

Interview with Ellen Schomer [ES]
Occupation: Past fisherman
Port Community: Point Judith, RI
Interviewer: Lisa Colburn [LC]
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Women’s Oral Histories Project – NOAA Fisheries
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Interview

[00:00]

LC: Would you mind saying your name and saying that you’ve agreed to the things on the Oral Release.

ES: My name is Ellen Schomer and I agree to everything I’ve signed here on the Oral History Release Form to the best of my understanding.

LC: Thank you. So Ellen, could you tell me what age were you when you got into fishing; what is the year you were born, and how did you get involved?

ES: I started fishing when I was 20 and I’m 51 now. I was working on a boat not this winter but the winter before. How did I start? I was in Provincetown one summer doing odd jobs and having a good time being part of the summer culture there. And my brother’s ex-wife had moved to Provincetown and we were really close; they were the very alternative members of my family. So that’s why I wound up in Provincetown. And the second summer when I went back, she was dating a fisherman who was a sea scalloper, a kind of low end sea scalloper. Back then everybody was doing it; there was a big boom. That was 1977. They were hiring anybody who could shuck a scallop to shuck these massive amounts of scallops that had been found in the area. So I got on his boat and one week I was on it for the Blessing of the Fleet. The next week I was the cook and it was a great adventure. I had been doing nothing but adventure since I left home at 17, hitchhiking around Europe and even down to Africa and stuff. So this just fit right in and I couldn’t believe I was getting paid, all this and money too. Little did I know what a terrible boat he actually was; even I figured it out after a couple months. Meanwhile the hook had been set, so I wasn’t going to not fish; I was going to keep pursuing this crazy new way of life that actually seemed very much like an old way of life. It’s kind of funny when I was in junior high school in New Jersey, we were given A High Wind in Jamaica to read about pirates and that book made such an impression on me; then we got to see the movie and Anthony Quinn was the pirate captain. There were these children, when the pirates attack the boat, the kids got rescued and the others were not killed but left drifting. And the pirate captain, Anthony Quinn, protected the kids from the mean, bad pirates who were his crew. Nothing would do for me, but that I could have been those kids in that story. Then somehow around 19, I sort of got to live that.

[04:46]

LC: Did you ever encounter pirates in all your time?

ES: No, thank God! Well, pirate fishermen, yeah. Not pirates for other than fish.

LC: Can you describe... from what I can tell, you have had lots of different jobs, and you’ve come and gone out of the Point Judith area, and if there’s too many different jobs and places

you've fished, if you could just give me the highlights. From that point in time when you've scalloped, how many years, that summer, did summer work, you know, what's sort of your account over the last 30 years; where have you gone, what have you done, what roles have you played in the fishing community?

ES: I'll give you the condensed version. When I started fishing back then, in 1977, I was slated to go to a different college that fall, but I decided that I had found what I wanted to do, so I didn't go to college. I stayed in Provincetown and also fished in New Bedford for about three years on scallop boats, I could be wrong about that. Scalloping dropped off and I got into dragging, still based out of Provincetown and it was all Eastern rigs.

LC: What's an Eastern rig?

ES: An Eastern rig is a boat with the pilot house aft. It's the old style; they are modeled after schooners and there's no net drum, and everything is done the old way. Hauling the net over the side, pulling it by hand and then using winches. In between those Provincetown years, I read Pêcheur D'Island, about fishing in Iceland from France around the 1930's. Pierre Loti was the author, and that book just... it was a romance, it was a fishing story, it captured my heart, so I said, "OK. I'm going to go live that story." And I went to France and I fished on a boat in France for about 6 months in a little port and that was where I actually first learned dragging and a little bit of net mending.

LC: What port were you in?

ES: I was on an island called Île de Ré and I was in La Flotte en Ré. And that was just a very not-profitable but good adventure story thing. Then I went back to Provincetown and after altogether 6 years there, it was time to go. I went to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, I went all around looking for something that would be like Provincetown; I felt like a wharf was necessary and sand dunes, but that wasn't so easy to find. So Portsmouth had a lot of character, so I found the docks and met the people and I worked there and just moved over the line into Kittery, Maine. But it was pretty cold up there and I was also now officially getting sick of fishing and wanting to do something else, and I found that I really liked working on nets. Up there in Portsmouth, I learned about Point Judith and that there were actually three net businesses in Point Judith, so I thought I ought to come down and check that out. I ended up getting a promise of employment from Jamestown Trawl which was Dave Beutel and Robin (?). So I moved down to Point Judith; I think it was the dead of winter. The net shop was really interesting, learning so much more; I thought I knew stuff, I didn't really know anything. And they were willing to teach me a lot and I enjoyed being able to make plans, not always being on call and after awhile, I started to not enjoy making plans; being at work everyday at 8, leaving at 4, Friday night, live for the weekend, go out to the Sunny Side, have a few drinks... I wasn't making enough money and I was finding it to be too much structure for me. But with these new net skills, I went fishing hard bottom out of Woods Hole. Of course I missed the point of telling you the various boats I'd been on. At that point now we're talking getting up to 30-40 different boats. Women weren't... they were a novelty item that not everyone wanted the novelty of. And I always had my choice of the bottom end boats. I remember there was a captain that hired women in Woods Hole, and I got on his boat and it was really interesting. Gave fishing a whole new spin, this style.

[11:37]

LC: Do you remember the boat's name, the captain?

ES: Yep. *The Chain*, Bill Crandle.

LC: And what was different about it?

ES: We were catching lots of cod. We'd have... I'd seen it before... rail to rail codfish and during the course of an hour or an hour and a half tow, the net would hang up, maybe several times, as much as 5 and ten times, you'd feel the boat slow down and kind of jump. And invariably by the time we hauled back, with all our fish, we would be shredded [the net]. You'd have to keep mending the net. And we'd have two net drums. So, quickly change nets, they were identical nets, really, really easy to work on, and have to get that net completely put back together again by the time we'd hauled back the other one, which might or might not be shredded. So it was fast and furious. And lots of twine work. I remember people had like twine ego. "They don't have me touch the fish, I'm the needle person!" You know, and there would be a crew of eight, so there would be four people on each watch and we'd work around the clock, so you'd have invariably 2 people on twine and 2 people on fish. I ran into a lot of attitude over the years in general, but I remember doing that to, guys that would take the needle right out of my hand, like: "You go work with the fish." Now previously they would have been like, "you're too weak to work on a fishing boat". But now they are like "oh no, you go work on the fish; you chop the ice, you lug the bushels". Whatever they might have been able to do to have a problem with you. But I got to be good at the twine between all the practice there and Jamestown Trawl. And I remember twine ego got set aside because now you got sick of working the twine. "Can I please work on the fish, I'm tired of...". Your hands being out in the cold and it's kind of a brain teaser sometimes. Fishing is a no-brainer; it's all back and hands. So that revitalized fishing for me for awhile.

So I did that for a few years, and then, even though I had moved to Rhode Island, I hadn't really fished out of Point Judith. I had an opportunity to go on a boat in Point Judith... the first one was the *Cindy Anne*, which the owner, Jim Thayer, now has got the biggest boat in Point Judith. It was from back in the days when you caught a lot of fish with a small boat, without a lot of electronics. So now, he's got this mega-ship which had its heyday and now it's on the down side, because it's like having a big SUV, it doesn't make sense. I remember we hauled back and we split the bag like 25 times or something - that could be an exaggeration - but on scup, which was not a fish I was familiar with, being from the Cape and more Northern waters. I was like: "Wow, I can't believe, I've never seen that much, what I thought was valuable fish onboard like that.". And of course they weren't valuable that trip, we worked our asses off and... we made O.K. money, but I thought I was seeing gold landing on deck, but that wasn't the case.

[16:07]

LC: What was the market for scup? Was it local markets, was it a specialized market?

ES: I've heard it goes to Philadelphia and Black people... different places like it a lot. It is a very good fish, it's just... I think it might be more work to process because it's smaller and it's boney and it's kind of a shame ... it's not fair that it ends up being in poorer communities because I'm sure it costs more. But for some reason that's how it's marketed. I could be kind of off on my information.

LC: Actually I'm having a recollection. I went out on a party boat years ago, one in New Bedford and lots of people take a bus up from Philadelphia and New York area; a big part were African American communities, and it was scup. I think you're right on target.

ES: I think maybe it might have that popularity because maybe they catch it further down New Jersey and Washington, Maryland and stuff. So I fished in Point Judith on and off for awhile. Then a friend of mine turned me on to the work of unloading the boats but not actually in the fish house. You'd show up and see if they would give you work tending the hatch, guiding

the baskets out, dumping the baskets or something, and I really enjoyed that. I did that for about 3 years. Again, you were always on call. You had to go down or call in the morning to see if there was any boats in. Then you didn't know if you would get hired by them, but there was such volumes of fish coming in, that they had to go back out again, the engineer might have to change the oil, the captain would do captain stuff and they needed people to help unload. The money was good.

LC: What was that called?

ES: They call it lumping. But the actual lumping is the guy or occasional woman that goes down there, and scoops the fish out of the pens into the baskets, either using a fork or using their arms. I have great footage of my friends doing that. I shot a lot of video in '95 before I left. So the basket guiders and the basket dumpers... well, in New Bedford, they're called lumpers. I don't think they're called that in Alaska or other ports. So I did that for about three years. It was hectic never knowing what you're doing and plus being not the one in the fish hold, you got paid half as much. Also around that time, maybe before then, I got my captain's license and that helped me get a job running a buy-boat.

[19:50]

LC: What's a buy-boat?

ES: For buying clams from the quahoggers in the Bay. So I did that on weekends for half a year or something.

LC: So what size boat would you be in?

ES: That was a 50-foot boat.

LC: 50-foot boat. And what do you do, go around and collect from them when they were out?

ES: You go up to the upper Bay mostly when it was open and drop the anchor and at the end of the day, all the diggers would come around, like seagulls.

LC: Like a floating wharf in Maine.

ES: With machines that would count the clams and stuff. I had a skiff then too, and I tried skiff dragging with little miniature net and doors.

LC: About what year was that?

ES: '85-86. I tried digging clams, not successfully. Well, nothing has been successful, but I tried. I remember one time with a friend of mine who was also guiding baskets with the skiff, we were underneath the Jamestown Bridge and we had to haul-back and the cod end was so full that we couldn't get the net onboard; we were in this 18-foot wooden skiff with a mast and boom. She and I are just hanging by the rope of the tockle, trying to get the bag onboard. It just won't come over, and we were drifting near the pilings. We're going, "No Benny's, no insurance company; we would rather be here in this ridiculous boondoggle trying to make a measly amount of money than to be selling out and having a conventional job. We eventually got it on board and of course it wasn't fish; it was mud and crabs or something; somehow we got it on. So there was lumping and then I got into bait stringing, which Amanda taught me how to string bait, oh boy, you could teach a monkey how. The money wasn't too good, but it seemed O.K. It was piece work. And pretty much everything has been piece work. Somewhere in there, I started working with another woman, a little bit, first we made gillnets. She was a marlin spike artist, it was her business, and she could do all kinds of old world things, like...

LC: Say that again?

ES: Marlin spike. Which is the fid spike thing you use to open up wire, to splice wire, rope; a lot of people use it for rope as well. She could make puddings on tug boats; back before they just put rubber tires on them, they had those brown things, and she could make beautiful manila

fenders and all kinds of incredible stuff. Which she thought meant she could make gillnets. She could tie some good knots. And then you add to the mix, that I thought I could make gillnets because I knew a little bit more about nets and together we made quite a lot of gillnets, which I guess I'm not too proud of, because I don't know that I think that's a great fishery. But particularly we made some swordfish gillnets, which I really don't know if I think that's a great fishery. But the other thing not to be proud of is we probably weren't making them that well. There was more to it than either of us knew. That was just still, in the fishing industry, doing twine, thinking we were doing the right thing. Just like getting horseshoe crabs off the beach seemed like a really great thing to do, but now you find out it wasn't such a good thing to do. [24:18]

ES: What happened after that? Oh, bait stringing. I got into bait stringing a lot and worked for Andrea at the Bait Company.

LC: When was that?

ES: Probably started working with Andrea there around '89 or '90. And that was really hard on my hands at first. I was surprised, having done so much shucking, ripping cod, guiding baskets, but I got over the hump with my hands and was able to keep working. But her work was sporadic, so sometimes it would be slow and somebody would need somebody to go fishing, so she'd let me make a few trips or maybe I fell in love with some boat and thought it would really work out; I'd make a few trips and end up wanting to come back and string bait. Bait was great; you could make your own hours and it was piece work.

LC: What do you mean you could make your own hours?

ES: As long as you got the bait done, it didn't matter what time you showed up. In fact one guy, who we all enjoyed a lot, just passed away, but he would bring lights and work at night in the summer. And then sometimes with the Bait Company, in the winters it was slow I'd have to fish. Of course I haven't mentioned that in between all these gaps... the goal is to escape fishing. The problem is you keep going back because nothing else quite works out.

LC: The structure becomes too much and you just want the freedom and flexibility?

ES: And being outdoors. But also I had ideas. I'm going to sell my photos or greeting cards, or I had a food business or whatever. Always invest about \$5,000 and then lose it and then go back to fishing because if you did at least get on a good boat where you could make some good money, sometimes \$800 per day, you could re-coupe your loses and then try your next dream, or go on a vacation and take a break or something. I waitressed, I worked for caterers sometimes, I got into landscaping; I can't even remember what all. Bait's been good. And then I'd do bait on my own for different boats; do a season or something. A few months. All this while it was burning in me to move to Hawaii; for 20 years I had been... I first went in 1980. And I finally decided just to do it. And I moved there in '95 and worked in a boat yard at first.

LC: Where were you?

ES: On the big island of Hawaii.

LC: Do you remember what boat yard?

ES: Honokohau in Kailua Kona. Where I swear the hole in the ozone is in the southern hemisphere... it is right over that damn boat yard. Grinding and polishing fiberglass, and aluminum, and paints, and respirators on... and stuff like that. It was nice. Nice start. And then I met a fisherman when I was out surfing; a great man, Manu Pacheco, and he invited me to fish with him. Not out of Kona but out of Hilo, in Pohoiki, the rough side, rough and rainy. But I moved over there, and I had wanted to buy land. Back then, you could get a piece of land in Hawaii for \$5,000 and you could build a shack out of palm fronds but you wouldn't be on the

beach. He brought me to the other side by the volcano and I saw that it was a really nice area and there was good surf. So I fished out of there with him for 6 months or something and bought land. He wasn't a boyfriend but everyone assumed that was the case. We just kind of laughed. It was very interesting in some respects, fishing wise (very ethical), because we'd go out at night, in a 25-foot boat and we caught squid for bait with a little teeny rod and reel. Where I had been seeing thousands of pounds come on board with nets, kind of limp and lifeless and now, you'd have like three squid in a bucket that were putting on a show for you; changing colors, acting up, you're goal was to keep them alive so you could put them on the hooks for the tuna. We were getting 100-200 pound tuna, sometimes swordfish.

[30:35]

LC: In the smaller boat, or the smaller boat was used...?

ES: No, we were getting them onboard. And Manu would pull them up by hand and we'd take turns lying on a bench sleeping because it was all night. As soon as you heard one of the lines go off, you're practically sleeping with your boots and oilers... they were rolled up on your ankles; you'd just pull them on and jump in and help the other person. And it was such a fair fight; one person to one fish, using his hands.

LC: How much would you get for one fish?

ES: He took really good care of them. We'd pull into Hilo, to the auction and the crowd would murmur: "Manu is in." Because his fish were good and he had a good reputation. All the fish would be laid out on pallets from all the different boats and they just made it illegal now. Board of Health, this and that; this whole cultural thing, right down the tubes. Such a part of fishing history in Hawaiian culture.

LC: They just recently?

ES: Yep. One fish, he could get \$10-20 per pound for a 200 pound fish.

LC: How many would you get on a single... sounds like it was an evening?

ES: All night, it would be like... we'd leave at 4-5pm and be back at 5-6am and go to the auction and then be done with all our boat stuff by 9-10 in the morning and go home and try to sleep. It was awful; it was 100 degrees in the place I was renting and I never slept, and I was so sick from being sleep deprived really. They were all lamenting it used to be better. We would be lucky, very lucky if we got 8-10 fish. And many nights we didn't get any. Maybe we'd get 2-3. So you might make \$500-700 for a nights work. But I figured out in the end, I was making average \$150 for way too much work for a normal person to want to do.

LC: So \$150 in the early '90s?

ES: That was '96-97. Actually when I hooked up with him. I had left the boat yard. I got a job in a construction company driving a water truck. They knew they were going to get this government gig up at the military base, up at Mauna Kea, at about 9,000 feet and it would look good for their company if they had... what's that? They are always into everything... the Army Corps of Engineers. It was one of the things they oversee, and it would look good if they had a woman on staff. "We have to get a woman, what woman would want to dot his kind of work... oh her!" "Oh God, knows we can't have a woman do hard work so we'll let her drive the water truck." I would have much rather done physical hard work, never mind I could have done it. The water truck was so challenging; it wasn't any exercise but it had like 18 gears, water coming out about 12 different places, and brakes. If you brake too much rather than downshift, a little alarm would go off to let you know that you were now out of whatever compression makes the brakes work. That's when I went fishing on the other side. Plus our job had started to slow down up on the mountain anyway.

[34:56]

ES: So I went over there and I worked with Manu for awhile and then what happened was, I bought land and built a house; stayed there for 3 years without leaving and then the inevitable series of weird jobs that never were quite right led me to decide that I had to come back to Point Judith and Andrea took me back in for the summer doing bait. I enjoyed coming back to the fishing community and being on the docks. I started to come back every year or so for anywhere from three months to six months. But it was all in the name of just having enough money to pay my meager bills. I didn't have to come back to Rhode Island, but I wasn't going to do certain other jobs that were available there. I was in a very weird community in Hawaii; I was 12 miles from the most active volcano in the world, Lava Zone I, where your house is most likely to get run over by lava. Talk about living on the edge. And there were all these characters; it had been a huge pot growing community until Green Harvest started flying. So there were all these crazy people and I appeared to be the staunch New England work ethic, straight, conventional person. Then I come back to Rhode Island where I was like the far-out, free-spirit, so I kind of preferred being amongst the responsible, conventional people than to be the one who's too straight. Not that I don't absolutely love Hawaii and all the people I knew there, but it was very hard. It was hard to make a living because so many people where I lived were scamming one way or the other; whether they had a drug thing going, a welfare thing going, a lawsuit thing going, a trust fund going... so jobs paid so crappy because people had jobs for fronts, or for something to do or for God knows what.

[37:37]

LC: How long... do you still have your property there?

ES: No, I sold it.

LC: Do you wish you had?

ES: Oh God yes.

LC: From when you first went there to the point at which you moved completely, how long of a period was that?

ES: Well, when I first went there, I immediately shipped all my belongings from here, my car.

LC: And what year was that, approximately?

ES: '95.

LC: And then when you finally left and had everything shipped back?

ES: 2002 I think.

LC: So you have a recent history.

ES: But I made a side trip to New Zealand and Australia, and I so wanted to make New Zealand be my new home. I didn't know that for sure, until I was there. I feel like... the dollar was strong, which is good, because I was able to rent a van for \$25/day which was really good. So I had my home, my surfboards, but it's a big country; like the size of California with a lot of dirt roads. I spent an awful lot of time looking for that new place to call home rather than just enjoying New Zealand; it had to be a fishing port, it had to have surfing... everybody wants to move to New Zealand; they don't want you. You have to marry a New Zealander. And there were all kinds of people from other countries meeting each other, but like, "Oh, you're not a New Zealander? This isn't going to work!" They certainly didn't need any more fishermen or people who could work sheep. They wanted brain surgeons. Somebody else got in... they could do hair extensions. Because they didn't have that yet; now I'm sure they have plenty. So unfortunately I didn't get to move to New Zealand.

LC: How long were you there for?

ES: Just a month and a month in Australia. Then I came back to Rhode Island and bought a cottage that's just in a trailer park. Just has running water five months of the year, down in Matunuck. And went back to work at the Bait Company and I had my skiff right in the pond. So I could walk from my cottage to my skiff in about five minutes and go through Potter's Pond and the cut by Captain Jacks; a beautiful way to go to work verses going down Route 108.

LC: You actually went by boat to Point Judith? Wow!

ES: Yeah, it was so fun!

LC: How long did it take?

ES: About like it would in the car but slightly more of a hassle; but I had a dock space. Between walking to my boat and taking my skiff... you know, a half hour. Some days it's rough, some days it's foggy in the summer. But it was just so much more relaxing than going through all those traffic lights. And Narragansett in the summer; the Salt Pond Plaza, four corners by Stop and Shop, and the Mobil station is just so ugly. So that was really nice. Then of course, bait got slow in the fall and I went fishing and they shut the water off in the cottage and I had to haul my water. "Ok, this plan isn't working very well!" So what happened then?

LC: Those solar showers just weren't going to happen in the winter time.

[41:37]

ES: I did stay the winter but I went back to Hawaii for a nice month or so. And during a previous time in Hawaii, I saw a salad farm... well I got to eating these salad greens that were incredible. They are not really available around here, except when I grew them... did you see all my land out here? I decided that the escape from fishing was going to be to grow organic salad greens. So my parents had passed away and I had some money from that plus the cottage that I fixed up in the trailer park, I sold it right at the peak real estate boom and made an absurd amount of money for a place that was the size of this kitchen, on leased land. That really paid off. Back-tracking before the salad farm, in Hawaii, before I had gotten there, I got my AB ticket because I thought the escape from fishing was going to work on container ships or tug boats.

LC: An AB ticket is?

ES: Its Merchant Marine papers. But it's beyond coming in as an Ordinary. You can work your way up the Hauser, the rope that goes... the boat hangs off the Hauser when it's tied up or moored or whatever. You can work your way up to become a mate and then a captain, verses going to Officer training school and getting it the preppy way. It's not right; you got your credentials without being in the trenches with the people. So I had gotten my AB ticket because I was able to document all my sea time; you had to be on boats over a 100 ton... maybe that's not true... for the 100 ton captains license I needed that. So I did work on tug boats out of Point Judith. I got to work on research vessels for the University of Hawaii for a little while. Which was not like working on the *Calypso* with Jacques Cousteau. I got to start the day mopping the floor and scrubbing the toilets and then I got to go up and stand in the wheelhouse with another officer and make like we were driving the boat, which I guess we were. And sometimes you got to go out and run a winch for a scientist.

LC: Do a tow or two and see what came in.

ES: They'd get all excited because there was a cup of clear water. It was no exercise and it was really boring. But very nice people. I realized between that and the idea of actually being stuck out on a ship for 1-3 months and possibly pulling around fossil fuels was just not going to be square with my values or my need to be outdoors and moving, and be more earthy. To be on a boat where you don't wear rubber boots seems weird to me. So the salad farm. I bought this

house, I looked around and found where there was enough land that I thought would be enough to grow salad greens, because I'd seen it in a few other instances, on a very condensed piece of land and I couldn't afford more than this.

LC: How much?

ES: I have a half acre and more than a third of it is garden. You grow a crop every 21 days, so you're cycling it around.

LC: Are you buying starts or are you buying your own seeds?

ES: Seeds, directly.

LC: And then you put them in...?

ES: A lot of work, a lot of money. I've put in like \$20-30,000 into this and lost it all. And it was very heart-breaking to work that hard and struggle so much; it was all new territory and just figuring out one challenge after another. Organics are challenging.

[47:15]

ES: So I go back fishing in the winter the last few years I think. And doing bait and helping Andrea unload trucks of herring and being where you knew you could make some money. Salad farm didn't work out.

LC: So you're not doing it at all right now?

ES: Actually I am. But instead of having the whole plot be greens, I'm just doing 1/3 of it greens and one market, Belmont's, or maybe a restaurant or two. And try and sell the other vegetables, maybe making it more self-sustaining. I'm going to have blueberries and raspberries. I couldn't see just ripping the thousand dollars worth of fencing and \$5,000 worth of soil to put lawn back into mow.

LC: What didn't work out about it?

ES: Not enough land.

LC: So you weren't doing it on a big enough scale to...?

ES: For the style I wanted to do, I couldn't use a tractor. I couldn't even use a large Rototiller. So it was too much work; it wasn't efficient enough. I think I could do it on a bigger piece of land. And also being one person with one income, I know other people who do various intriguing ventures that work out. When they crunch the numbers, they could never afford their whole life if that profit margin they're making was all they had to live on. About a year ago, still trying to escape fishing, I decided I was going to go to massage school. That would provide me... I like working with my hands, I like standing up, it's not outdoors, I don't like that part so much, but I sure like it when it's cold out, being indoors. And you can work for yourself and it would be like a kinder, gentler thing for my senior years.

LC: Thinking to the future.

ES: Though a lot of people I know are getting out of massage at 50 rather than starting it. I found a school that I could fast-track through it in Costa Rica. I went to school for 4.5 months there, eight hours a day and I've started my practice. Worked for someone else for awhile and now I've got my own office as of a week ago in Charlestown. I hope to reel in a lot of diverse people. Unfortunately fishing people aren't making much money, but they certainly deserve some good massage and I want to make it feel more accessible rather than just something that just nice, new age ladies do.

LC: That have money.

ES: Of course, I like that too. It still is an expensive thing. I also want to be able to do some pro-bono work. So that's, hopefully the end of the fishing career story.

LC: This is the short version?

ES: Did you ask me to say in a nutshell? I'm sorry!

LC: No, you said it was going to be a nut shell. I'm curious, what have you been able to do for things like health insurance?

ES: I really haven't had it. Once I had it, when I worked that construction job in Hawaii. I had it for two months and then they let me pay to have it after I left because I had been in long enough. I had it altogether six months. Then once before I had it again; I only had it for a little while.

LC: Are you a pretty healthy person?

ES: Yeah, pretty healthy. When I did have it, I remember at one point, just finding the bullshit between the doctors and the insurance companies... it's a risk, and I may rue the day to have taken the risk, but it insulted me, it insults all of us, and I'm just like f\$%& it, I'm not going to have this, I'm not going to participate in this.

LC: You're lucky if your health is such that is hasn't been a major issue to not have it. In terms of all the physical labor you've done, what's been the wear and tear in your body? Do you feel it now, like a lot of sternmen talk about back pain and repetitive motion issues?

ES: No, I feel fine. Different times... like forking bait. I'm pretty short and the barrels are pretty big, so I have lower back pain more on one side than the other. But if I had done more stretching or strengthening on the other side, I think I would have been fine. And surfing helped a lot. I don't smoke and I eat healthy. I remember a friend of mine called it 'My Fault' insurance, like there's 'No Fault' insurance. I just try and take care of my health. I'm lucky in my genetics. And in my build: short, low to the ground, thick.

[54:08]

LC: Have you ever had any major injuries due to fishing?

ES: No. I've cut myself with the knives a few times; I had stitches, minor. I'm not a hero and I don't put myself in the line of fire if I can help it.

LC: What about any... when you were out on a boat... boat going down, any safety incidences that scared you?

ES: Because of the caliber of boats I could get on, I've seen everything break: the masts, the booms, the net drums, the blocks... and that's one reason why I'm not a hero. Because when I got on good boats, people were like, "Here, you can get under there and put that hook in whatever." And good boats are maintained and rules have been made that safety chains have to be in place and metal has to be inspected, so everything that ever broke that could have killed someone, fortunately in the circumstances I was in, none of the dramatic sad stories happened. For me. I know of others.

LC: Never lost at sea, or had to be towed in by the Coast Guard?

ES: We were going into Gloucester on this scalloper, and the hatch cover went upside down. There were some green crew, and you're not supposed to do that; there's certain superstitions, there's many, but there are some that are pretty adhered to. And hatch cover upside down is one of them. They put the hatch cover upside down, and a few minutes we hit something; water was pouring in the focsle; it was an old eastern rig, we all slept down there. But we were a few minutes to the dock. We tied up to the dock and were bucket brigading out the boat. The Coast Guard was just over a tall, chain link fence with barbed wire from us, but it took them a half hour to arrive with the pumps. So there was that. Then when I was on a research vessel in Hawaii, we were nosing around Lahina at night, after a day with the NOAA people, your people. We tried to drop our anchor; evidently not in the right spot and the boat... I like to say sank... but because

the water was so shallow, it sank, it was on the bottom, but we were still above. We had to evacuate the scientists.

LC: How big of a boat was it?

ES: It was a 140-foot boat. It was very exciting. I felt terrible; the captain was a wonderful man and we loved him. And we wished it had happened to certain other captains in the fleet, not him. I got to say that was when working on the research vessel was interesting, fun! Now we had some excitement. And then because of the way things work, they declared it a total loss, which it wasn't, it's just government waste. And research vessels seem like a huge milk cow that everybody... so many states have so many of them. And most of it has to do not so much with weather but with Naval Undersea Warfare. One way or another, that's where the money comes from. So they scrapped the boat.

[58:44]

LC: What happened to the captain?

ES: He was such a wonderful man, he says, "There goes my career." But he had already had his career; he had been a Navy captain or commander. And he's sweeping up the floor, which the cook should have done after the trash spilled because we were rocking around like crazy. "Captain, give us back that broom, don't you be doing that." But they kept him and they treated him good and they understood. He was a wonderful person. I've been out in bad weather but nothing really bad ever really happened. That's why the book *Out on the Deep Blue* is so great because it's more of the essence of it. Of fishing.

LC: Not the horrible catastrophes.

ES: That story lies in that quiet conversation you have in the wheel house together. Or the silly, crazy stuff; not the shark bites – those are good stories – but that's not, to me, what it's about. That's what was so funny about the *Perfect Storm*, and all the fishermen would laugh about it, "Can you believe all the stuff that happened in the course of one day or one trip?" It's more subtle than that.

LC: I think that's where the way of life part of it, would you say that's the culture of it?

ES: And now; I miss the docks and when I get down there, it's really nice and if I have something to do that I get to put on my boots, it's like slipping into little wombs, and it feels good, the wooden docks feel good under my feet, and the boats feel good. But we all know how sickening it gets, but it's a nice place to visit. Occasions lately I've had to come together with the people that I know from the community, have been funerals. I remember one guy said at the last funeral, "It used to be weddings that we got together for." So it's nice to be part of a special community here, in Point Judith. And some people, they don't care so much for one another, or not joiners. None of us are joiners; that's why we're there. But it really feels like...very special to be part of it and then in the world culture of fishing. There are other people who have fished around the country and around the world; it's a special community. Cult. God, my life is so much richer for having been part of it.

LC: With the funerals that you've been to, is it because of lost at sea or fishing accidents, or just people that are dying, the average age of the folks that are fishing now a day?

ES: Sometimes its people's parents. So they are elderly. Or siblings who didn't fish but you just want to support each other.

LC: So it's the social connections and your close connections?

ES: Yeah. Not so much fishing related. Although some people, a lot of fishing people smoke so it's not helping their health. There has been one of the most tragic ones was when this captain

had a heart attack out at sea. A wonderful, wonderful person; a family man, a really honorable person. He died with a young family, four kids.

LC: Was this Scott Westcott?

ES: Yeah.

[01:03:39] End of part one of the interview; recording stopped.

[00:00]

ES: Lack of sleep really wears down your immune system. Between the lack of sleep; and it's very irregular sleep. It's funny; a lot of people are just so thrown if they take an airplane. "Oh, I have jet lag." What do you want, a medal? Try going fishing for one day.

LC: I hadn't really thought about that. That the sleep schedule is so irregular that your body has to be incredibly adaptable.

ES: It's more of a mind-set. And that's what so many fishing people do; they just do what you have to do – if you have to stay up for 36 or 48 hours – I remember working with these old guys back in Provincetown. One was 70 and the other was 62. And they looked old. We were bending over because that's how we fished for cod and everything back then. Now people use conveyors. "How do you do it, you guys are old, I'm young?" I didn't say that. And the old guy just said, "Just relax". Because literally you could be bent over for 12 hours. You just relax. So whether it's putting up with the sleep deprivation, you just do it. I had someone recently who was going to be part of my new massage practice, and as it turns out, they were quite an unreliable person. I remember they called up, "The reason I didn't show up the day before opening, because I had been up and not gotten any sleep doing some helpful thing for somebody." And my other friend was like, "Right, tell a fisherman that!" Between that and the not-so-well-balanced diet. Now it's nice, there are some really great cooks on boats, but vegetables have not always been part of the scene on a lot of boats. Though people are more aware now. So between the smoking, the poor diet, the lack of sleep, some people don't live as long or as healthy as they should.

LC: What percentages of the people that are part of your inner circle, or your outer circle, are connected to the fishing community?

ES: The majority.

[03:07]

And when was the last time you were on a boat? You said you went to massage school?

ES: The winter before this, January, a little over a year ago in January.

LC: Are you still going down and stringing bait for Andrea from time to time?

ES: Very rarely.

LC: So you're really trying to make a break right now. Is this your longest break?

ES: Yeah

LC: How are you coping?

ES: It's good.

LC: Are you twitching sometimes?

ES: Well, it's been winter and I do get cold. This winter, massage is my new practice and it's been very slow and I've just been hemorrhaging more money trying to get it going. I've been sitting around, huddled by the wood stove getting flabby. If I was fishing or doing bait I would be forced to be out there, and I would be like, "Oh it's really not that cold out, and doesn't the fresh air feel good." I can't even take a deep breath because I've been indoors breathing wood stove smoke and stressing. I don't see any good way, really, to be a part of the fishing industry anymore. If I wanted to. My friend just went for seven days to Georges Bank on a Cadillac of a

boat and made \$107 dollars. If you don't really like fishing that much, then you don't really want to be there, you sure don't want to be there for that.

LC: What are you seeing in the people you know, of the community of people that fish – you had mentioned before you turned this on, people are losing their homes – can you sort of make that picture concrete for me in the last few years, in terms of the way in which people are really suffering.

ES: I don't know exactly, I hear more rumors. But a lot of people, I think, I saw this before – sorry lobstermen – but a lot of these people have wives with good jobs.

LC: That's a strategy that's keeping people fishing right now, particularly down here.

ES: In other walks of life, the husband has the good job and the wife grows salad greens or something.

LC: Supplemental income verses it shifting. If you can just rattle off as many as you can think of, what are the good jobs that the wives have around here? That allows their husbands to continue to fish?

ES: Banking, school teachers, airplane pilot.

LC: A woman airplane pilot? I had heard about a lawyer?

ES: Yeah. Probably. Maybe family money. I don't really know because I don't know the wives so much. They have a job with benefits if they have a family it's pretty important. Then some people are renters forever. I don't know for sure and it could just be a flip comment on my part, but I think that's true to a degree. So many things are changing, like, it's so sad to me, the boat yard, in Snug Harbor is closing.

[08:02]

LC: Which one is that?

ES: Gallups. Already years ago, the docks next to there, where Point Judith Marina is, filled with fiberglass sport boats and larger yacht-y boats. That had been working boats and that's become a marina. When I worked running the buy-boat in Wickford, where the buy-boat tied up at Wickford Shellfish, was all wooden or fiberglass shellfishermen's boats and a few little draggers. Same thing with down at the town dock, where there is now a seafood market and some sport boats and fiberglass boats... that's all gone. But behind... in Provincetown, the boat yard had been there 100 years and like the old timers literally sat around the wood stove like some Maine scene and remembered Manny Zora, the smuggler and stuff like that, of rum running days; that's gone. The restaurant out front was a "townie" restaurant where the volunteer firemen would come and the fishermen and they'd have squid stew; that's gone. Now the boat yard is going in Snug Harbor. People who have worked there, both fixing boats and secretarial and stuff, they are all done. Again, what was your question?

LC: An extension of that, can you describe....

[End of this part of interview; cuts off in mid sentence].

[00:00]

LC: If you are looking back lets say since you've been back this last stretch - you said it's been since about 2002 - so you've had about a six year run where you're here more than anywhere else – what's left? What businesses have left that you can think of?

ES: I know the little Galilee Grocery moved from its funky old wooden place to a newer place and then they sold to a couple different owners. Boats stop getting grub there because the owners are against fishing and most of us won't even get a sandwich there because of their attitude.

LC: You'd come down the breach way and it was on the right?

ES: Before it was down just past the Bait Company almost to Georges. Now it's on the right in the new building. There's only... there's two net shops now.

LC: You said the place in Snug Harbor; they're going to go pretty soon...

ES: They are done.

LC: Any other places that you can think of that you've seen?

ES: Actually close or change? If they didn't close, they changed. Working in fish houses now, like Hanrigans, they've got all Latino people, before they had Asian's but they go to these bulk employment agencies where before fringe fishermen type persons – maybe they don't fish—maybe they could pick up some work unloading, processing. Now they just call up and say they “need a six pack of Guatemalans today, send them down”. So that changes the culture of it. Not that they aren't incredibly hard working people and they'll create maybe – if the fishing survives on any level – a whole other sub-culture way... in Hawaii I saw the sugar industry fold. Of course the Hawaiians hated when they got enslaved into the sugar business and all the other cultures got brought in, but now they bemoan, the good old plantation days. Maybe we're becoming some new good old days but they don't seem good right now. I know Trawl Works is slow. Wilcox might have to let somebody go. All the businesses are slowing down. The lobster traps supply, the Bait Company....

[03:19]

LC: So she's feeling it too?

ES: Oh yeah. And the regulations on skates. Years ago she moved into the soft bait and herring and stuff; that has worked out well. Weirdly, people drive all the way, as far as Bridgeport, CT to get a truck load of bait. And how economically reliable is that going to be at \$4 per gallon?

LC: A couple years ago I was down talking to people in Point Judith and it was Skip O'Leary? That boat is tied up; he just tied it up, no insurance. He was pointing everyone out that was tied up and didn't have insurance.

ES: Yeah, the insurance has hurt. And it has hurt wood boats in particular. People say - I was not really aware of exactly what happened – but in the '80's there was a lot of money loaned out to boats to be built or people to buy boats and there seemed to be all this butterfish and fish around. I just know from the Point Judith perspective, a little bit about that. I don't know what happened in other ports; I felt Provincetown and New Bedford, but especially Provincetown, were my fishing developmental years and Point Judith seemed weird to me. But they loaned out a lot of money and I've heard a lot of people got into fishing who were contractors or this or that, and young. And the fishery school, a lot of people really made it their career, to attending and working and on through. Some say it's a weeding out process. But then other people say it's not a weeding out process because people who are 2nd generation fishermen and have had good, reputable boats full of integrity, are barely able to make it. I don't know on what level it's going to survive. And you can just imagine really, it would just become a corporate thing with underpaid Latino's. You can look at Campenelli's lobster boats; they have 4-5 and more and more they've been getting Latino guys who may have fished in their countries so have a knowledge of marine stuff, but going out and working for much less pay than really is warranted. Maybe having to do a whole lot of extra work that didn't used to be part of it. I scalloped with a guy, a bunch of Latino guys, but this one guy, he claimed that he had been a dentist in El Salvador or Honduras. Made his way through to the U.S. and there was woman who was a connection for guys to get jobs on a scalloper out of Fall River, I think. And he said they were underfed and

overworked and they made trip after trip and they were getting completely ripped off by this criminal operation that had one or two boats. Then, somehow, one day on the docks in New Bedford, he got hired on some other boat and it was like he couldn't believe how badly they had been treated, that he was supposed to...illegal as hell, because they were illegal aliens and everything

LC: Total exploitation.

[07:22]

[End of this part of the interview – stopped recording in mid-sentence]

[00:00]

ES: When you talk about that, it makes me think of... Over on the bait docks, there started to be a bunch of Vietnamese that would come down from Hartford, and they would fish all day. They'd be there at 5am and be there until 5-6pm. But they weren't fishing for subsistence. It was for emotional subsistence, not financial. I think, because I traveled in other countries and stuff, they were coming from the city where they worked. One of them had a BMW and I don't know what he did. It seemed like he got the fancy car but maybe didn't have all that much else. Another was a doctor, old man, who was never going to go back to Vietnam until the Communists were out. And they were coming back to... maybe they lived around the water where they were from, but because it must have reminded them of their countries. Because here is a place that was real. Like if you've ever been in a market in Central America or Asia – it made them feel better to be around that instead of people zipping in and out of Wal-Mart or whatever. I don't know much about the subsistence fishing.

LC: I know when you go across the causeway on the right hand side, you'll often see people way out, I think they are quahogging? They call it the Escape Road.

ES: That's more enjoyment, recreational than actual subsistence. I guess for everybody who does that, it's like a different culturally important subsistence, emotional subsistence thing.

LC: Is that particular ethnic group that goes for that or everybody?

ES: Everybody. Italians, Swamp Yankees, Asians, whatever. Latino's. There's a quote about preserving wilderness, it comes in fliers you get in the mail. Just knowing its part of our country for example, never mind the world. Whether people manage to get out to experience it or not, its part of the mental health, you know. To know that we have these kind of places and activities. So I think a lot of that quahogging out there on the flats, whether people just drive by and see it or do it, or whether people are commercial fishermen or just know they exist, it's part of being balanced as a culture. And we're losing that balance. I'm so happy now when I see kids out on bikes, especially without helmets. First you're shocked they are out on bikes, it's great. We've become a nation of virtual realities.

[04:19]

[End of this part of the interview – recording cut for personal commentary]

[00:00]

LC: You were just saying you were out on an eastern rig and you had this emotional...

ES: The whole industry and the whole thing of it captured my heart because it was like going back in time – we're on wooden boats, the wheels had spokes, they were not hydraulic. Other people were like, "I remember that, that sucked; I'm glad to be on a steel boat with a conveyor." Which way does your back hurt more, with the conveyor or without? Maybe if you didn't drink so much beer, your back wouldn't hurt so much bending over. But a lot of people got into it

because of the money, primarily, above all else. But then again, everybody who's done that for the most part, unless its totally in their family background, fishing is just a job, they are the more individual types that aren't going to be able to plug in that well to something else. There's been this exodus of people from the boats in Point Judith going to other jobs.

LC: What kinds of jobs?

ES: Electric boat. Some people, a couple people I know got hurt, got degrees, got into medical stuff. But it's like Hawaii has more Hawaiians living in Las Vegas than in Hawaii because they went there for jobs. And to take them and put them in this desert away from the ocean, I don't know how people are handling being in these other occupations. Some say they are pretty happy with it, but it just seems like... fishing can kill your spirit being in it, but being out of it can kill it to, depending on what you go out into.

LC: You were saying that the people that have come into it that weren't multi-generational, tend to be rugged people? Did I get that right?

ES: Everybody is, but they would be... some people would never want to work on a fishing boat and others would say it sounds good; it tweaks they're fancy, whereas somebody else just is dying to put on a tie and be at the bank or the insurance company. So it's a community of very individual individuals, I think.

LC: And it seems to be a good fit between the people themselves and the demands of the occupation and the characteristics of it. It's hard to replace anywhere else; when you're not doing that, it's hard to be satisfied, it seems.

[03:24]

ES: What's sad though now is the caliber of crew has gone downhill so much because a lot of good people have had enough of it, they've reached their saturation point and they've got enough responsibility and motivation and drive to try and get into something else. It's funny because that makes it easier for me to get a job. People who would have nothing to do with me ask when I'm going to go fishing with them. It's nice and funny. Last boat I was on, there were a couple 20 year olds and to them it was not that weird to have this woman on the boat, and they were so nice. Now 30 years ago, those kids would have hated my guts.

LC: They would have had some kind of history to put it in a context to hate your guts. Whereas the kids are probably are college students or something coming down?

ES: No. Just that women have come such a long ways. People are like, "Oh that woman is a fireman or carpenter or a doctor". It's nice. But then as far as the good people leaving the boats, that's also where... I think I am a pretty good hand and now a days the huge amount of volume is not so hard on you. And as all the fishing people are ageing – like we joke at the Bait Company, it used to be 80lb bags of salt, now everyone there, just about everybody is over 50 and the bags are 50lbs. And we do 500 per day. It's really nice to see that some young people still take an interest and want to make it happen for them. But you really have to wonder, with the regulations and the price of fuel, something has to give. I don't think it's going to be our government subsidizing it like in other countries, that's not going to give. Unless they can figure out a way to make as much money for everybody handing out subsidies as they can harassing us.

[06:01]

LC: Yep, it's real unclear what is going to happen there. And it's interesting too that you compare the whole subsidization of the farm communities and how fishing industry hasn't been treated the same way and the logic about that. As an observer, it's interesting to see both the parallels and ways in which it's different.

ES: Well, I think the reason is because the farm subsidies have been corporate because the family small farms haven't benefited from the subsidies, and fishing typically wasn't corporate. So if it had been corporate they probably would have figured out a way to get subsidized. There's just not a whole lot of support in this country for small business, and individualism in general.

LC: I think the value on that has changed. The small business and someone that is an individualist, it's less easy to find something that's suitable that it was in the past.

ES: Less easy?

LC: Well, the number of jobs and types of occupations that you could have done 100 years ago are different. And fewer.

ES: 30 years ago.

LC: 30 years ago we're talking about a lot of global changes and how things have changed. I'm curious, I have a couple questions, and I know I'm going to want to talk to you again once we have the transcript, but where were you born?

ES: Switzerland. My family was there in Europe for 15 years right after WWII, but we left when I was 20 months old. My brothers and sisters grew up in Europe – they were much older than me – speaking French and they were in France and Switzerland.

LC: And are your parents Swiss?

ES: No, they are American. They passed away, but my dad was a Minister and my mom was a Social Worker and they were pacifists and they went to... my dad was C.O. in WWII and they went to help a village in France that had saved the lives of 8,000 Jews through passive resistance. Then they came to the States to Chicago. It's funny, Mary too, we both are from similar backgrounds... later my family went to Montclair, New Jersey, which is this like... I think it might be liberal, but it's middle class to upper middle class, nice New Jersey town, and her parents are a lawyer and an antique dealer. We didn't know each other then, even though we were in the same high school, because I'm older than her. I remember we were talking to some other interviewer person with Andrea, how when we stumbled on boats, we were like, "Now this is different!" This isn't tea and cookies in the church basement!

[10:03]

LC: What did your parents do when they came back, when they were in Montclair?

ES: My dad worked for the World Council of Churches and before that he was in Chicago – Chicago Theological Seminary.

LC: And your mom, did she do social work in the States?

ES: Yeah. She was the Ministers wife in academia, she was an academia wife in Chicago and then she got her Masters and worked with the mentally retarded in group homes in NJ. Then they ended up in their old age, going out to Berkeley, CA and that's where they were when they passed away.

LC: And your siblings, brothers and sisters, what did they do with their lives?

ES: It's funny; I was just saying to my sister, "We're all self-employed now." My older siblings, one was the rebel who was XXXXX. My sister was in academia all her life and now she has a consulting business, its called Change Management Consulting, I thought that was her own catch phrase but I guess that's around. It helps companies deal with their employee's strengths and weaknesses and make a team.

LC: So corporate consultant?

ES: Yeah, but more cultural because she was in India for a few years as a teacher so a lot of what she does relates more to the companies that have foreign workers, like call centers in India.

My brother worked in humanitarian organizations, Bread for the World, UNESCO, Save the Children, Christian Children's Fund, and USAID... all his life and mostly overseas and then now he is in Guatemala with his Guatemalan wife whom he met when they were students in Paris together. And they're trying to keep the family coffee farm viable. A couple hundred acre coffee farm.

LC: So you really come from a very non-traditional background with a much bigger global view.

ES: Yeah. There are all kinds in the fishing industry. I'd like to be a fly on the wall and hear Mary talk politics with some of the guys down there. But there are all different views. I remember a couple pretty regular guys talking about when the politics had gay marriage be their big cause they were going to base all politics off. And they were like, "I don't care about that; talk to me about something I care about." They knew gay people in the fishing industry and had no problem with them whatsoever. I think that also has something to do with the heart and soul of a lot of fishing people. I remember when I fished in France, my captain was a very colorful person and he says in French, that the men of the sea have much more heart than the men of the land. As far as harassment goes and stuff, I could very well understand, though I didn't like it, why guys didn't want me on the boats, sleeping in the same room with them, doing the same work as them; I'm 5'2" I'm small. The worst harassment I got was from the Proust quoting Harpers subscribing Coast Guard Commander who was the mate on the research vessel. Once you can work along side with people, they are fine unless they are complete assholes, and carry your weight, and be enjoyable to be with, and suffer together, they are fine with you. And the idea that like men in white collar jobs, would think that they are smarter than women, or more capable, is absurd. To think that you're stronger, that makes sense, but to think that you're smarter or more capable – they don't have heart, like the sea people have heart.

[15:12]

LC: And were you ever married or have kids?

ES: No. Alas. I've lived with a few different guys who I intended to marry but didn't work out, so kids didn't work out either. Not that I'm against any of that, I think it's a great thing if you can pull it off.

LC: And what did your family think when you decided to make fishing your career?

ES: Well, it's really their fault. We went around the world when I was nine. You've probably cursed your own kids with this now – we went 6 months to all different countries and I went to school in India and I saw so much more possibilities out there and got the appetite, the whistle wetted for what's possible. So meanwhile they thought that I was going to go to Harvard like my dad, or at least would go to college. I didn't want to go to college. I went in Paris when I was 17 because I found a college, I thought that would be a good compromise; I'll go hitch hike around Europe on school vacations and there's no dorms, thank God. I'll figure out a place to live. So I dropped out... I did my one year and I dropped out and stayed in France and then I thought well maybe I really ought to go to college so I went to another school in California and then I had the fishing summer in Provincetown. And that was the end of it, though I was ready to go to Boston University to try something else.

LC: Did you have a focus about what you wanted to learn or you were going to find your focus?

ES: The first round of college was just to leave home. The second round was... being a dishwasher and waitress was not great, so I was going to become a lawyer. But I took a couple little courses and I thought I don't approve of this whole legal system. I don't think I want to

become a lawyer and profit from it. Then fishing came in. But then, when I gave up on the lawyer idea and was going to go to Boston University, it was going to have more of a foreign language program and I wanted to study foreign languages and do whatever you do with that, which in my mind was travel, but I knew that I could maybe make money too, have a respectable job. So when I started fishing and decided not to go to college, though my father didn't come down on me hard on that, in private my mom said he was really heart-broken. And then I kept doing it. Then he started to get this idea – because my dad was born in 1915 – that I was re-living *Captains Courageous*, and the guys were playing penny whistles and whatever that hand organ thing is...

LC: Concertina.

ES: Yeah. Which wasn't quite it; they were shooting heroine. (This is an exaggeration)! But I thought that was colorful. Today's colorful version of mariners. So he was heart-broken but he kept it to himself, but there were always these nudges. "Well you're not going to be able to do that when you get older; how are you going to hold up?" And then he started to try and see it in a positive light, he said, "You've seen that your ceiling is much higher than you thought it could be, just by the sheer endurance it takes to fish." So I'm sure he thought that was going to be helpful when I managed to do something that he felt would be proper and secure for me.

[20:10]

LC: You mean the tenacity and the?

ES: The endurance. It's never a bad thing to have under your belt. But I think for my mom, some of her might have been a little bit envious because she had always had to be my dad's support and she loved playing and being outdoors and doing stuff; he was kind of stiff and obsessive compulsive.

LC: Content in a very structured lifestyle, more or less, although it sounds like there was an element of structure to your life but also a lot of adventure that didn't really fall within....

ES: My dad was a real risk taker, actually. He never thought about money but they were very caught up in the world and saving the world, so to him, that was worth taking risks for and he's was probably right. And most worth valuing your life by doing. So my brother, who did all the humanitarian work, was like the white sheep of the family and everybody kept waiting for me to grow up. And worrying. But mostly they didn't have to worry because they knew better than I did that I would always land on my feet.

LC: And how did... if you look at your... you said over and over, the life you chose hasn't been terribly profitable. And that you've taken some risks and lost but, going into the future, based on the amount of your life's work, that was based on some aspect of fishing was that able to be enough to support you going forward, or you're needed to work now...?

ES ...to make up for what I didn't do then? Yeah. I would say so.

LC: The latter?

ES: A lot more people focus on getting themselves set up for their old age, and I'm not set up. And it's a concern, but it's probably not going to be a huge concern until I'm there. And people who keep working in their old age, in their 70's and 80's, it seems pretty good if you're not working at Wal-Mart, you know?

LC: In all these different jobs, were you ever able to feed into you social security at all? What's that if you're looking into the future? Because that's an issue for people in the fishing industry.

ES: I never stayed anywhere long enough to make a really good years pay, so my social security for the future is not much. Investments aren't much either, and God knows, even people

who have a huge amount, what that's actually going to amount to. If I hang onto this house and if I grow a lot of food, and if I rent a lot of rooms... I don't know. My grandfather died ten days before my mother was born in 1919. For ten years, she was unmarried with three small children and no welfare or social security. And she did laundry and she had foster kids and they were very poor and she did what she had to do. I guess I'll just do what I have to do. I feel bad for my nieces; I should have kids of my own. I think it's natural to take care of your parents, but nobody does it. I don't have any kids to take care of me; my nieces are my executors; they'll get stuck holding the bag.

[25:14]

ES: I remember one time, I fell from a ladder in my little house and as I was careening down towards the ground, I was thinking, I said to a friend of mine, "This can't be happening; I don't have health insurance!" I remember my friends really astute comment was: "That is not the first thought probably that crosses someone's mind in the same circumstances in Zimbabwe. I guess because I've made my life the way it is, that's my plan and I'm sticking with it. I meet people who are like; "Got to have benefits". It's like, again, I'm really lucky and I could be real f%\$#ed up by this, but if you force yourself to have this job with those benefits; you're probably really going to need them because of the stress of having the job you don't like and the illnesses that follow.

LC: Rather than doing some thing you really love.

ES: Not that I haven't had tons of stress – it's not fun changing jobs every three months and pounding the pavement and re-inventing yourself, you know. But I guess as far as my health goes, that stress hasn't had as bad an affect on it as other people's stress has had on their health.

LC: If you had to live your life over again, would you live this life? Or what might be different? What decisions might you have made differently?

ES: I can't even conceive of it, because it's not a reality so I can't imagine. I might have had better taste in men. That would have helped a lot of matters. I've made shitty money all my life, so if I'd had an enjoyable companion who also threw in their shitty money; it would have been a little easier financially. And having children would be such a wonderful thing to get you outside of yourself. Which I'm kind of wrapped around myself. It gets old. Rather be wrapped around other than myself; that's what's nice about massage; in that moment you step away and are really into that person. Nurturing them. It's a break.

LC: I have one more questions. One of the things I'm looking for is symbols of art that kind of symbolize people's thinking about fishing, their sentiments about fishing. When I was at the Working Waterfront Festival, I bought – I forgot which industry organization, but this t-shirt...

[29:06]

END OF INTERVIEW [recording cut off in mid-sentence]