

**Interview with Niles Pearsall [NP]**  
**Occupation: Commercial Fisherman**  
**Port Community: Point Judith, RI**  
**Interviewer: Azure Cygler**  
**Date: November 15, 2011**  
**Catch Share Oral Histories Project – NOAA Fisheries**  
**Logger/Transcriber: Elizabeth Wetterhahn**  
**INDEX: [minutes:seconds]**  
**NESTCO, Narragansett, RI**

Interview

[00:00]

NP: That's a fancy recorder.

AC: I know. It's quite lovely.

NP: Now does it pick up background noise?

AC: No, it's lovely. I record journaling. So I love this thing. So just for the record I'm going to state my name is Azure Cygler. Today's date is November 15, 2011, and we are at 55 State Street, NESTCO's (Northeast Safety Training Company) Conference room. And if you could now just state on the recording that you have read and agreed to terms on the release?

NP: I agree.

AC: Okay. And to begin, if you could just give me your name and your address?

NP: Niles Kenneth Pearsall II. 434 Klondike Road, Charlestown, RI, 02813.

AC: Okay. And your home port is here?

NP: Point Judith, RI.

AC: And your vessel name?

NP: *Black Sheep*.

AC: Okay. And if you're in the sector or the common pool?

NP: Sector 5.

AC: Good. And if you don't mind me asking how old you are?

NP: 44.

AC: Excellent. So to begin, if you could just give me a general context about who you are. A little bit of background of where you came from.

NP: Well, let's see. I graduated South Kingston in '86. Started down here lumping boats and I got a job on a lobster boat offshore. Offshore work on an offshore lobster boat for two years. Then I went fishing, dragging. I worked on deck for, I don't know, 7 to 8 years after that. And then I started running boats for other people and I've probably run 7 or 8 boats out of Point Judith before I bought my own boat 10 years ago. And now I have my own boat and am self-employed. And it's all good I guess, you know?

AC: And your boat is a... you do groundfishing?

NP: Drags, yes. Groundfishing and squid fishing and whatever's going on at the time, you know?

AC: Okay. And how big? What's the length?

NP: 80 feet.

AC: 80 feet, excellent. And you have children and are married?

NP: Yes, I have two girls.

AC: And their names?

NP: Danielle and Ava. Danielle's 13 and she goes to Chariho. Ava's 9 and she's going to be 10 in the next couple of weeks and yeah, she's great. She goes to Charlestown. They're both into softball. They're both into lots of activities. They're so smart, it's crazy. Which makes me happy. And my wife is an RN and she works at Westerly Health Center and she works at South County Hospital. And that's about it. We have a small house in Charleston on a couple of acres up in the woods.

AC: And you've been there how long?

NP: 10 years.

AC: 10 years?

NP: Yeah, so.

AC: Super. And have the girls ever been on the boat.

NP: Yeah, to go out to see the Air Show in North Kingston. Yeah, not fishing, no. Yeah, they know what Daddy does and they like it. They like coming down and hanging out, you know?

AC: Excellent, yeah. Blessing of the Fleet and...?

[03:08]

NP: Right, yeah. We don't do that anymore, but other things we do. They've been out on the boat.

AC: Super. And a little bit about where you fish, if you could just describe inshore or offshore.

NP: Well, let's see. I used to fish a lot. Well, I used to go to Georges Banks in the summer, but because of quota systems and what I got for quota up there.... Because when I bought the boat, it never went up there. [I] mostly fished Southern New England, around Block Island. So the first couple of years I bought the year we went up there, we didn't do so good because it was just, it was beat up, you know? And with... I'm limited in my horsepower. So the next 7 or 8 years I've been fishing South of New England and when I first bought the boat, we had our 88 days, which they said they [would] never take away, but they did. And then it went to a 1:1 or they give you... we had to do the call in service and they gave us so many Days at Sea.

Actually, every year they've reduced it 8 percent and we're down to 40 days basically right now. But now we're on 40 days plus quota system. So I still fish around Block Island and Block Island Sound and South of New England and I usually go about 100 miles. I don't usually go any further than that. I'm not... I fish at my own pace, that's why I bought my own boat, because I got sick of working for guys that literally pushed things to the limit. So I'm kind of a cautious fisherman. Well, I bought my own boat 'cause I got sick of working for assholes.

AC: There you go, there you go.

NP: So then they went from the 88 days, now we're down to 40 days, now we have a quota. And the quota is fine and the whole system is great, but they need to increase our catch limits. The fish are there, I've seen them. Just over the last 7 or 8 years, the stocks [have] come back. And yellowtail flounder, codfish, butterfish, squid; every species, just about, and we catch a lot of different species; black sea bass. Everything has just come back in quantity. And we're towing bigger nets; it's half the boats down here now. And I just think the government could increase our catch limits.

You know, where they based it on a four year span, and they really should've done better on the history. They should've either went back 8 years or everybody should have gotten the same, you know what I mean? Make it fair, not the four... the four, who picked the four years? I'd like to know who got the privilege to do that, you know? So I got kind of screwed on my quota. I got like 25,000 pounds of groundfish total quota, compared to some of my friends who have hundreds of thousands of pounds and, you know, it's because my boat fished South of New England. I tried to do what the government said and then we ended up getting screwed for it in the long run anyway. So now we're on....

AC: What were the years that they chose?

[06:06]

NP: I think it was like 2002 to or 2000-2004, maybe. Right when I first bought my boat and fishing was... they didn't have the... they had the 88 days and they implicated after that they started... they gave us ten grand. I got ten grand and they took half my days, so that was a kick in the crotch right there. You know what I mean? That was... you're talking \$100 to \$200,000 worth of my income gone right there. And they had to do something, and I understand that and now they've whittled it down to 40 days. And the fish are coming back.

Give us better quotas, you know, that's all I'm asking. I just want to feed my family. I don't want to get rich. But I've watched a lot of my friends go out of business, too. It's mainly the smarter fishermen who either lucked out with no breakdowns or had good quota... this is a very family-oriented port. Everyone here... there's no drunks or drug addicts like it was 15 years ago, or New Bedford and Fairhaven. It's a totally different little port over here, you know? Everyone knows everybody's business. Which is good and bad, but... anyway, south of New England, that's where I fish.

AC: Okay. And crew, do you have...?

NP: I have three guys.

AC: And that's pretty consistent? Or [has] been consistent?

NP: Yeah. I used to go [with] two guys, when I was younger, 'cause I could run up and down the deck and hustle more. But then I go three guys now. So, yeah.

AC: Okay. Yeah, we'll definitely want to hear a little more about the quota and those sorts of things.

NP: Okay, you didn't want to get into that.

AC: No, no that's okay. That's perfect. But we'll go back to that. So, just... I didn't mean to cut you short cause that will certainly be an important part of the discussion a little bit later. And then, if you could describe your neighborhood. You said you lived in rural Charlestown. So does it seem like...

NP: It's in the woods.

AC: ... a fishing community?

NP: No, it's in the woods near the state park. And it's nice 'cause it's quiet and no one bothers me.

AC: Gotcha.

NP: And I don't see my neighbors, they don't see me. It's a good environment for my children to grow up in.

AC: Okay. So is there awareness that Niles is a fisherman and he lives there and....

NP: Yeah. People drive by, they see nets and stuff in the yard. Everyone knows, yeah on my road. But it's very rural; it's not a cul-de-sac with houses everywhere or anything.

AC: Gotcha. So it wouldn't be really a fishing community?

NP: No, that's more of Narragansett. And there are not many fishermen down near, left. You know, a fishing community. We all go to the dinners and everything, but no.

AC: Gotcha. And then on that note, socialization. Do you... you said things have kind of, have changed, but it's a very tight knit port. Would you consider most of your friends to be fishermen?

NP: Yeah.

AC: Is that who you spend most of your time with, free time?

NP: I spend most of my free time with my kids and my wife.

AC: Okay.

NP: No, I'm in my own bubble when I get home.

AC: Okay.

NP: I have the friends I graduated with, I know everybody around here. Yes, everybody knows I'm a fisherman in Wakefield, Narragansett.

[09:07]

AC: But your sort of close social networks?

NP: Right, is not... we don't do a whole lot together, you know what I mean?

AC: Sure.

NP: We're all raising kids, so we're all doing....

AC: You're focused.

NP: You know what I'm saying? You know, that's the big thing.

AC: That takes a lot of energy, for sure. And just a thought on your, maybe your family's longer-term life plans. Do you feel like over the last couple of years you've changed the way you're thinking about things like, say retirement, or...

NP: Well, I thought about selling the boat.

AC: Moving or....

NP: It got to the point where... well, when fishing's low and you're not making any money, your ups and downs and....

AC: Okay.

NP: Have I thought... yeah we thought about moving to the Carolinas. We've thought, we've had... everyone brainstorms when they're... you know, you think of a better life. But no matter where you go, there you are anyway, so. My wife, she got her nursing degree. So we just stayed here and stick it out. And this is where I grew up, even though all my family pretty much moved away. They were local. My grandfather... my father and my grandfather grew up in Snug Harbor.

AC: Oh wow.

NP: And they were part of the fishing community, too. My father was a fisherman, on and off. My grandfather was a local artist around here. He started the Scituate Art Show, he started one of the Wickford Art Shows. He was on the committee, so.

AC: Oh wow.

NP: Yeah, its kind of... and if you go to my house, it's nothing but... I must have 150 paintings in the attic. My great grandfather had one painting hanging in the Smithsonian, so... I got all antics in my house.

AC: Wow.

NP: In a way, I guess it is kind of... you know, I'm part of this area, so.

AC: Moving would be harder than....

NP: Yeah. I might as well just stay here because... like you said, and then you go move to Florida or North Carolina and its strip mall after strip mall. At least this is a little local New England community. If you can make it through the winters, you know?

AC: Exactly.

NP: Right.

AC: Exactly. That's... that's interesting. What, in your opinion, were the best years for the fishing industry?

NP: Well, when I first bought my boat the restrictions were pretty lax and they were pretty good years. I was making, you know 60 grand, 70 grand a year and I was going two-handed a lot, though, that had a lot to do with it. And then now over the last, you know, that was in 2000... 2001 I guess I bought my boat. First couple years were good, then it went downhill when they started taking our days. And then now we're into the quota system, which started last year, which is fine. We're the last to do it. [It] seems like everybody else is doing it

except the Northeast, throughout the whole United States. They just need to get better research. Well, I'm doing a trawl survey for them in August, for tagging flounders. We just need better information. The fish are there, we just need to... you know, people need to... they need to give us more fish.

AC: I see. So you're involved in some research, it sounds like....

NP: Yeah.

AC: To diversify...?

NP: Right. Anything to help the industry, you know? To show the scientists that, you know... we could go into that more later, too. Because, you know, their mishaps and making regulations and rules on their towing crooked nets and stuff. It's just... pisses me off to no extent....

AC: Right, certainly.

[12:22]

NP: So the best years were the first three years I bought the boat, then it's... but I survived. The boat averages between 3 to 400 grand a year, so....

AC: Okay.

NP: But in the last three years it's just been around the 300 grand range, so... my income, too, went from like 60 grand down to 40. Depends, sometimes I have someone run my boat for me, so depending on how much I go, my income will go from 35 to 45 grand now, compared to what it used to be when I bought the boat. Yeah.

AC: I see. And that's once taxes are paid?

NP: Right, exactly.

AC: Which is no small...?

NP: No, it's a good thing my wife works 'cause you need that double income. I couldn't... I had to cancel my health insurance. It went up to 15, 18 grand a year for our family of four. So now she gets benefits through her job, which is great. You know, yeah, we were on state for the kids, anyway, had state... because I was a sole income and my income had dropped so much that we couldn't afford the health insurance. And, you know, the economy is terrible. We import 75 percent of our fish into this country. You know, and the fish are there and the rest of the world isn't doing anything to... they're killing it. They need to do what we're doing, I totally understand that. But we have a great resource. I kick over more fish than I save, I used to. Nowadays it's about even. Like we went out and made six tows last trip, and we caught our quota.

AC: Nice.

NP: Everything in six tows. We had no bycatch and it was great, so.

AC: Excellent.

NP: It is working, but they need to increase the quota. It's starting... it hit rock bottom and now I think it's just starting to work its way back to where... now that the boats are weeded out and the mesh sizes are bigger and all the rules seem to be.... There's not too much more that they can change. They've put a lot of people out of business. It's sad, you know?

AC: Right.

NP: I mean, I'm one of the lucky ones, the way I consider it, you know. So anyway, yeah it hit rock bottom and now it's on its way up.

AC: So since sectors started in, what May 2010, have you seen these changes sort of, have they been greater or less....

NP: Well, you've got to pay attention more. You've got to turn in the paperwork. You know, work their work. I have no problem, they just need to increase the catch limits.

AC: Okay, I see. And would you say your quality of life in general is better or worse?

NP: It's the same.

AC: It's the same.

NP: It's the same since... when I first bought the boat you could have, but the economy was better back then too. So, it's the same.

AC: So the downturn in the economy has a huge factor?

NP: Exactly, that too.

AC: For everyone.

NP: Right, exactly.

AC: That's interesting. And what advice would you give someone starting out today? If they were to...?

NP: There's no way. You can't even... you can't buy licenses. You'd have to let someone die to buy a license. There's no opportunity for younger fishermen now. All my deckhands are veteran guys that have been fishing for twenty, at least twenty years.

[15:14]

AC: Gotcha.



NP: So there's really no.... No, I wouldn't recommend.... Stay in school. I wish I had. There's no... you know what I mean? There are no jobs. There are no boats. I've got guys coming down and I've got to turn them away all the time 'cause....

AC: Right.

NP: Whatever.

AC: I hear you. Okay, now Niles, if you could just talk a little bit more about sectors.

NP: Yeah.

AC: That was a great introduction and sort of overview. If you could just describe your sector. The details you know about, about members, if you have a position...?

NP: Yeah. A lot of my friends went to the New Bedford sector last year. Last year was the first year really it went into effect because there was more fish there. I forget what that sector... sector whatever. 6 or 5 or 4 that New Bedford is. Cause they can trade more and this and that. But my outlook is... I got a quota. I try to manage my fish through the year so I don't burn it all up at once.

AC: Okay.

NP: The guys in my sector are great. Chris Brown, he's a great guy. He's done so much for this industry. A lot of people think he's a bad guy because, you know, they've got to blame somebody. But he's put a lot of time in going to meetings and getting things... trying to get things reopened and trying to make this whole sector thing work. It'll work, it's just... and everyone in it, yeah everyone's great. They're all good people, so.

AC: And you've been involved since the beginning?

NP: Yeah, I signed up right away.

AC: And it was easy to get involved?

NP: Yeah, you just sign the papers. I've got to resign now.

AC: Okay.

NP: Yeah, and Fred and everyone helps each other out, so.

AC: Cool.

NP: You can always ask someone a question around here if you're not sure what's going on. Either Chris or Fred or... and they answer the question, you know, so. No, its pretty, you know, we're on the, all on the same page.

AC: Okay. So would you say there are pros and cons? And the pros and the cons are even? Or...?

NP: Yeah.

AC: Is there more pros than there are cons?

NP: No, we're even. It would be nice to have more fish, so.

AC: Okay.

NP: They did up my yellowtails this year, from 3,500 and I got 11,500. Which, that's what I mean, it hit rock bottom. Now, I think the government's starting to see...

AC: Okay.

NP: ... that there's fish out there to be caught. And throwing them over isn't the right thing to do, you know.

AC: Okay, gotcha.

NP: So, no... it's fine. Everything's I'd say the pros and cons are equal.

AC: Of sectors themselves?

NP: Right.

AC: Are about equal?

NP: Even, yeah.

AC: Okay. And do you sort of interact with other sector members from different sectors or is it...?

NP: No.

AC: Pretty much you guys stay local?

NP: Yeah, I'm local.

AC: Okay. And what motivates you to stay in the sector. 'Cause is it every year you can opt to renew?

NP: It's... no, we were forced into the sectors so now we've got to make it work.

AC: Okay.

NP: You know, I could go common pool, but the common pool you're just cutting your own throat because there's, you know, they don't give you enough days. The sector, the whole

background of it... it is a good idea, it'll work, you know what I mean? Give everyone a quota, manage your fish. Basically you just want to manage your own fish, you know what I mean?

[18:22]

AC: Sure.

NP: But they need to give us a little more fish.

AC: Okay.

NP: So does that answer your question?

AC: Yes.

NP: All right.

AC: And health insurance? You said you have health insurance through your...?

NP: Wife.

AC: Wife. And boat insurance. Is that something?

NP: That's 35 grand a year, Point Club.

AC: So you have to just pay that out of your....

NP: That comes out of your gross stock at the end of the year. Half pretty much, well I'd say a third... more than a third is our fuel bill. You know, we've got a big fuel bill. So that's what's killing us too is the high... The price of fuel went up and our catch went down. That's killing us, you know? Some of the guys... I got lucky 'cause my boat doesn't burn like some of these others. Some of these guys can't just go out for the day and catch their limits and come home 'cause it's not, you know... it doesn't work for them. They don't make... there's not enough profit in it, you know?

AC: And just looking at, just some more, sort of your social networks. One of the things we're trying to understand is how, sort of, the fabrics of communities may have changed since sectors. Would you say it's still that tight knit place, or that sectors have caused any rifts? Or would you say sectors have nothing to do with it?

NP: No, it's caused rifts. It's caused rifts, but you know, it is what it is. We're in it. You've got to do it. We were forced into it, so now we have to make it work. That's all I've got to say about that.

AC: Okay.

NP: Some guys hate it, some guys love it. Some guys were forced out of business. And like you said, pros and cons. It's all in who you talk to.

AC: Okay.

NP: It works for me, 'cause it has to work. I've got to make it work. I can't just quit, you know?

AC: Yeah.

NP: We've still got a mortgage to pay and bills to pay.

AC: You're committed.

NP: Yeah.

AC: Now the risks, would you say they're... it's because some guys think...?

NP: They didn't get any quota.

AC: Oh, so it's just purely...?

NP: Yeah, a lot of it has to do with quota.

AC: You have more than I have?

NP: Yeah. That has a lot to do with it. Mostly.

AC: Interesting.

NP: I think that's... I mean, we all get along, but we all have our quota. We know what it is, and we just.... And some guys, some guys buy and sell fish too. They really get intense and go online and liven things up. And I haven't got... last year I wanted to see how the system worked before I got right into it. But I mean, we can buy fish and this and that, but it's stupid to buy, you know. You know, you buy fish and then you take it, you know. It's just, it's crazy... whatever.

AC: Now, but if it... now this is my ignorance, but if everyone is... most everyone's in the sector, isn't it beneficial if you have a guy in the sector who has a lot of quota cause that's contributing to the greater pool?

NP: Yeah, if he wants to share and trade, yes. That's why the more guys in your sector, the better off you are. That's why some guys in Point Judith went to the other sector, because there was bickering going on and, you know? And a lot of guys just sell the fish right outright. Well I've got this, so I'll put it online and it's gone, you know?

[21:26]

AC: Okay, and leasing, is that something?

NP: Yeah, leasing and selling, they do all that. I haven't done any of it. This year I'll buy some fish off the fish house, cause I know Jim Fox has fish, so when the codfish start coming around, hopefully he'll sell me some at like 80-90 cents a pound. [I'll] go catch it, hopefully get \$2 a pound or \$3 a pound and make a profit. Otherwise it's a gamble, you know. I could come in and they could be 90 cents. I did all this computer crap to break even, you know?

AC: Right. And you still would have to pay a certain...?

NP: Fee.

AC: Percent.

NP: Right, you still pay.

AC: Per pound, to the sector?

NP: Right.

AC: And does that change every year or is that something that's...?

NP: I don't know. It's not a big... it's not a lot.

AC: Okay.

NP: Yeah, I mean we stocked 7 or 8 grand last trip and I had to give them 100 bucks.

AC: Oh, okay.

NP: For them, if that's what it costs to manage it and keep everyone on track, that's fine.

AC: Gotcha.

NP: I have no problem with that.

AC: Cool. And would you recommend, if you had a friend was in fishing, say in North Carolina and he decided to move up to Point Judith, would you recommend that he join the sector?

NP: Yeah, I would recommend [it] 'cause you get your quota, you know what it is, you manage your fish. But there are no more licenses and boats. There are no more boats. There are no more boats.

AC: He would have to be already in....

NP: Yeah, you would have to be grandfathered in or bought your boat at least ten years ago. There's no... I wouldn't recommend anyone getting into this business.

AC: And is the shore side infrastructure part of what's making it difficult? Is that gotten...?

NP: Yeah.

AC: Supply houses and is there fewer of those than before?

NP: Yes, there used to be 10-15 fish houses down here. Now there are 2.

AC: So how do you manage...?

NP: Co-op.

AC: Choices...?

NP: They've got a monopoly and they're in cahoots together. The Town Dock and so they set the prices. But they pay decent. I don't complain. It's pretty much.... I can look on the computer and see what they're paying in New Bedford. And these guys are right close to what, if not a little bit more. I have no problem with, I mean....

AC: Gotcha.

NP: Once in a while you look and say, oh I got crappy prices. But they do the best they can, you know?

AC: Yeah. And has that infrastructure changed in the last couple years specifically or has it just been a long sort of steady...?

NP: No, it's the same. It's the same. It is what it is, you get what you get. You come in, you try not to think about it, and go out fishing again, you know?

AC: Okay. And as far as being involved in the fishing community, do you attend meetings and...?

NP: Yeah.

AC: The council meetings and...?

NP: Yes, I've been to quite a few.

AC: Okay. Are you on any committees?

[24:07]

NP: No.

AC: Or anything like that?

NP: No.

AC: So just go and...?

NP: Just in Sector 5.

AC: Attending, okay. And how about in the broader community? Are you on the school board or?

NP: No, no. Softball, I used to be the softball coach.

AC: Cool.

NP: For my daughter's team. But, yeah I'm working so much that my schedule didn't...

AC: Yeah, that's... that's tough.

NP: Yeah.

AC: You know, you want to be a part of their sports.

NP: I still am. I was getting burned out anyway, so... and she's had the same coach for like 8 years, so I just turned her over to my buddy who's the coach, you know. And he takes... she's great and she loves it. And I love to go and watch, you know, so... yeah, that's one of the joys of my life is watching her play softball.

AC: That's awesome.

NP: Yeah, it is.

AC: It keeps a nice parent, you know... father/daughter relationship when you're not being the coach.

NP: And it's a small community. We're up in Chariho, you know, Charlestown's small. So it's nice up there. It's not... I've watched South Kingston and Narragansett just grow in the last fifteen, twenty years. It's just... everyone moved down from Warwick. Just... traffic, the roads are....

AC: Prices have gone up....

NP: And homes and taxes.... I know, it's another reason I went to Charlestown, 'cause the taxes are low.

AC: Yeah.

NP: So anyway.

AC: Very good.

NP: What's the next question?

AC: Now, if you don't mind if I ask a few questions about your income? You don't have to give....

NP: No, that's fine.

AC: ... specifics, but just in terms of how it might have changed. You talked a little bit about that. When you're in a sector, do you get paid differently from how you used to get paid when you'd land fish?

NP: No, it's all the same.

AC: So you get paid per pound?

NP: The same.

AC: Okay. And then you just write a check to the sector?

NP: Right. It's the same.

AC: Okay.

NP: None of that has changed. Sectors haven't changed how we get paid.

AC: Right. And have earnings, sort of percentage wise changed dramatically in your household? So does your wife now contribute more than she used to? Or is it...?

NP: She never....

AC: Even....

NP: Well, she works now, right. Before, she was in school and raising the kids when they were little and, you know. So, good thing she has an income, because yeah... I could have been one of those guys out of business. Or I would have been borrowing money off of my parents, who don't have a lot of money to....

AC: Yeah, yeah sure. And then you talked a little bit about leasing and you haven't had to lease...?

NP: No.

AC: So just....

NP: My quota and fish it.

AC: Okay. And you would if... what would bring you to lease?

NP: I would not lease my days but I might buy some days off another fisherman who doesn't, you know... who has got them for sale. But, I've gotta keep what I've got. Or otherwise I wouldn't make it through the year, you know?

AC: And what would make it worthwhile for you to do that? To buy some from other guys?



NP: It would give me more Days at Sea. I could go out and get the 300 monks for the day.

AC: Okay. So then you would have already caught your...?

NP: Yeah, I would have used my quota along with my days and then if I got down to 5 to 6 days but they were catching some fish, I could lease the days and then have to buy the fish from Jim Fox to go catch it. I mean, it gets....

AC: Interesting.

NP: It gets....

AC: That seems like a nice option for you guys.

[27:19]

NP: Yeah, it works I guess. I'm going to try it this year. I haven't tried it yet, so....

AC: Okay. So just a few more things if you have some time still?

NP: Yeah.

AC: Okay, good. A little bit about just, your overall quality of life. This is something that's such a hard thing to pinpoint 'cause it's....

NP: Everyone's different.

AC: Everyone's different. And it depends on...?

NP: My quality of life....

AC: But would you say overall, looking at everything, your overall outlook on life is better or worse since sectors started? And obviously there's....

NP: I would say it's about the same.

AC: Okay.

NP: Because I mean, it's gotten better because the sectors have given us a little bit of fish to work with. They took the flounders away, and flounders were a big part of my income.

AC: Yeah.

NP: They went from wide open to nothing. They could have said, well you can at least go out and catch 250 a day, along with your yellowtails or whatever. So that hurt. Quality of life... it's about the same. But the only reason it really is is because my wife started working, you know? Otherwise... we need that double income because my income has dropped in half, so she made up for that other half.

AC: Gotcha.

NP: And so we... and we're frugal, you know what I mean. We're not one of these... we bought our house, we didn't pay a lot for it. You know, we weren't in that bubble thing.

AC: Yeah.

NP: So we're lucky. I count my blessings. You know, things could have been different. I mean, I've watched a lot of my friends lose their boats and it was sad.

AC: Yeah, it seems like the last couple of years have really been... I've just seen the newspaper.

NP: Yeah.

AC: And hear a lot more than ever before, so.

NP: Yeah.

AC: And do you think that the future of fisheries is brighter or less bright?

NP: If they give us some more fish to work with, it'll be fine. But they have to start increasing the quotas. They can't just... if they take anymore away from us, you'll see what you see. You'll see half of the half of the boats. We'll be down to a third of the boats. I mean....

AC: So the general structure of sectors is a good idea?

NP: Right. I mean, we take observers all the time. You know, I might get one this trip. I just called out for a groundfish trip. You know, I have no problem taking them. I'm not going to... I have enough morals where I'm not going to go somewhere and work on an area where I'm killing thousands to save hundreds, you know what I mean. Especially with the fluke, cause there's so much fluke everywhere. We actually have to go places where you're not where... where there are no fish to catch another kind of fish. And you've got to really pay attention and you've got to look at your logbooks from fifteen, twenty years ago and say, all right, well this is what I caught here and there.

AC: Really?

NP: That's what a lot of fishermen go by, you know, their past history. You've got to keep a good data program. I know guys who write it down, and throw it out. I have all my years of fish, you know, so... you've got to really pay attention. Yeah, just open the quotas up a little bit more. Give me some more yellowtails. Open the fluke up a little bit more. You know, maybe open the monks a little bit more. Don't go to quotas on the monks. The system seems to be working the right... if they don't change anything. The only thing I would change is increase our quotas a little bit. Now give us the 8% back every year that you took for the last 5, 6 years, you know?

[30:36]

AC: Right, gotcha. Okay. That's very interesting. And in terms of any health issues? Has your involvement in fisheries caused any...?

NP: Well, let's see...I ran four miles this morning. But I still smoke. I probably smoke a half a pack a day. And that's my health issue. I can't... I don't drink.

AC: Is it stress?

NP: Yeah, its stress.

AC: Stress related?

NP: Yeah, a lot of it has to do with regulations. Even when you're in compliance, but the Coast Guard's right there. And then you've got DM (Dockside Monitoring) when you come in. Before we had a dockside monitor, which was crazy because he's just standing there. We go with our... it's tough to judge everything... I don't know. It's stressful, yes. It's very stressful. I actually take anxiety pills because I have anxiety, so.

AC: And that's from fishing?

NP: From fishing.

AC: Wow.

NP: It is. Well, you know every time you go out there in that tin can, you're on your own. And you're dependent on your friends next to you, in case anything could happen, you know? Engine, something could stall, you could sink. My buddy's boat just sank last year. He barely got off it.

AC: Right. Friends of Phil Rhule Jr. and I've actually....

NP: That's a sad story.

AC: Years ago, yeah.

NP: You know, he's trying to make money, pay his bills. He loaded the boat up too much and was out in rough weather, trying to, you know, pay the bills. And the friggen boat rolled over on him. He was a good man, too, you know. And there's about a dozen other stories just like that one I could sit here and tell you about, you know. It's... they say it's... I just read in the Providence Journal the other day. It's the most percentage of 100,000 people... it's the highest mortality rate. Even before coal miners, so. Yeah, I think is like 37 out of every 100,000 and then coal mining is like 18, and then I forget what the one was after that.

AC: So you always have that sort of....

NP: Respect the sea, right.

AC: And plus you have to deal with....

NP: The mechanical... and catch fish, and worry about what not to kill and throw over and....

AC: Yeah. Yeah, I can't imagine....

NP: So it's stressful. It couldn't be as bad as airplane pilot or something. Okay, I've got 300 people in my life. And I've got to land this thing. But yeah, my anxiety's high. I don't smoke at home. But when I get down on the boat I smoke.

AC: Something triggers it?

NP: Yeah, just the nicotine in your blood. But at the same time... plus all the other guys smoke. It's hard.

AC: Part of the culture?

NP: Right.

[33:14]

AC: And then just in closing, if you could... it sounds like this would be a no, but I'll ask it anyway. If you could actually go back in time and remove sectors as an option and replace it with something else, would you do it? Is there something that you have in mind or...?

NP: Well, the Days at Sea were working fine. You know, we were seeing increases in stocks. But then the *Albatross* trusted their shoddy... they made a lot of rules and regulations off that boat towing crooked nets, outdated nets. Scientists on the boat, they didn't have a fisherman on the boat. They should have had a New Bedford... doesn't matter where, a vessel captain running that boat for the government, to show them where the fish are, update the gear. They made a lot of rules and regulations off their data, you know. From the *Albatross*. I don't know if you know all about it?

AC: Sure.

NP: And after they were busted on it, they didn't change anything. So they took our days. They slowly took our days. They weeded us out and the Days at Sea were working. Then they went to that 2:1 and that really made it... that wasn't working. And now would I change it? I think the sectors will be fine, as long as they give us... they start giving us some more fish back. Because the fish are there. I have to go to areas to get away from one species to go... you know what I mean. If we just go out there and make two or three tows, keep what we catch, and have a quota system, that's fine. It's working, yes, it is working because... it's working for me. Now some guys, you know, I don't know.

AC: Yeah.

NP: It's not like we have a choice. We have to make it work, so we are making it work.

AC: Okay, super.

NP: But we're the last, like I said. The east coast is the last to get into this quota system. Alaska's had it for years and it seems to be... whatever.

AC: And then just the last couple questions. Is there something I haven't asked that you want to state? And then also, with that, in conclusion....

NP: I think, okay.

AC: Please.

NP: The last thing....

AC: Or is there something I didn't ask about sectors or your life?

NP: No, I just think the government is too involved. I think they make too many pilot programs, too many scientists for every one fisherman. There's six or seven marine biologists or you know, whoever, around our industry. The government's created jobs around our industry, but they've actually taken from us. You know, I mean, they need to give us something. They're giving government jobs out, that's great. Well, increase our quotas so we can keep the fishing industry going. Otherwise, you will lose a way of life. They'll weed us out. There'll be no boats down here and they'll put up condominiums right here. They've been dying to do that for years anyway. Move us up to Quonset.

AC: Yeah.

[36:10]

NP: And this fishing port's been here since my father, my grandfather were little boys, you know. And in the sixties and seventies, that's when the government should have been involved when they let all the Russian trawlers, all the Japanese boats. They fished our waters for years and towed football field sized nets around and wiped our fish out. Then when we kicked them out and made the Hague Line, we just upgraded our boats to catch as much as they used to catch and towing around small mesh, killing everything. They should have been more involved. They waited too long, you know what I mean? And now they just created all these jobs around our industry and it just seems like we get the shaft.

AC: I hear you.

NP: You know what I mean? So, it sucks.

AC: Yeah. And just the last question. If your grandchildren or great grandchildren were to listen to this oral history, is there something you'd want to tell them? Or is there something sort of for posterity's sake that you'd want to have on the archive about your life or a story that you're fond of or a memory that you'd like to share? Anything along those lines?

NP: Let's see. It's not the worst job in the world. It pays decent. I enjoy being out in the boat. It's better than being stuck in a cubicle or.... I grew up, had tough times. I grew up in a group home, a boys' group home. My parents were divorced. They're both alcoholics and when they went their separate ways I was shipped back and forth. And what would I say about fishing? It's just a way of life, you know. But everyone down here is... we all know each and they're good people and we try to count on each other, you know. The main thing is worrying about each other while we're out fishing. You know, just so you know someone's around in case something happens. And now... it's a good life. I have no problem with it. I get burned out sometimes, but that's why you have a mate, so they can take the boat once in awhile and....

AC: Some breathing...?

NP: I'm lucky that I had this industry here as I grew up, you know. Because if I was in the mid-west or something... I mean, I graduated high school but... it's a good thing that this was here to.... I had something to make a living out of. And I've worked my way to the top now. That's the... you know, you own your own boat, you can't go any higher pretty much. Am I happy? Yes. Do I like my job? Sometimes.

AC: A job is a job in the end sometimes.

NP: Right. You've got to work or you go crazy. Unless you hit the lottery or something, you know?

AC: Now that's interesting. You said that it was here... and that you were lucky that it was here. So did you feel that you were driven to enter fisheries way back in the day or...?

NP: Yeah.

AC: It was sort of an obligation from your family?

NP: No. A lot of my friends have... their fathers and grandfathers were fishermen. My great grandfather, my grandfather, and my father... they moved down from Scituate. They had a beach house down here and they ended up making it their permanent residence. So they grew up in Snug Harbor area, Point Judith. So my father's name is Niles too, so he knows a lot of people around here too, as well as... I always hear, "Oh you're Niles' son." It's a living....

[39:44]

AC: You were familiar with it?

NP: I was familiar with it, yeah. And it was good money. When I got out of high school I was making more money than.... Even in high school, I was making more money than the teachers were making, lumping fish. Cause it was more big quantity in. And so... you know, you get paid by the thousands of pounds. And yeah, I was driven to it 'cause I enjoyed it. It's kind of a crazy life when you're younger. You know, you've got pockets full of a thousand dollars and you're

18 years old. I mean, I made 80 grand my first year, no third year out of high school. You know, I'm working on deck and I didn't pay my taxes and I had some screw-ups but....

AC: Yeah.

NP: My wife changed me. God bless her. So I'm living the good life now. Raising my children, sober, and yeah... there's not much I could change, you know, besides....

AC: Sure.

NP: Just being able to catch a little more fish. I hate throwing fish over. It's sad, you know? But I try not to, too. I love the environment. I pick up garbage on my road. You know, I get so mad when I see people throwing stuff. Oh, it makes me mad. 'Cause I jog the same road every day. 4 miles every day I'm home. And it's the same people throwing the same garbage on the same side of the road.

AC: People still do that?

NP: And I stop and I get it, you know. Yeah, people still do that and I live in the woods, you know? I don't know where people's morals are nowadays. I wasn't raised like that, you know? I just... kids nowadays don't give a crap about nothing. The world is their garbage can. And you get a lot of ignorant adult people that are like that too. And it's just like... just ignorant people out there. There are too many people in the world right now. You know, it's just crazy.

AC: Yeah.

NP: And people don't work like they used to, you know? They have lazy bones, you know? Half the country's obese, I mean... and even if they offer them a job oh you know, it's not enough. I'm pretty much an independent voter. I like... I'm a Democrat but big business, they try to take over and oil rules the world. And after the oil it's the politicians and whoever greases the politicians, they have the lobbyists to get things done. Fishermen don't. We don't have the money to... so you're going to get the, you know National Marine Fisheries... Look, they got sued because they weren't.... This company said they weren't doing enough, and that just implicated more laws on us, hurt our industry more, so.... Big business is... with this very small self-employed... a lot of these boats are sold to the companies now. They're company boats.

[42:19]

AC: Really?

NP: Yeah. There are a few guys that just sold out. They got sick of it, you know.

AC: Is it... which?

NP: Town Dock and Handrigan's Seafood, fish houses bought the boats 'cause they need the fish. So they can afford to buy, you know, buying up all the little guys. That's what they did out in Alaska.

AC: Sure.

NP: That king... you know, the Deadliest Catch. Those guys are the very few that actually bought quota from other people so they could survive and that's why they have those "Oh, we can land a million pounds" of this and that. You know, they're under the quota system. It works for them, but a lot of little guys went out of business and that's what's left. You know, big boats.

AC: Has anyone offered to purchase?

NP: Yeah, my boat... I put it up for sale for awhile but they couldn't pay me enough. Then what am I going to do? Go work on deck for someone else or run... and then I've got to go on their schedule. I said, you know, I'm just going to keep my boat. That way I can see my kids on weekends. It's tough dealing with kids. My wife works so I've got to be home or she's got to be home or... 'cause no one wants to baby-sit. So anyway.

AC: They sound like great girls so....

NP: They are great girls.

AC: They'd be a pleasure to....

NP: Yeah, they're not bad at all. They're easy. They're actually pretty easy. They're mother rules with an iron hand so....

AC: Okay.

NP: She's very... she had a tough upbringing too, but she's... her morals are in the right place. And that's all I want my kids to grow up, have morals and do the right thing, you know? And they're already doing that, so....

AC: Excellent. And you've done....

NP: [We've] tried to point them down the right path. Don't spoil them, make them work, try to earn a little bit of what they... cause kids now are spoiled up until they're 18 and then they don't even know how to go out and make a dollar, you know?

AC: That's true. Hard work is an affect that has been lost....

NP: Yeah.

AC: And the video game exaggeration.

NP: Yeah, right. It's... right. You know. You know.



AC: I'm learning, slowly. Well, this has been very, very wonderful speaking with you Niles, and I will turn off the recorder and say thank you.

NP: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

[44:28]