

Interview with Russell Sherman [RS]
Occupation: Fisherman
Port Community: Gloucester, MA
Interviewer: Azure Cygler [AC]
Date: November 6th, 2012
Catch Share Oral Histories Project – NOAA Fisheries
Logger/Transcriber: Matthew Schult
INDEX: [minutes:seconds]
Telephone interview

Interview

[00:00]

AC: Okay, for the record, my name is Azure Cygler, and I'm here speaking over the phone with Russell Wallace and it's the...

RS: Sherman, Sherman.

AC: Excuse me, with Russell Sherman. We were just talking about a Wallace, pardon me, Russell Sherman. And today is the 6th of November, 2012, and Russ, if you could just give me your full name for the record?

RS: Russell Anthony Sherman, born April 29th, 1948, United States of America.

AC: Excellent, and you are a commercial fisherman, is that right?

RS: For the last, almost forty-two years.

AC: Okay, and what's your homeport?

RS: Gloucester, Massachusetts.

AC: And your vessel or vessel's name, Russ?

RS: The *Lady Jane*, after my mother.

AC: Okay, and I'll ask some more about that. Are you in a sector or in the commonpool?

RS: I'm in a sector, that's all.

AC: Okay, which sector would that be?

RS: Uh, New England, Northeast Sector 2.

AC: Okay, good, and if you don't mind my asking how old you are?

RS: I'll be 65 in April, I'm presently 64; I'm in my 65th year, let's put it that way.

AC: Okay, super. And if you could give me a general context about yourself and your family, for example, how you came to be in Gloucester in the fishing business, your family structure, that sort of thing? That would be great.

RS: Mm-hmm. Well, I graduated from school in 1971, which was a long time ago, but I had numerous loans to pay off as the young people do today, although not the burden that they have, and I needed a job. And so, senior year, which was spent in Cambridge, a friend of mine gravitated up this way, my best friend, and had lived off campus. And so I'd come to Cape Ann recreationally during that senior year and had come to really enjoy its sights and sounds, and in looking for work that summer when I graduated, my pal said, "Well, gee, you can get a job on a boat up here."

Well, I'd always been an outdoor person, Eagle Scout, all that sort of stuff, and so I said, "Yeah, I'll try that out." You know, just as a temporary site, just as something to hold me over, because I didn't want to go back and live home. I mean I was 23 years old and it was time to get out and start running; although I'd been out running since I was 17. So anyway, I came here, and I started to fish with a fellow who was an immigrant from Sicily who spoke, he probably had ten nouns and three or four verbs in English; and the two of us together on a forty-two foot boat. I progressed a lot and I was you know, a learning sponge in those days as most young people are and I enjoyed what I was doing, and progressed up the ladder to different, different Captains and different boats and different levels of knowledge, and I guess it was in 1980 I got my first boat, to run for someone else.

And actually when I married in 1984, I already owned one vessel that, it was a partnership, that went south because of various mechanical and personal difficulties with the partner, and so that venture hadn't panned out. That was actually the first boat that I ever owned, that was 1980. And then I married in 1982, and then 1984 we bought the *Captain Dutch* together, Christine and I. I married a Gloucester girl although I'm from Putnam, Connecticut, from farm country. And we settled in to have a beautiful child who's now 28 years old, Margaret, and I formed another partnership which was my fault, and it was also a fellow who ended up having alcohol problems, and so that partnership only went a couple of years.

We ended up owning the vessel 100% at that point and went through, raised our family and did our thing, always got by well and then I, you know, participated, I always believed in participating in the system, that's the way I was raised. My father was a Yankee and a patriot, and a perennial third selectman, and said that if you don't participate then you don't have a right to speak. I always wanted the right to speak, to be heard, and also to attend and to see what was, what people were doing. As it turned out, because fishing is not just a business or an enterprise, it's a way of life as I found out, you know, I had been subject to that in the farm, farming business, because the little town I came from, most of the guys I played ball with were cow farmers, dairy farmers and stuff. I worked in the fields, in the orchards as a kid, I always had to work, we were brought up to work and hold our own. So I'd get involved with the council process at the time, and we owned our vessel and raised our family, and it came around 2000, I was 52 years old, and my daughter mostly grown, but my old boat was falling into, not into disrepair, but to the point where I couldn't repair it anymore, it was crazy. Good money after bad as they say.

And so I had to make a decision, one way or another, decided to go to a little bit larger vessel because politically I had seen in my candidate, the larger boats, the offshore boats were holding sway in the council process, and the onus of regulation was coming on the inshore fellows, of which I was one. And I wanted the flexibility although I was most familiar and most comfortable around the shore where I had learned my job and my areas, but I realized I had to have some flexibility so I bought a little bit larger vessel, used, a fix-me-up as it were, with..., but in order to do that I had to sell my vessel and the permit. I had to make the permit sell the vessel, to get some other cash, and we put everything we had into it and bought this boat out of New Jersey as it turns out. It was a very good physical buy, but business-wise it wasn't, because I wasn't equipped with future vision, crystal-ball-like vision.

And so I bought a boat that was up one class than my other boat as far as capacity, horsepower, length and tonnage. And I got it for a reasonable price and fixed it up, put it in great shape to go fishing, and the second year, which was 2001, of course it was a lawsuit won by Confirmation Law Foundation, and my good pals, the Cape Cod Hook, the turncoats, and due to a judge's ruling I ended up with thirty-one Days at Sea instead of the eighty-eight Days I had purchased, supposedly with this vessel. And that was my second year into the business, and we were a couple hundred thousand dollars down, and all of the sudden the groundfishing that I did 60-80% of my income on, although I wasn't totally a groundfisherman, I fished whiting, but both vessels as I was want to do, and so we were cut off at the knees, right there and then.

And the difficulty started in and it never stopped, because of... Well and then I went to work for the government, doing the industry base survey, gave it my

whole heart and soul and made some business moves with Days at Sea that weren't very smart because I depended on the government to keep their part of the bargain, which they didn't. I sold away Days at Sea, because I had work to do for Uncle Sam, and then Uncle Sam just up and terminated the project, fully funded eighteen months into it, and there I was, hanging out again. And as it turned out in the end, I was owed another fifty-odd days of work that I never received. So I took kind of a financial punch there, and then the ultimate, the ultimate insult on that deal was, the industry base survey, was that I was not allowed to use those landings that I had made for Uncle Sam and then Uncle Sam sold and put the money in the coffers of the National Marine Fisheries Service, I was not allowed to use those as landings in my final allocation in the current crooked system that we have now. So that was ultimate, and the other ultimate thing was, is that we, the four boats that participated, caught fish for the government, sold fish for the government, and we were told that it was all going into the program because one of the big rubs with our fellow fishermen were, was, at the time, that where is the money going for this fish? Is it just, are you fishing for the government, who are you fishing for? I thought this was supposed to be an industry-based project, so it was totally misrepresented and I was a little sore about that, but you know.

And so, we struggled onward with the boat, we always made it, I worked hard and I've been as diverse as I could, but we've come to the point in the last two years with this new sectors system, that we are not making it. And I mean not making it in a big way, to the point of my accountant questioning me about, "Just how smart are you, Russell, you know, to stay in this deal?" We've...we got a bum allocation because the boat was bought out of New Jersey, and previous to my working it, 2001 through, it was mostly scup, squid, butterfish, down that way they did do some yellowtail fishing and this and that, but negligible in the current system, and so after forty years of fishing, and then thirty years of our own ownership and, about twenty-eight years of our ownership and employment, we're pretty much out of business here. I'm just, we're both hanging...we've lost, well here's an example: we owned this house that I'm sitting in right now, for six days, and then we had to turn around and put it down as collateral for a revolving credit loan of \$100,000 so we could lease fish in order to stay in business. Because my allocation after thirty years of fish, er, forty years of fishing and thirty years, almost thirty years of ownership is about \$160,000 worth of fish; if I catch every last ounce of every last fish. And boy that don't make it

AC: Hmmm.

RS: In the last two years my groundfishing effort has been totally almost totally leased, well it's been at least three-quarters leased and I can prove that. And the

profit margin on a leased trip is between 12-14% and you cannot make it on that, my vessel hasn't been hauled in three years.

AC: Oh, wow.

RS: But my equipment is up to date, my insurance is, the boat is a safe vessel and what it's done is it's drained \$40,000 in the last two years from our own personal finances, that we've scraped together and given to the business to keep it going. So for us, where, we always got by Days at Sea, even when we got kicked in the teeth we got by. This system is belly-up, is belly-up for us. And I'm just maintaining the fact that I went down to go squid-fishing after all these years, 64 years old I lived on the boat for six weeks down there, at one point and three weeks for another point.

AC: "Down there" meaning where?

RS: Down in Stonington, Connecticut, to try to learn the squid racket and try to save myself at this late stage in the game. Because I don't have enough money to retire, Christ, this business has been bleeding money for the last two or three years now. Because of regulatory systems, not because of lack of fish or lack of effort, or, you know. But anyway, that's my story to start with, that's what happened to me over the last many, many years. And there's been a lot of stuff in between as far as personal excitement and activities and danger and suspense and all that happy horse-shit. And I've been to Washington and I've spoke before a Senate subcommittee and I feel that I participate as much as I could.

In fact, I'd like to get this on the record, that looking back on it now, at my age, with my daughter being 28 years old, and looking back on the council process and how badly skewed and how corrupt it's become, I feel that I wasted those years. I wasted those moments or those hours in meetings, in Washington, trying to make a difference where I really couldn't. And I should've been home with my daughter, enjoying her childhood a little bit more, and that's my cross to bear, no one else's, but I want that on record.

AC: Certainly, it certainly is.

RS: (Laughs) It's a pretty sad state, when a guy's got to say that at this stage in the game.

AC: Now Russ, is Margaret involved in fishing in any way?

RS: No, none whatsoever. And that's colored a lot of my business decisions as well, realizing that, you know, she was never going to be a working partner, but it was always something. In fact, the business itself was something that I always hoped to preserve and make grow for her. When she, you know, when she needed it,

after I was gone and everything, to hand her a business or at least a permit or something that was worth something for all those years that I wasn't there. But I don't see that happening.

AC: Now, is she in school at the moment, in college?

RS: Nope, she's currently out of school and working with children, teaching children and stuff, and has a good life and we're very close.

AC: And she remains in the area?

RS: She's up in Lowell, (Massachusetts) fairly close by, yeah.

AC: Sure.

RS: I try not to intrude on her too often, you know, I try to mind my own business. It's hard, you know, when you've only got one child and she's your daughter and you're Daddy, you know?

AC: Yeah, absolutely, I'm an only child too, so, I could understand that. So sometimes an intrusion by Dad is a nice thing, too (laughs).

RS: Oh yes, shows I'm interested.

AC: Now Russ, tell me why it was more advantageous to you to join Sector 2, versus staying in the commonpool, amongst all that you were going through?

RS: Well, actually Azure, like I said I had gone to the meetings, I know what was going on, I saw how it came down I knew what was coming down, too late, because I was too thick to take the warning signs. And there were warning signs, there were warning signs from Vice Admiral Lautenbacher and Dr. Hogarth, the Kentucky colonel, and those birds, they said it enough. And Paul Howard, Executive Director of the council, but I was too thick to take the hint, that it was inevitable that this was going to happen, whether it was right, wrong or indifferent. But I was smart enough to realize that once it did come, that it was a train coming down the track I'd better jump on it, or else I was done for.

And so that's why I went kicking and screaming into sectors, that's why the coalition went kicking and screaming into sectors. And we provided a vehicle for people like myself, Azure, because the real political situation in the sector system at this point is, if you have a good history, if you have fish to loan or to lease or to catch or to whatever, then you'll be able to get into a sector, you'll be able to get into one of the five sectors that were supposed to be, because there was only supposed to be five, ask Pat Kurkul. He testified to it on the record, I was

there, and so fellows like me, in the original sector system, in the original sector plan, until the coalition threw a monkey-wrench into the gears was five sectors, and I can name them off and I could tell you who's going to be in them. And old Russell wasn't going to be one of them, never mind thirty, forty years on the sea, made no damn difference, I didn't have enough fish to matter, or I wasn't important.

So if the coalition hadn't put forth those thirteen sectors and that day in Portland, arrived with forty members and two lawyers, we were getting railroaded by Pat Kurkul and all the rest of them. All the rest of them, Jimmy Orland, uh, Mike Leary, Frank Blount), Paul Howard, Executive Director, the whole bunch of them were railroaded us. Because this is the uber-consolidation move, it's almost the uber, individual fishing quotas is the uber that's going to put a guy like me out, sectors or no sectors, period. There are a few redeeming factors, but what I'm saying is, it was the sector or death. And that was it, we were only afforded that way out, not by our government, not by fairness, but by some slick-thinking minds on the coalition's part. To put those in, to get them right, to get them unassailable because there was almost a riot before lunch and Howard called a question, he said, "We're going to talk about this, and lunchtime we're going to give our opinion." and it was yes, these now-existing seventeen sectors can be in but no one else can come in until perhaps next year. And so we were saved, the little guy was saved, you know, sort of. And the one thing about sectors versus individual fishing quotas is that the sector mechanism does or can be used to float a community in dire straits, you know? Keep the fish in Gloucester, keep the fish in Portland, keep the fish in Boston, that type of thing. So your infrastructure is to somewhat, although on a diminished capacity, is maintained. And that and survival is about the only good thing I've got to say about it. Because it's not a conservation policy, it's an economic policy, to knock the little guy off and consolidate to the upper 20% of the business. Where all the rest of us deserve to be there too, because we've all borne the burden of diminished income, diminished lifestyle and everything, because many of us love this racket and we love this lifestyle and that's why we did it. We thought we could make a difference, but it's a railroad job, just like they railroaded the farmers in the 1980s, I saw them do it. So, that's what I think about sectors.

AC: Okay, and Russ have you seen...?

RS: And it's, they've just, like I said, my accountant, who's my wife's cousin, Jim Perry, who is a very brilliant guy and has a lot of fishermen as clients, said to me last tax time, "What are you doing Russell?"

I said, "Look at my permit Jim, look what I've got."

"Yeah, you're right," he said "you ain't got much."

I said "No, I don't." And so, for a panel of my peers, supposedly, plus my State, my State representation, that's why, Azure, I went off at the meeting, about six months ago down here in Gloucester when Paul was there, Paul Diodati, and Dr. David was there, and Bill Hoffman, and McKeernan and all those guys, I know them all. I participated with them, I was primary in the raised-footrope experiment, I've done my thing. I've had my gear in the past cut up by guys-this is going way back-because I took an Observer to Middle Bank, and let them see what was going on because I was aghast at the fish that was being slaughtered. This was way before your time, you were probably in grade school, and when there was no mesh regulations, there were no mesh regulations, there were pretty much no regulations, and I was the one that had the courage to take the guy there to see what was going on. And it was my gear that was cut to pieces on the wharf and stuff, so I've participated, I've done my part.

And to get kicked around like so many other fellows in my shoes, I'm not just crying about Russell, I'm crying about the other 60-70% of this groundfishing industry that's going to be put to sleep and is being put to sleep right now. Within five years we'll be gone. And that's a sin, that's the shame of it. And the people of this country don't understand that the last great natural resource that's a public resource is being privatized, and your grandchildren, Azure, are going to have to ask permission to go fish for codfish sometime. And it's unfortunate, but it's the beginning and it's the end of it as well, that's the way I feel anyway. Because it used to be, now we started, we were married in 1982, in 1984 we put \$10,000 on this house loan, got into partnerships unfortunately with a guy who liked his Budweiser too much but we didn't understand that at the time, we didn't realize, we weren't that close, it was a business arrangement. And we bought a half a fishing boat, and no young married couple of our means will ever be able to do that again, not anymore. It isn't possible.

And you can see it in the industry, you can see the crew problems I've had in the last three years have been unbelievable, I've always had a steady crew. Seven years, nine years, three years, guys stayed with me. I worked hard, I was honest, and so I kept people. Now, it's like a revolving door, and you're getting, you know, people that have no other alternative, really. They have a lot of problems, some of them, many of them. And that's what you get for crew, I mean that's what's happened, there's no, very few...I don't see young people because they don't have a promise to get ahead. And that's what young people need, that's what this country needs, that's what this country was built on.

And through all of this baloney where a few are getting richer and richer and the wealth isn't getting put down, you know, down to the lower people, the opportunity, the hope to be Skipper some day, to be an owner some day, to have your own vessel and your own crew, it's gone, it's gone. There's no, you

would have to put down, you would have to put down a quarter of a million dollars, easy, cash foundation, to get into this business on any level. It's crazy, and it's not necessary either, but this is the way it's come.

AC: Yeah, and how have you and Christine mostly been able to survive through this, and what sort of changes have you had to make to make it through? You spoke about your home, and...

RS: Well, we have a small home, and now there's just the two of us, our daughter of course, she's off on her own and we live modestly. We haven't been on a vacation in, I don't know how many years, twenty years, twenty-five years whatever it's been, you know, we..., Christine's going to work for the coalition, well actually she founded the coalition, she and John Bell, and pretty much the two of them together worked to get it to happen. But you know we live modestly, we don't want for comforts, as I always, Christine starts worrying about our retirement and our future, and I always say to her, "Look, we've been married thirty years in November, has one bill collector ever called you asking for money, ever?"

And she can say, "No, no one ever has." We don't have a lot of material goods but that doesn't matter to me, I wasn't raised that way, you know? It's just we bit the bullet and done what we had to do, always with hope that, you know, it would get better until recently where, I don't know if it's a combination of age, Azure, or realizing that I don't have that many good years left. Always before in this business and it was one business where if you had a slip-up, if you had a setback, an engine or a this or a that, you could work a little harder and make up for it if you were ambitious. And a guy that went fishing could always pay his bills, if he managed his money right, and we managed our money right. We owe nobody nothing, except for the bank. I mean as far as our, The Railways and The Roses and suppliers like that, we're current and our house bills and everything's current, and but, the rainy day fund is diminished, because we do pay our bills, you know?

And so looking at the future, no looky too good, you know? I'm going to be 65 years old with a fake hip, how much longer am I going to stay at it? I even tell myself that, and you can't...I'm looking for a guy that I can trust to take the boat, you know? And I don't see him out there real close by, because I just won't hand it to anyone, because my house is on the line, our house Azure, is collateral, the boat loan, for \$100,000, which was the original loan, which was at \$200,000 but now it's down to \$100,000. And now we're into this revolving credit loan for another \$55,000, and it's not for fish, it ended up for a generator and you know, different things. I've got a mortgage, I've got \$50,000 in debt service between mortgage and insurance, every year, clear money that's got to go, before I buy a shackle or a piece of twine or get the boat hauled up.

AC : I see.

RS : And so we're at deficit spending, only we ain't the federal government, we can't print the money. And I tell you the resentment is high (laughs), the resentment is high. You know I've, we've all done what we were told to do, the ones that didn't are either gone or have been penalized. You look at a guy like me I have no major violations in all these years, always done what I was told to do, and usually was in the advance of it, and still get kicked to the pavement, along with 60%, 70% of my brethren, and it stinks. It really stinks. I say so many times it's a good thing this degradation happened when I was in my later years because as a young man I wouldn't have taken it. In fact that's why I can't go to the council meetings anyone because I back-slapped that no-good son-of-a-bitch Mike Leary, at the council meeting where the split went three different ways. And if the government wants to get to the bottom of sectors and the bottom of everything, they should look at the allocation process.

AC: Right.

RS: Because it was just as crooked as no-gooders can be, and I was there to see it. In that meeting, at noon-time, after the Cape Cod Hook got their pass, Russell didn't get a pass, Cape Cod Hook said, "If you give me 1996 to 2001 as my, as part of my allocation I can make it. But if you put 2001 to 2006 there we're going to go out of business. Well lo and behold, Russell's going out of business too, only I put a lot more sweat and blood into this business than they ever will. And the same reason they would go out of business and got a free pass was the same reason that I got put out of business and got no pass. And then to turn around and all that was a deal, Azure, all that allocation process was a deal, was all a deal. And the head person that ran the deal was that lady from Connecticut, and she lined them all up, Jimmy, and Mike, and Frank, and that bum Saltwater Magazine, and Pappalardo, I've pissed in more saltwater than Pappalardo's ever sailed over, give me a break. And they whacked it up three different ways, three different allocations, when Goethel stood up and read, and read the article out of Magnusson that says, "In time of allocation, no one group, no one gear type, no one State will be held above another." Yet there were three different formulas for allocation.

AC: Ah, I see.

RS: Ah-ha, and a business that had run on capacity for twenty-odd years of its existence, now all of a sudden in eighteen months was turned over to catch history, and no bow, no grain of salt was given to capacity after people had made life-changing decisions, financial decisions on capacity, and they didn't go fifty-fifty. Well they didn't go fifty-fifty because there several people on the council

that had a lot to make on history only, as far as the allocation vehicle. And boy they got what they wanted, and I knew, because going up in the car that morning, I was told exactly how the vote was going down. And we called Mike Leary and braced him on it, and he as much as admitted to it, and so that noon-time when he was walking up the aisle towards me, and I had just got through with my hip operation two weeks before, I saw that he looked at me, he gave me a smug look. And I got up and I tried to slap him across the face because bitch-slapping was the only thing he deserved and I was a little slow on the uptake, like I said, thirty years ago he'd be out cold. I slapped him on the back and I moved him along, and he turned around and come back at me. And what he said to me, and I'll put this on the history, and I'll swear to it on my mother's soul, is, "Hey Sherman, what's it feel like to lose a permit, huh?"

AC: Oh, oh my Lord.

RS: Yes, exactly, a council member too, supposedly a small-boat representative to a constituent, myself, who's had more water..., time on the water than he'll ever have. And he said that to me, and of course my reply was, "You little so-and-so, let's go outside and finish this right now."

And he turned away, and he came back and said, "What did you say to me?"

And then I was back in my own mind, and I said, "We'll settle this out fishing." He went right to Cohen, the federal agent, and pointed me out, and said, "That man assaulted me."

AC: Oh, jeez.

RS: Yeah, that's a federal offense, which I don't care about, it would be ridiculous, and old man like me, him pressing charges, huh, I'd be ashamed. But that's the kind of thing that goes on, Azure, and that's the kind of thing that I was aware of, and others are aware of. That's the kind of thing that's ripped this business to pieces. Right now, the State of Massachusetts, now we have a big, big crisis on Stellwagen Bank. We have big boats in there fishing, big boats out day and night, well what the hell did they expect? Those fellows have Gulf of Maine codfish allocation, they have every right in this great country to catch what the hell ever they want. And it doesn't help me to say that, but it's true.

And it's right, and that's the way it is because of the system, and now the State, that's why I went off on the State the other day, because they're trying to stir this up, big boat against small boat. Well what did you expect? You were told what was going to happen and the State of Massachusetts voted six to nothing for catch shares. For catch shares; and I told them why, Azure, I told Diodati was there, and his boss, she's a lady, I can't remember her name, I guess she's the Undersecretary for the State. I said "You all voted six to nothing for catch

shares, knowing full well you were going to disenfranchise at least 70% of your people in Massachusetts and yet you did it because you were afraid the Feds will cut your money off. And that's why you did it." Everybody rally around the flag, Uncle Sugar's in town, and that's the way it is, unfortunately. And they can't say it's not, because they've ruined the groundfish industry in this State, in this, (laughs) they've ruined it!

AC: And, what have you seen in terms of the resource due to this, is it changed?

RS: The resource, um, I haven't had any trouble making a living. Of course I didn't before either, but I saw the fish more abundant than it had been in the past, different fish coming ashore, grey sole and stuff coming ashore that never was, hadn't been in a long time, actually, because I can go back thirty years. So I do see the trends and I know much of it is trends in nature as well as anything else. I was always for mesh regulations, I was always for discreet spawning closures and I always will be. I'm not a person, Azure, that believes that this is an infinite resource, I mean I am Harvard educated, I'm not stupid, and I know what this is about. And it, we need good regulations, that's why I got my gear cut up all those years ago. That was before they had any mesh regulations or anything. And then I was talking about, "Jeez, if we only had five-and-a-half, we only had five inch..."

"What are you crazy?!" you know? But I have seen the fishing increase. It has to, because there just isn't that much pressure like it used to be. There just isn't that much pressure. What we have now, and I think it was Rago that said it, and nobody ever listened to him, it was about three years ago, we have natural predation and natural mortality outstripping commercial removal.

AC: Ah ha, yup.

RS: Paul Rago. He's no fool, he's one of the indisputable sources at Woods Hole, which is another problem, which is another problem, best available science. And it's not that these folks at Woods Hole aren't very intelligent and well-educated people, but they've got a bally-wagon to protect. The trouble with National Marine Fisheries Service, they all back each other's play. Maybe in the individual parts they say, "Well, gee, this isn't working so good." or whatever, but they never let it out, they circle the wagons every time, every time. And nobody is perfect, not even old Jesus Christ himself. But they won't give credence to anything else but themselves because they have fine jobs.

Don't forget, the bureaucracy never even had a hiccup during this last recession; they never even hiccupped, because the eagle shits every two weeks, you know? And what really, people do nine-to-five up there at the fortress, doesn't really influence the rest of their life, you know? But it has everything to do with our

lives, everything. And I don't think they understand that responsibility, or really care. You know that a lot of that culture is still there, Azure, that we are malcontents, we are shady at best, will bend or break any rules or regulations for our own self-aggrandizement. That isn't true. And I tell you one thing, with these Observer programs I've enjoyed having a lot of the young people on the boat. Try to educate them and show them that, hey, I'm just like their father or their grandfather, I'm no different, you know? I'm not some brigand.

One young lady, a Smith graduate, recent, this was great, this happened two years ago. I have hardly any yellowtails, I think my total Gulf of Maine yellowtail allocation for the year is 1,500 pounds (laughs) you know? So I stay away from them, this is, every year you have to develop a new strategy, by the way. I'm into my second year of strategy now (laughs). But my first year of strategy was, so I was out in the deep water all the time, no yellowtails, eighty, ninety fathoms and deeper. Haul back five baskets of dabs and some other stuff, you know, and now we're up comparing notes with this young lady, and she says, "Oh Russell, how many pounds of yellowtails did you have?"

And I said to Kate, or whatever her name was, "Kate there are no, there were no yellowtails." I said, "We didn't have a yellowtail flounder in that whole tow," I said, "we're out here at ninety fathoms of water, yellowtail don't live out here, you know?" And she looked at me straight in the eye, and I said, "Those..."

she said, "But you had five baskets of flounders, or four baskets of flounders."

I said "Well there were a few grey sole, you know, the long slimy ones." Then I said "The other, the majority of it were dabs, American plaice, you know, the ones with the brown backs and the white bellies."

And she looked me right in the eye, it was great, and she said, "Russell, are you lying to me?" Smith graduate, she just graduated from Smith! And I looked at her, I said, "Kate," I said, "do you really think I would lie to you on any matter, especially something so petty? That is a dab, I've been fishing forty years, it's an American plaice." And then she realized, she realized and she was so apologetic and everything, but she knew that she just stuck her foot into her mouth. But it wasn't her fault, she was told, "these guys, there's a shortage of yellowtails, these guys are going to try to gyp you on the yellowtails, they're going to try to hide them, they're going to try to make something else out of them, they're going to, you know." So, that culture.

AC: Gotcha, gotcha.

RS: But I do enjoy having the young people aboard; I don't think sometimes they enjoy me, but...(laughs).

AC: I am sure it's mutual.

RS: As long as we don't have to pay them, and that's the other thing, they all realize this and you know, my boys, this trip here didn't make very much money. You saw what we brought in, I said, "Well we have to pay you, it's hard enough to know that you're making more money than we are, and you're in the way. But when we have to pay you, uh-uh." I said "This is going to, it'll be a very tense situation." and every one of them knew it too.

AC: And how many crew do you have, Russell?

RS: Well, I'm going to have two myself, two myself, three altogether for groundfishing, I used to take four, but can't afford that anymore. And when I go squidfishing, I like to have three on deck if I can, because you know, down there I'm just learning that racket now, it was a disaster I broke even, I didn't even break even, really. We broke even because I didn't take any pay for myself, but I had to learn it, because I'm going to have to go down there the first of May and try to do something, I've got to try to fish some kind of fish I don't have to pay for, before I catch it. Because as you know Azure, you lease in a volatile market and you sell in a volatile market. Last year I leased the Gulf of Maine codfish at \$1.50 and I had to sell at \$1.60, I have no control over what the market's doing, I have, the only thing I know is I'm broke, I've got to get some money one way or another.

And so you've got to go and you've got to land the fish right now, guys are out fishing, I should be out fishing but I'm not because I have a limited supply of fish. And I had, I paid for every goddamn pound of it, and so I have to try to deliver when the prices are up, and because of the storm-New York is a big codfish market-and because of the storm, the transportation, the lack of cooling down there and all the effects that they've had the poor bastards, codfish is very sluggish around here. I mean it's starting to show up now, codfish and pollock is starting to show up around the shore, that cycle's moving, the great circle's turning, you know, and guys are out fishing for them. And Christine says, "Well, why don't you go out?"

I said, "Christine because they're \$1.60, \$1.70 for markets, I don't want that, \$2.40, \$2.60, because we had to pay for those damn fish, see?" Some of these guys got 100-, 150,000 to start with. See, in the sector thing you could make it work if you have a large enough foundation of your own product that you don't have to go and lease from anybody. It's supposedly yours if you access it through the sector, which you do, you access it through the sector. But if you don't have that foundation, Azure, if you don't have that \$200,000 or \$300,000 stock, a boat my size, with a three or four man crew, you're screwed. Because,

like I said my profit margin is 12 to 14% when I'm leasing fish. And that's not enough, that's not enough for a hardware store, that's not enough for a restaurant, that's not enough for a fishing boat, you know? But, it's supposed to be that way.

AC: And do you, through the Permit Bank, at any point, do you lease from the Permit Bank?

RS: The Permit Bank has kept me in business since its inception. And I can say that to anyone truthfully, the Days at Sea that I got at a reasonable rate, at an affordable rate from the Permit Bank kept me going. And actually I did better in that system, Days at Sea and the Permit Bank helping out, and us going out and trying to make a few deals on our own, and leasing Days, we made out a lot better and the boat was a lot better taken care of. My crew made better money under that system than this system here and now. This is my strategy this year, I only used in May seven Days of my own fish, seven fishing Days, and then I went, I had to have a generator put in, which I went to the revolving credit, it cost me \$20,000. I didn't have the money, the boat didn't have the money, I had to take that out of the revolving credit fund that was supposed to be for fish only. You know you promise yourself these things when you start, "Oh, this is going to be for fish only." And it was at first, until it, you know, until you need more money to keep going, to shovel into the hole.

And so, I went down late to squid season, late to learn, late to catch, late to everything because I had to put that damn generator in and it always comes on longer than what you expect. But I only used, and I used my own fish those two trips so I didn't have to take anything off the top of the, you know, it was clear money to the boat, clear money to the gang. I had a horrible time with the gang, and problems; one guy was coming off of drugs and he was sick, and oh it was awful. I had, oof, two trips out of hell, but we got them done. And I took that money, put it aside, put my debt service and I said, well I travelled, I went down, I lasted, I got there late, I had three trips on the squid, three small trips, they shut it down. Came back here put my whiting net on, caught all kinds of whiting this summer, couldn't get over 35cents a pound for them; and it costs you 24cents a pound to get them into New York. So we caught all kinds of fish for 8 or 9cents a pound, you know?

AC: Oh, jeez.

RS: So then September comes along, I'm still not trying to touch my fish because I know I've got my Permit Bank fish coming, and I've got my own fish that I haven't, I hate to say this, I haven't had to pay anything for, but really I paid plenty for them. And so that's been my strategy, Azure. And now the second round has come out of Permit Bank fish, and I've applied for that. I haven't paid

for the first round yet, I still owe them \$14,000 for the first round of fish, and here I'm taking another \$10,000 or more better on another ground that I haven't even paid for, that I don't even have. Only on the faith that I can do it because I've done it all these years. I'll go out and I'll catch those fish and Vito and the Permit Bank understand and they know where I'm coming from and they know me just like they know each individual takes that fish and has a right to that fish. They know I'll pay, and they know that every time I land a pound of fish, I'm going to give money to the Permit Bank to pay back my debt, and I'll have it paid back by the time the fish is caught. And that's the only way that I'm going, that's the only way that I'm surviving right now, Azure, that's my plan.

See if I can get enough so that in the spring I can get it hauled out after three-and-a-half years, and get the bottom scraped off and get ready because it's time for Russell to be a gypsy again and head down to Connecticut for squid season. Which if I was 30 years old, or boy if I was 25 years old I couldn't wait to go (laughs), you know? I was young and single again, wow, great adventure, wonderful adventure, and beautiful sights and sounds and girls and everything, but you know that isn't in my game plan anymore, you know? And so it's more of a burden than anything else, but it's something you have to do. Because fishermen are if nothing else, we proved that we're resilient.

AC: Absolutely.

RS: And that's why we're like a bone in their throat, and they're trying to get rid of us, and boy I think they got the process right now. Because what this is going to do, Azure, this sector system, this sector allocation, this bum allocation that we got, and everybody knows it's a bum allocation, the only people that are smiling about it of course are the 20% that made out pretty well, and they were supposed to make out well. The other 80% are all crying in their beer, just wondering what are we going to do? How is the end finally going to come? And when you get up 80% like that, at some point they'll come around with the individual fishing quotas, with the referendum, with the deal. And once that happens, that's the end of New England fishery, groundfishery as we know it for four hundred-odd years. It's the end of it, it's the end of family fishing, the end of the family fishing business, case closed. Because there won't be any going to the leased process and stuff, you've got to own them and that's it. And if you haven't got enough, you're going to have to sell it out. That's all, you'll have no choice, I'll have no choice, and then that'll be the ultimate consolidation, that's where we're headed, there's no two...they would've done it this time if they thought they could get...if there wasn't so many angry people still left in the business that would vote against that consolidation management move, they would've done it this time. That's why they had to do the sectors, they had to round-about that, as we all know.

And that's why it happened that way, they'll say, "Well, we've got patience, we'll wait a little longer.", because this is not, and it's been proven, this is not a system that promotes the greater good of nature or the abundance of the stock or whatever you it has nothing, nothing, nothing to do with that. Because all of the total allowable catches for the last decade have been in place, and we have not met them. Even under the Days at Sea system we did not meet those, we did not catch over our limit on any goddamn species. So this isn't a management system, this is a management system you're managing businesses now. You're not managing a resource, you're managing the people, and it's nothing short of social engineering. It's nothing short of social engineering, the haves and the have-nots. And that can be seen if anybody looks at this process since, oh, Amendment 13 anyway and before, they can see it's a matter of social engineering. And that the people that they're dealing with are just such cantankerous, miserable resilient people that some of them, like myself are not giving up, easily. We are not going easily, we're going though. Mark my words, we're going, and that's a statement I hate to make, Azure, because it's very, it's a down statement, you know.

But, as I noted before, when we spoke before, because I pulled back from this politics, no more going to Washington, no more Senate committees, no more council meetings, and now I can't even meet with the people of my State. My health, my blood pressure and everything has receded and it's become manageable, but before it was running 190 over 90, 190 over 95, 195 over 90, and I was a stroke waiting for a stroke. In fact that's what my doctor told me, "What are you waiting for, to have a stroke Russell?" And so I just had to quit, and a lot of it was that. When I do get out fishing and we're fishing, we're doing what we are supposed to do, it's very, very therapeutic for me. And for a lot of other fellows, I'm sure. You just have to deal with what's in front of you and with what you've always dealt with, and you can affect that. This way of life now has become, the overriding and overarching issues that, uh, have your fate dangling as a person, as a family are way out of your control. And what's right and what's wrong has nothing to do with nothing. And people realize that, and that's a hard thing, it's a hard thing to realize.

I'm sure the small farmers in the 1980s during the so-called "Green Revolution", where I saw them on the nightly news, seven o'clock news with all their goods out in front of their homesteads that their grandfathers and great-grandfathers took away from the Indians at gunpoint, uh, all there; bureaus, chest of drawers, tables, all being auctioned. I saw it on television, I was a young man and used to always watch the news. That happened there, the small farmers in the 1980s. What the Feds did, was they said "Gee, you guys are good farmers, you're growing a lot of wheat, you're producing a lot of beef here, you're, you know, um, just imagine if you had a couple more combines, just imagine if you had this, and..." and so, you know, they low loans they bought, they got in too deep and

somebody kicked the door out from underneath of them and that was it. And then, Archer Midland Daniels, Monsanto, Weyerhaeuser, all these big outfits, they own the farms now, big feedlots. I went cross-country on my motorcycle I could smell them from eight, ten miles away. And everybody in this business yells about, "Oh they subsidize the farmers, they're subsidizing..." they don't subsidize the farmers, not the farmers like us guys. Because I grew up with the farmers like us guys, you know, some of them are still going. Not many, they're dairy farmers back in Connecticut, you know? But, that's the way of it.

AC: Now, I have a couple of other questions if you still have some time.

RS: Certainly, I'm sorry, I'll stop rambling.

AC: No, it's wonderful, it's not at all rambling. It's exactly what this is about, but just a couple more directed questions. Do you have health insurance?

RS: Yes I do, I do. My wife and I both do, Christine and I both do. We have Commonwealth Choice, and that costs, individually, \$975 a month. So, combination, over \$1,900 for the both of us a month. I will be going on Medicare in April, when I turn magically 65.

AC: Right, okay, is that something you guys have always maintained through your business?

RS: Yes, we were part of the fishermen's partnerships health care, and were on that for a long time. Before that it was Mass Health because we just, you know, in the last ten, fifteen years, we just, there's no way on our income that we could keep paying \$12 or \$14,000 a year for premiere coverage. But when Mass Health came in and God bless Ted Kennedy, God bless him and his memory, I'll tell you. My poor old mother just rolled over in her grave because I said that, but Senator Kennedy did the most he could do for the fishermen when he had that affordable healthcare. We paid on a sliding scale everywhere from \$900 a month and at one time we were down to \$300 a month. It just, it depended on the year's wages, what we earned. And we were at a high for the two of us, was \$900. And I think our low payment, in our lowest year was like \$360 I believe. But that program went the way of all programs when the dear Senator passed on.

And so then we had to get out into the real health market and this is what we scored, \$1,900-odd a month. Christ, taxes and mortgage on our home, Azure was \$1,400 before we paid it off. And so this is more than the taxes and the mortgage to a bank, lending institution for our whole mortgage is more than that, appreciably more than that. I think, gee, maybe it's good that I'm going to

be 65 pretty soon. You don't want to wish away the days of your life, but Jesus Christ, \$987 a month, that's a lot of dough.

AC : That's huge, yeah.

RS : And it's depressing, this year, if I make \$30,000, and that's, I'm ashamed to admit it, but I say what the hell, it's the truth, you know? And like I said, I spent the last six weeks of my life living on a fishing boat, usually by myself down in Connecticut, trying to get by, you know?

AC: Mm-hmm. Now, what have you seen with all these immense changes that you've described, how has that influenced your friendships and relationships to other fishermen and possibly their families? If those were relationships before, has it changed, what do those relationships look like now amongst these immense hurdles and challenges you guys are going through?

RS: Ah Azure, that's a very deep question. It is, it has a lot of depth to it, and I've seen the whole spectrum, I see the different gear types eating each other up, I've had to..., I've..., Jesus Christ, for my fellow fishermen, not many of them, but some of them, I've developed a deep hatred, and would not go to their aid. I hate to say this, unless it was life-threatening out fishing, I would, I'd steam right by them, they were laying dead in the water, I'd steam right by some of them, not all of them, and not many of them, but a couple or three.

AC: Hmmm.

RS: And the ones that are more, from what I can see, my own perception of them, my own perception of them, as individuals, as men, and women, the ones that are more inclusive and more willing to compromise and realize that that other guy has troubles too. I've become very close to those people; small circle in Gloucester, I've become very close to those people, Vito Giacalone, Joe Orlando, just to name a few, just to name a couple, or Sam Novello, and others I just try to stay away from them. Try to go my own way, and then not bother anybody and just do what I got to do to survive. I think there's been, I know there's been an incredible burden put on my home because of all this, my relationship with my wife and my children, not so much my little girl now because she's been gone out of the house for quite a while. But she sees Daddy, you know, and she knows Daddy and when you're down, and I've gone through bouts of depression, Azure, I'm not going to deny it. I've taken Prozac, I don't anymore, I didn't feel it was doing anything for me. Like I said, we've had health issues, we've had fights, or not fights, discussions between the two of us, we never raise our hands, we're not that kind of people. We raise our voice, what married couple after thirty years doesn't?

AC: (Laughs) Exactly, yup.

RS: But to have your wife cry, break down and cry because she's afraid for her financial future, it's not easy on a guy like me. I'm of that generation, you know, and we work hard together, both she and I. But to see her worry about something that I, that neither one of us has any control over, it's disturbing. And it's disturbing when people you thought were your friends out on the water accuse you of doing things that, you know, we have a fixed-gear, mobile gear trip year, and I've had a good friend of mine go to the Feds and accuse me of doing things that I didn't do. And I had Federal agents call me up and stuff, questioning me on the telephone, and I can't believe this coming from this guy, I mean he and I we started the Gulf of Maine Fishermen's Alliance together, and used to go to the council meetings together and then have a cocktail afterwards and everything. Now, I'd just as soon not see him, when I see him I turn away from him. Guys like that Mike Leary, I see them, they're cutting everybody's throat around here, and yet Gloucester accepts him, there's some of the young fellows think he's God. They don't know, he's taking their future away from them, they don't know that because part of the reason why this was allowed to happen, Azure, is the fishermen are independent, irascible sons of bitches, they don't like these meetings, they don't go, or they don't participate, they rely on someone else to do it, and that is always a recipe for disaster. If you're not there yourself, and you're not well-informed and see what goes on, then you deserve what you get in a way. You know, people used to say to me, "Hey, go down to Dunkin' Donuts and have the council meeting." Maybe it's a bad windy day, and they say, "Oh, gee Russell what went on?" and I say "Blah, blah blah" and they get oh, they get all, "Why didn't you say something? Why didn't you...you should have said this...you should have..."

I said, "Me?! Me? Where the hell were you?" They used to say in the old days when the council really didn't mean as much to your life, it did, but they didn't realize it. It wasn't that in your face in those days. Things were just starting to happen. The council process has evolved, you know, in the last twenty years, quite a ways from a just, wild, free-for-all to an insider deal, you know? And they said, "Why, what's in this for you? Why do you go to these meetings? Why aren't you out fishing with the rest of us?" because everybody knows everything around here, any waterfront place. And they, "Well Jesus boys, they're killing us. You don't care?"

"Oh it's nothing we can do about it anyway." Well there is, but you know, when you don't have that spirit from the beginning, you usually get what you deserve, and we certainly have got it. But anyway.

AC: Well, Russ, I definitely want to respect your time, and this has been very, very informative and heart-breaking all at once.

RS: Oh, I wish it was more positive, Azure.

AC: Well, on that note, too...

RS: The positive thing about it is the business itself, the fishing business itself, I mean you, used to be you rose and fall on your own merits. Boy, that's the American way and I love it. A little good healthy competition is good for everybody, but the competition is taken out of it and the..., you know, your own ability to affect your own future, and financial and mental and family and everything has been just taken away, it just isn't there anymore. Which is unfortunate.

AC: Well in that, on that thought and maybe an addition, a closing, a statement or a story that you remember from your experiences in fisheries that you would want to leave with those who might listen to this in the future? Is there something that pops in your mind?

RS: Well, I think, looking back on it all, and I think the value of, of the character of the business and the character of the men that I've met, I've met some incredible men over my career Azure. Men that taught me so much and they were such philosophers of life and such astute pupils of life, and I met plenty of bums too, I met both sides. And I could tell you stories for hours starting up in Kodiak and different, back in 1970s, 1972, 1973 when I was up there and all the way through, different men that I had for Captains and friends and stuff, and they've just been, I've met some incredible human beings. Men that I would say, "Gee, I hope my daughter marries a guy like that." you know, that kind of a guy. Or, I had a wonderful father, I have a wonderful father, and I never had to put anybody up against him, but there were guys that I would say "Gee, I wouldn't mind him being my father too." You know, a guy, Bob Bruce, Willis Powers, different men that had done so much and had been so many places and learned so much, and just being around them and listening to them and to see the way they handled themselves was an honor, an honor, yeah. And that's what I leave about this business.

AC: Wow, wonderful.

RS: And there were other lessons in life, disappointments too, that way. Men I thought were one way but turned out to be another, but those were few and far between.

AC: And is it the character, that character...

RS: I had a great ride (laughs).

AC: Is it that character and that personality that's attracted to the fishing business, or is it the fishing business that shapes that sort of character, or is it a bit of both?

RS: A little bit of both, Azure, I think, you know? And many of the fellows I first went fishing with back in the 1970s wouldn't believe me. For a college kid who was an American kid, didn't have a vowel on the end of my name, up here in Gloucester trying to get a job on a decent vessel that made good money was not easy, and I did finally crack it. And a lot of the fellows that I went fishing with, Harry Barbarito, and different guys I revere to this day, never had a choice in the matter. That was their destiny, they were Depression kids, and brought up around Gloucester, they come home from the war or whatever it was, whatever they were doing and went fishing because that's what there was to do. A lot of them didn't like it, and yet they did it and they were damn good at it. And others, just, like Bob Bruce was in the Merchant Marines for ten years, went around the world so many times, and he was, his father was a schooner man, Captain, great highline skipper out of Gloucester, and it was in his blood, you know?

And so, it has a funny way, look at me, I'm a farm boy pretty much, brought up in a small town, mill town in Connecticut surrounded by farms. And here I am, you know, they said, how, you know, scholarship boy at Harvard and all that deal. You know, my parents, my father and mother, of course they had such great plans for me and here I turned out to be a fisherman, and they..., my mother never got straight with it. She said, "I hope I live long enough to see you stop fishing." Well, in later years it was the danger of it all, she, I almost got lost a couple of times, and I had a...I've been lucky that way, Azure, very, very lucky in my career. I've had a lot of close scrapes and always come out breathing, you know? And it scared my mother. My father in the end, said to me that, that he appreciated now why I had done this, and that he realized that I was not just a fisherman, or he'd say, "Oh, he's a fisherman." but then he realized I was a business man, and as well as a fisherman and I was running my own business and handling my own finances and at the time doing quite well, you know? I mean, not big, but well.

And you know, he was proud of that, and he used to come and help me with the boat every year we'd put the boat up. When there was money in the business every year that boat went up and it was painted and cleaned and repaired, and looked like a shiny penny every year. And my Dad and I worked together on that, and it was the closest we ever were. And so it's been good to me in that respect, very good. Today it would be different because he would have to wait every three or four years for me to do that, and he probably wouldn't have lasted that long.

AC : Well, Russ, is there anything else you would want to add before we close today? Something I might not have asked that you think would be important to share?

RS : Um, no, I don't, I just think it's important for the people who may come later on to realize just how precious that our national resources are, and that the public should retain hold on some of them anyway. You know, they shouldn't all go to profit, and that I will always maintain that the small businessman, the small fisherman/farmer, farmer/fisherman or small business operator is going to be a better manager, manager of resources than your bottom-line corporations which is EDFs [Environmental Defense Fund], you know, the cry that ownership breeds responsibility and therefore taking that one step further, bottom-line corporations are more responsible as husbands of the resources than small business people like fishermen and farmers and family people like that. So, with that said (laughs) I think I've about had it.

AC : Gotcha, well I wish you well, and I thank you very, very much for your time today.

RS : Well thank you, and thank you for helping to provide this platform.

AC : Sure, absolutely, and just to close this is Azure Cygler and I'm here on the phone with Russell Sherman on the 6th of November, 2012, and if you could just hold on the line for a second, Russ, I'll conclude. Thank you.

RS : Certainly.

[1:14:51.9]

END INTERVIEW