mean, they have the same, the few guys that are left I think are all in the same boat.

AW: But you socialize with other fishermen?

KN: Yeah.

AW: And, I mean, would you consider Scituate a fishing community?

KN: Not anymore.

AW: But how about before 2010?

KN: Sure. And I think Scituate, like I've always said, Scituate has always been known. People come here as a tourist spot. They come here, they watch the boats unload. You know, it's definitely Scituate's history. You know, a huge part of Scituate's history is just gone.

AW: Now have you seen the social dynamics down at the docks change over the last couple of years between, you know, guys?

KN: Yeah, I mean, there is no social, no one has any money. There's no social dynamic.

AW: Like the way that people talk to each other, has that changed?

KN: It's definitely not as, it's definitely not as friendly as it was. It's a little bit more, it seems like this whole thing.... How do I word this? I mean, it's like, it's like they didn't want, they didn't want to police us, so they threw this thing out there. Now what they do is they have everybody, all the fishermen arguing and fighting....

AW: Amongst yourselves?

KN: Amongst ourselves, over quota. Over, you know, who's going to buy this, who's going to, you know what I mean? Who's going to lease this fish from this guy? Who's going to lease, you know? And then a guy will get up there and lease his fish and will go out of the sector and, you know? It's not getting to the point where people are mad at him, 'cause everybody feels bad for him. But, you know, the whole idea of this thing was to bring a group of boats fishing together, to try to make a living. And like, like last year, there's really only about 3 of us fishing out of, I don't know how many boats are in the sector, 25?

AW: And every one of those 3 boats just were fishing other people's quota?

KN: Yeah.

AW: And so what were the people that owned that quota doing? Sitting onshore?

KN: Just leasing it, yeah. They're not, it's not like they're getting enough money to survive. One or two guys have decent amount of quota, but for the most part....

AW: And they just leave their boats tied up?

KN: Yeah. You've got to remember too, a lot of these guys are getting older.

AW: Yeah. So it's alright.

KN: Kids are a little older, they're getting older, I mean....

[42:16]

AW: But their kids aren't taking over like they would have 10 years ago?

KN: No. There's one boat here where its still a father and son, two boats where it's father and son teams where, you know. I know one of the sons on one of the boats. He just had a baby and he said "I can't do this anymore. How do you do this with kids?" And I said "I have 4 and I'm getting old." You know?

AW: And would you say, if things changed in 10 years, and got good again, would you recommend it for your sons?

KN: Yeah, my kids would love it. One of my sons....

AW: If it got good again?

KN: If it got good again.

AW: Yeah.

KN: I think the biggest fear now is even when it gets good, you have this thing where, you can just all of a sudden overnight get an email saying "We've decided the stock assessment of this species is low and we're closing things down again." You know, these scientific stock assessments just seem to be a joke.

AW: So is it that sort of unpredictability that really...?

KN: Yeah.

AW: ... gives you uncertainty?

KN: Uncertainty, yeah. I think that would be the biggest thing for keeping my kids out of it.

AW: Is the uncertainty?

KN: Yeah. I mean, there's, supposedly this boat we had out here this year, supposedly doing the scientific survey work. I saw it. It was in an area where there's no fish. And it was going back and forth and back and forth for a week. They caught no fish. And they were fishing what, 6 or 7 miles northwest of where they were. Of course they weren't catching anything. There's nothing there. There's never anything... maybe one time a year. A few days a year there might be fish there. And that's how they got their numbers for the Gulf of Maine? Come on.

AW: So what does the future hold for Scituate?

KN: The town pier where we see nice fishing boats now.... I guess in 5 years, that will be a yacht club. Or condos. Condos for people with boats tied up to it. That's what I would say in 5 years. There won't be any fishermen left.

AW: None?

KN: None. Nobody will survive this. I don't think anyone will survive another year. If there's a 60% reduction in codfish next year, that will wipe everybody out.

AW: And if there isn't, do you think... how many people will survive anyway?

KN: Probably 4 out of the 6. We'll survive another year.

AW: At this, at these rates?

KN: At these rates. I'd say we're probably going to lose a couple of boats a year.

AW: A couple of boats a year?

KN: Yeah.

AW: Just continually dropping out?

KN: Yeah. Well, if there's 60% decrease we could definitely lose 50% of our 6 boat fleet next year.

AW: And how many boats were in the fleet, before 2010?

KN: I looked at a picture that's up at the fish market here...

AW: Yeah.

KN: ... and there had to have been 20 boats tied to the pier.

AW: Yeah, I remember when I was a kid, walking down the, just go down and there was 5 and....

KN: Yeah, 5 across the front and back on both sides.

AW: And I thought to myself "Geez, they really have to climb over each other."

KN: It used to be a lot of work to have to move vessels. That's one good thing sectors has done, we don't have to move boats anymore, 'cause there's no one to move. Just go out and go in the morning. I used to hate, the worst part of fishing is moving the boats. Now we don't have to do that. There are only 2 of us on one side. We almost have our own private marina. It's horrible.

AW: Have you had any gigantic life changes happen because of sectors? Have you sold your house? Have you sold a boat? Some people have had two boats and sold one.

[45:44]

KN: No, I haven't had to do anything yet. The closing out the, cashing out the retirement accounts last year was....

Yeah. Now this year I have to give 40% taxes on them. It was kind of a waste, but it was, I wasn't behind on my mortgage but I was.... I knew that I was going to be in the process of getting behind, so I did it.

AW: Proactive about it?

KN: Yeah, that's kind of a big deal 'cause I'm 42 and that was really the only money I had saved.

AW: And you had been saving that for, you know, 20 years?

KN: Yeah. And it's gone. It was just like I just cashed it out, paid off the bills. It's gone. I have any.... I didn't do anything.

AW: Yeah, it wasn't like you made any business deals or anything?

KN: No, I didn't make one business deal with it. All I did was pay off my mortgage. And we were still on the old health insurance so I paid, I was two months behind on that. It just went, it just went in no time.

AW: So some people said that they've taken money out on mortgages and bought more quota.

KN: Yeah.

AW: Is that an option for you?

KN: Yeah, that was kind of in my plan last year. And then after what I... what I totally keep saying, there's no way I'm doing that. I will not put another penny into this. I think you're just throwing your money away.

AW: Now if you could go back in time and remove sectors...

KN: Yeah.

AW: ... as a management tool...

KN: Yeah.

AW: ... would you do it?

KN: Yes.

AW: And what would you replace it with?

KN: The Days at Sea program with a quota system that protects the stocks in the Gulf of Maine, but does allow the small boats to make a living. You know, none of us are looking to get, to be millionaires. But we do need to make a living. Fuel's almost \$4 a gallon and ice is \$80 a ton, you know, and it costs, you know.... Be realistic with us, you know, what it costs to have a boat and a house and a family. I mean, they make it so that the amount of fish that we're able to catch doesn't allow us to have those things. It keeps us at poverty level. It doesn't have to be.

AW: You could be...

KN: We could be....

AW: ... higher.

KN: We could be....

AW: Middle class.

KN: Middle class. I mean, very easy middle class. And if you wanted to work really hard, you could be more than that, you know? But I'll tell you, I know I keep going back to this big boat thing is that, keep the big boats out of the Bay. And it keeps the fish for the smaller fleet. You know, that's what they need to do. If not, this place will be wiped out just like it was in the '80s.

[48:21]

AW: Now is there anything that I haven't asked you that you want to add about sectors or about the atmosphere around groundfishing right now? Or anything that you want to say?

KN: No, I think that's good. I'll probably think of things later but, yeah, I'll be honest my mind's fried with this stuff.

AW: It is?

KN: It is. It's fried.

AW: And also, is there any....

KN: I mean, I've, one more thing I'll add. I've had the same stern man for probably, probably almost 10 years. At least 10 years. He told me this year, he said he's done. He's done. He said "This is it. I'm not doing this anymore." I think he's doing it because he's been with me for so many years, he doesn't want to leave me hanging. But he told me this is his last year, that he's done. He's 36. He's been fishing his whole life. And he has a lobster boat. He lobsters in the summer. And he told me that he's just done groundfishing. He's just fed up. 'Cause you know, he's on deck now with the observers and, you know. I am too but not as much 'cause I'm driving the boat, but, you know, he's sickened by the amount of fish they're killing, you know?

AW: The observers?

KN: The observers. I mean, we never killed any fish before. I mean, we got them on deck, we flooded the pen with the deck house, the flounder and stuff, [we] just threw them away. And you know, now they're basketing everything out there. They leave it on deck for an hour, they measure it and weigh it.... You know, pick scales off it. And then they throw it, they dump everything back over dead. He's disgusted. He's like "This is disgusting. 'Cause they kill more fish than we do all year." And he's right. He's absolutely right.

AW: Just with the sampling process?

KN: Sampling process.

AW: Yeah.

KN: Which is useless anyway. We never got anywhere with that anyway. We've been showing these observer live bags of fish. Live bags of this, live bags of different sized fish, all the things that they say they're reporting. Where's it going? That 60%, they don't use that, they use one scientific tow. I mean, what are they using it... these numbers? You know, that's not... How do we win?

AW: Now, for posterity's sake, is there any type of story that you'd like to share about fishing that has nothing to do with the aspects of sectors?

KN: No.

AW: I mean, fishing is a really cool job and I'm sure that you have a lot of stories....

KN: It is. It used to be. It used to be nice. I mean, Scituate Harbor was a place where, if I came in on a Wednesday afternoon and my net was full of shreds, I could throw it up on the pier and there would be 5 or 6 guys up there helping me, you know what I mean? Get the thing back together again in a few hours. Same thing if... I'd be helping the next guy. Now everybody's just kind of on their own thing. You know, there's no family atmosphere down there anymore.

[51:16]

AW: No sense of community?

KN: No. I mean, granted if something went wrong with somebody's boat, everybody would drop and help, but we were all fishing all the time. Everybody was down there and everybody kind of had the same schedule, within the same schedule, and everybody helped each other out, whether it was unloading, whether it was working on gear, whether it was working on their boat. Now you don't see anybody. You know, one guy might go on a Monday this week, but I might not go 'til Thursday next week. And in between, nobody else goes. And the other thing, too, the other part of it too is, this was the big thing with me last year, was the safety aspect of it. I always fished with 3 or 4 boats out of Scituate. We all basically went out and left at the same time. We might not be on top of each other, but we were within 5 to 10 miles of each other. Last year we fished, and we were the only boat out there. There was nobody around.

AW: So if anything happened, there was no one there to back you up?

KN: If anything happened, there was nobody around. You know, now if something happens, someone breaks down.... If something terrible did happen, someone fell overboard, you'd be on the scene in 10 minutes, compared to.... I mean, there's no one around to help. And, you know, I don't... granted the Coast Guard without permits, but I mean, it's a lot quicker to have someone right on scene with you, right, you know.

AW: So you fished in teams.

KN: Yeah, especially in shitty weather with these small boats. We're not 100 foot boats. I've got a 44 foot dragger, you know, it's not a big boat. [There is] definitely safety in numbers out there.

AW: Well, is there anything else that you'd like to add?

KN: No, I think that's good.

AW: Ok, well, thank you so much Kevin. I really appreciate it. And this is Angela Wilson in Scituate with Kevin Norton on February 16, 2012.

KN: Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW

[53:02]