

**Interview with Steve Wilkes [SW]**  
**Occupation: Fisherman**  
**Port Community: Newport, RI**  
**Interviewer: Azure Cygler [AC]**  
**Date: September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012**  
**Catch Share Oral Histories Project – NOAA Fisheries**  
**Logger/Transcriber: Matthew Schult**  
**INDEX: [minutes:seconds]**  
**Perry Mill / Parascandolas Wharf, Newport, RI**

Interview

[00:00]

AC: Okay, for the record my name is Azure Cygler, it's the 21<sup>st</sup> of September, 2012. We're here at Parascandola's Wharf with Steve Wilkes. And Steve if you just could state for the record that you agree to do this interview...

SW: I agree.

AC: To begin, give me your full name please?

SW: Steven Edward Wilkes.

AC: And where you live?

SW: I live on the fishing vessel *Shadow Fax* at Perry Mill Wharf, Newport, Rhode Island.

AC: Okay, your vessel's name is the *Shadow Fax*, you said?

SW: Mm-hmm.

AC: Are you currently fishing?

SW: No.

AC: And when did you retire from fishing?

SW: I'm not sure if I'm, at this point, if I'm retired or retarded.

AC: Okay, what day, when was your last fishing trip?

SW: I stopped fishing in, well I stopped using the boat in 2008, the last time I sold a fish I believe was in 2004, or 2005.

AC: Okay. Okay. So, this was all prior to sectors starting up?

SW: Well, one of the things that happened is that as the business declined, in 2000 I was contracted to patrol a telecommunications cable off the coast of New Jersey and I did that for a month, and I liked the work, and other cables were being installed. So I then was contracted to patrol a telecommunications cable that was being installed on the Stellwagen Bank from Canada to Massachusetts Bay, and that job was supposed to be a thirteen-day job and it lasted for six months. And I discovered that we could stay at sea for a month at a time, and do what the cable company wanted us to do. Which made us valuable to other cable companies. So then I got a job that recurred from 2006, it might've been, no 2004 to 2008, so mostly for those four years, and also in 2001, I didn't fish, I patrolled telecommunications cables.

And 2001 to 2003 I brought the boat to Providence, to the shipyard and I rebuilt it. So I got the boat all 100% up to snuff the way I wanted it. I did a lot of steel fabrication, installed more electronics and, with the intent of going back fishing, but I kept getting hired by cable companies. The beauty of that is there is no wear-and-tear on the equipment. And, it's a, because you don't have any wear-and-tear on the equipment you have lower overhead and it was a better way to go. And it only required one crew member instead of three or four. So, I did that for those years, now when I went to the shipyard in 2001, I intended on a long stay but I didn't intend on staying in the shipyard for two years. Well what happened was as I started doing projects aboard the boat, I kept finding projects and I did them all.

AC: Boats are funny that way.

SW: Yes, and I wanted the boat to be in brand-new condition, and when I left the shipyard it was. But in the interim, when I went in the shipyard they had cut us back from eighty-eight Days in the groundfishery to fifty-five Days. Then when I came out of the shipyard I didn't fish because I had these cable jobs, so by the time it came to sector allocations I had next to nothing. So, consequently I never bothered enrolling in a sector. And I have, at this point I have, I think my allocation is fifteen Days at Sea a year, and my other options I can squid-fish and, you know, engage in some other fisheries but a lot of it's very limited because things keep tightening up.

AC: So you have groundfish permits active?

SW: Yes I have a groundfish permit, well, yes it's active, yup, and I have, of course, using that permit unless I bought allocation, and I'm not going to buy my own fish before I'm going to sell them, I think that's stupid, um, but if I used that permit the way it is, I can't catch enough fish to feed a family of cats for a week. So, that's the way that is. So, in 2008 when I finished up with the last cable job, at the point of when the recession hit, I tied the boat up. And so what I do now is I trade stocks and wait.

AC: Trade stocks of fish, or no?

SW: And wait. And wait, for something to change.

AC: When you say stocks do you mean outside of fishing or mean stocks of fisheries?

SW: Yeah, equities.

AC: Equities, okay. So you don't lease out your Days, your fifteen or so Days?

SW: Nobody wants them. I gave, last two years I've just about given them to a young fellow that has a gillnetter, and all's he gives me for them is some codfish. Because he's not..., he is, he likes having the Days as a back-up, but he's not sure that he's going to use them because of the way the seasons change in that all the time, and the way the water's been warming up, we don't, you know, it's hard to speculate whether we'll have the volume of codfish available.

AC: So are you technically in the commonpool as it comes to fisheries?

SW: Yeah, mm-hmm, yup.

AC: Okay, gotcha. So you..., okay.

SW: I used to fish, when I started, I started with another boat that I had built that's now called the *Seio Gisento* in New Bedford. And it comes here once in a while, I had half-interest in that boat, I sold out of that and I bought this boat in (19)'79. And I bought this boat in Texas and brought it home and configured it to stern-trawling and did that for several years, and...

AC: Inshore or offshore?

SW: Offshore.

AC: So long trips, or...

SW: Yeah, well, a long trip in those days was like from the part of the coast that I come from which is Point Pleasant, New Jersey, a long trip would be six days. Then in the (19)'80s we were making, we, I more or less moved the boat here to also engage in groundfishing, and then our trips were mostly eight days, but eventually they got up to twelve or fourteen days at times. Average trip was ten days, because of the depletion of fish, and the amount of boats that pressured the resource.

The government obligation loaned to fisheries that was incepted with the Magnuson Act in 1976 completely changed the landscape of this whole business. And people like me who were single-boat owners found our crewmembers getting boats to run and we found ourselves overwhelmed by an enormous fleet of boats that were government-sponsored. So we had a lot of competition, we had too much competition for the amount of fish that was available. Now in the (19)'70s, the government hype was, the United States is lagging behind in fisheries and fisheries technology and we want to be in the forefront, and there's enough fish out there for everybody for the millennium. Well that really wasn't true, as we can see today. So, at the same time boats were built for speculative owners who were saving tax money at the end of the year because there used to be investment credits and tax shelters for fishing vessels, and so a lot of boats got built that way, a lot of them got sunk that way, a lot of men got killed that way because of untrained people on the boats, and eventually it all came back to feed on us, and we had the industrial decay and the boat buy-backs and all of that stuff.

AC: Okay, and, was that how we got to where we are now, was there any positive management efforts that helped sort of make things better along the course of there-to-now, or has it all been sort of...

SW: I don't think so, I think when I started in (19)'76, I went to the bank to get a loan for my first boat, and I needed a partner because I wasn't well-capitalized enough. The best I could come up with at that time was \$30,000 and a collateral of my home. And at that time to have a boat built, you went to your local bank and you had to put your assets up for collateral, and you had to be able to put down a down payment, a decent down payment, usually a third of the value of the boat to be able to get in the business. And if you couldn't do that on your own, then you had to do it the way I did, which was to find a partner.

And then what happened was the obligation guarantee program originally insisted on 25% down, then they changed that to 14% down, and with a lot of the, or some of the Alabama boatyards, investors were shown how they could recover the 14% by manipulating the sale price of the boat. And so investors were having fishing vessels built, taking advantage of the government perks with no money down. And I really couldn't, it was very hard to compete with that.

That kind of capitalization. Now, my belief is, is that in 1975 or 1977, when there was a lot of young men going into fisheries, there's only two people that would take the risk to have a fishing boat built, and that would either be experienced fishermen or people with rocks in their head. Because at best, the risks are enormous. We're dealing with a resource that fluctuates in volume all the time, and fluctuates in price all the time. And when we go out fishing, we don't know what we're going to get for our fish, we don't know what the weather's going to be, and we don't know what's going to break down and what's going to hold together and we don't know if one of the men is going to get sick, or injured. So there are a lot of things, we're very much at risk when we go fishing, and with government's intention to take some of the financial risk out of it, in the short run they actually put more financial risk in it, in the long run.

So, I think had it been just left to free-markets to develop the industry, the industry would've gotten developed more slowly and it would've stayed down-sized enough to match the resource. The way it was, we proved that we could decimate the resource. And I could, for hours, tell you different ways that the resource got decimated by huge fleets of boats that had no regard for what they were catching or where they were fishing. In (19)'77 and (19)'78 I used to concentrate on fluke year-round. And fluke in this neck of the woods, except here in Rhode Island, like in Massachusetts it really wasn't marketable and they didn't fish for them. Here, we'd make a couple of trips in the fall and catch some fluke, and then I'd take the boat and by Christmas or New Years' I'd be down off of Virginia some place catching fluke. By that time the fish head home, and I'd be fishing offshore in New Jersey for the fluke. In the springtime we used to fish on Long Island, and then we'd come up here for the summertime, and the only time we'd really fish for groundfish was in, like from July 4<sup>th</sup> to Labor Day. We'd make a couple of trips catching yellowtails and that was it.

AC: Are you from Point Pleasant, originally?

SW: I'm from New Jersey, yeah, originally from..., well I was born in Newark, New Jersey. I had a house and a family in Bayhead, New Jersey for many years. My daughter still lives in New Jersey.

AC: And how did you come into fishing from Newark to Newport?

SW: Well, when I was a little boy, my grandfather had a charter boat in Brielle, New Jersey. And I guess I caught the flu, because all's I ever wanted to do when I was a little boy was go fishing. So when I was fifteen years old, I started working on charter boats in Brielle and pretty much put myself through high school and college doing that. I taught school for three years in New Jersey and ran sport boats in the summertime in, you know, yachts and tournaments and stuff like that, and in (19)'75 I was quite restless and wanted to go into some kind of a

business on my own. I didn't want to teach school for twenty or thirty years and become institutionalized, so I didn't.

I quit teaching, everybody said I was crazy, and I got a job on deck of a whiting boat in Point Pleasant, and at that time we were catching like 10,000, anywhere's between 10 and 20,000 a day, of uh, pounds a day of whiting. We used to get up at three o'clock in the morning, we'd finish up at three o'clock in the afternoon, or sometimes ten o'clock at night and you'd meet yourself coming and going for five or six days a week. But in those days in the wintertime we used to get a high price because Point Judith wasn't developed yet. Their, all their fishing boats were not, at that, when I started there were 64 fishing boats in Point Judith, and by (19)'81 or (19)'82 there was 164, so... The, in the wintertime, New Bedford used to freeze up and a lot of ports used to freeze up, and in Point Pleasant we could keep going 90% of the time. When the ports froze up, the fish weren't available to the marketplace, because the boats couldn't get out fishing, so I can remember one time I believe New Bedford froze up for ten weeks, and we got an astronomical price, the mythical dollar for a whiting. (Laughs) And for quite a while. But the thing of it is, those were small family-run operations, mostly on fifty to sixty foot or sixty-five foot wooden shrimp boats. And there [were] a finite number of them, and you couldn't buy a job on one of those boats. You had to have good seamanship skills, you had to be able to handle nets and fix the gear, build the gear, be willing to never really have a day off and you had to be able to also run the boat; and if you didn't like it that way there was somebody else to take your job. Now, at that time, like in (19)'75 and (19)'76, I used to make \$1,000 a week all winter long.

AC: Which is good money, right, back then?

SW: And that was day fishing, sure, and that was a lot of money. So after discovering that I made more money when I was sixteen years old than I did three years out of school with a degree, I decided, the decision was pretty clear to me. And I had a boat built with a partner, and in about a year-and-a-half, he wanted the whole boat for himself, and made me a financial offer I really couldn't refuse, so I let him buy me out, and I got the boat I have now. And then watched the business in the early (19)'80s, watched the business go downhill. But I liked the business, I was entrenched in it, and wouldn't have thought of doing anything else, so I stayed with it.

AC: How old are you, may I ask?

SW: Me? I'm sixty-five.

AC: Sixty-five, okay.

SW: And I had my first boat built when I was twenty-nine. So that's pretty much my story with that.

AC: That's a good history. Now are you married, not married?

SW: Well, I was, I got divorced in (19)'85 and I'm not married now.

AC: Kids? Do you have children?

SW: I have twins, a boy and a girl, Karen and Steven they're both thirty-six. And Karen is a nurse anesthetist, and Steven's an electrical engineer.

AC: Back in New Jersey, both of them?

SW: No, Steven is a corporate typhoon and he travels the world for a company called, I believe it's called FiberCon, and his specialty is fiber optics, and he's vice president of the company and he has to have meetings with a lot of clients and salespeople and things like that. So he lives with his wife right now outside of Boise, Idaho, and they have, actually they have two houses in California because he was living there up until a year ago, and so he's a very busy guy.

AC: But not fisheries, neither of them decided to...

SW: Nah, Steven fished with me when he was in high school and I think what he probably liked about it was that it gave he and I an opportunity to be together. But, he really wasn't crazy about fishing, he was proud that he did it, and he enjoyed doing it while he was doing it, but it wasn't a career-choice for him. And I respected that.

AC: Never pushed him? That's super.

SW: No, no. The only thing I pushed him to do was to learn how to use tools and learn how to make things, and to be able to take charge of his own life. And he's done all of those things, and he does beautiful woodwork, and he builds his own computers, and he will take a property with a dilapidated house on it and he'll have it looking like a million bucks and functioning 100% inside of a couple of years in his spare time, because that's what he did with one of his houses. Yeah, he's quite the boy, yup.

AC: Now, Steve, do you, how do you feel about how your life has sort of progressed with the cable observations from fishing to sort of more of a research.

SW: [Referring to warm temperatures in his car where we were conducting the interview] Better open that window, I'm going to open your window some more, alright?

AC: Is all of that sitting well with you? How do you, when you reflect on all of your experiences and, is this where you want to be? Or is this where you thought you would be? I know that's a big question, but...

SW: Well, no, because we live in a society, human beings, innately, our nature is we don't like change; we want everything to stay the same all the time. And we don't, most of us don't deal well with uncertainty and to the point of some of us get ill if we're..., if life is too uncertain. And I've always put myself at risk, I deplore stagnation or I did anyway. Today I'm sixty-five so I'm happy with a little stagnation now, thank you, but all my life I always wanted to move forward and accomplish as much as I could accomplish, in each day. And enjoy as much as I could enjoy each day. And where I've always enjoyed life the most is close to the water. So here I am, I'm still here.

AC: What was that choice when you decided to stay and live on the boat? Is that something that was necessity for you or pure pleasure, enjoyment like you said?

SW: Well no, when I got divorced I got moved out of my house and moved on the boat and just couldn't see living anywhere else. I liked living on the boat, and I was accustomed to it, and I was very comfortable with it, so that's what I did, and continue to do. Yeah.

AC: And how have you seen the waterfront change over the years, being a direct presence, constantly, has it been, infrastructure in terms of fishing, how have you seen all of that change, gentrification? What's your thoughts?

SW: Well, we are here, this property, this facility where we're conducting this interview is an anomaly. Here in Newport it's the last chunk, except for the State pier, it's the last chunk of working waterfront, more or less. And if you look around you, it's not really working at this point. And the landscape here is consumed with plastic-fed ships and sailboats and the town in thirty, in the past thirty years has become gentrified and very tourist-oriented. Most of the income in this area comes from tourism I believe, and so we kind of stick out like a sore thumb.

Now at the top of the street here, this Perry Mill Wharf, when I came here in (19)'77, that was a Westinghouse light bulb factory. Prior to that it had been Perry Mill, and I guess they used to grind grain up there, and this wharf here, before Parascandola's bought it, this wharf was a coal depot. This was Peckham & Son's Coal Company. And that brown building up there, well you can't see it



from here, but when you first pull in the driveway on the right you can see the roof, they call that the "Horse Barn", because that's where Peckham used to keep their horses to pull the, to pull the trolleys of the coal off the barges. See? Yeah, and if you go in there and you look around, you can see the walls with the original horse stalls, where the stalls were and the wood's all dented from the horses kicking it, yeah.

AC: Wow, so fishing wasn't a big part from the beginning, this wharf didn't support....

SW: In Newport? Well, Newport was a merchant town, merchant ships used to come in here. Now, if you dive down here alongside where we're sitting in my truck and you dig around in the muck, chances are you'll retrieve some clay pipes from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, because that's one of the things that they used to offload here, was clay pipes and I don't know what else, you know, whatever came in commerce, but this was a commercial port. And, when I came here there was one, two, I think there was three, three boatyards here with...capable of hauling commercial boats like mine, but there was three of them, we had Newport Shipyard, then you had next door where the Yachting Center is, there was a railway there they used to haul lobster boats and gillnetters and small fish draggers. And then you had Manchester and...not sure if it was Manchester & Williams or Manchester & Wheeler down the street, and they used to haul boats there. And then you had down near Wellington Square there was tank storage for the, for oil, and where the Pier Restaurant is now, where the Iris...International Yacht Restoration outfit down there?

AC: Right, world-famous...

SW: Right, that whole building there, that was an electrical generation plant, and they used to run diesel engines down there to generate electricity for the town, at least this portion of it. So yeah, there was...,

AC: Things have changed.

SW: There was, things have changed, there was a lot more in the interior of the island, there was a lot less development, there was more farms. So, yeah, things have, things have changed immensely.

AC: Now do you keep in touch with fisheries issues still?

SW: Not too much, no.

AC: Okay, so you're sort of...

SW: I'm, I've for six years now I've been involved in the financial markets and understanding them and being able to trade in them without losing all my capital is consumed most of my time.

AC: Gotcha.

SW: Yeah, and I keep studying, so, and I like it, and I keep researching, and I look at it as something that I can do into old age. You know, hopefully the brain won't give out before the body does. (Laughs).

AC: Now, selling your groundfish permit, is that ever an option for you, or is it not worth it?

SW: Well, it would be an option for me, but I've hung onto the permits because it remains, it's hard to figure out whether a boat would be more saleable with its permits, or less, or more saleable without them. And then the other question is, "How much is a groundfish permit worth, when I consider it to be pretty worthless?" You know, when I can't, so I have a permit where I really can't catch enough to make a living with, so who's going to buy it for how much? To me it's a disgusting circumstance.

AC: Yeah, and it used to be, it would have been worth so much, right?

SW: When the business was viable, yes. Yeah, well it was like, in 19... [referring to recorder on center console] just moving that so it doesn't fall off ...in 19...I'm trying to think of the year...'97 I think it was I was at Fairhaven Shipyard, I was having work done on the bottom of the boat, and at that time I knew some of the guys from New Bedford and I knew some of the scallopers in at that time, they were wondering how they were going to hang onto their boats. And they were scared to death of the shipyard bill. When they went to the shipyard and doing as little as possible, because they couldn't afford it. Because the scallop industry had gone so far downhill, and there was a lot of scallop boats tied up in New Bedford with permits for sale, and the boats for sale and there was no takers. Well the boats were mostly old eastern rigs, but the permits were viable, but nobody really wanted the permits, except a couple of enterprising people that had some foresight bought the permits, and a permit that you could've bought for \$40,000 then, is worth about \$1,000,000 for it today.

Because what happened was that the industry collaborated with Dartmouth U.(niveristy) to undertake certain projects to allow them to experimentally fish in the closed areas. And the closed areas were originally closed to everybody, now they're only closed to fishing vessels. Scallop boats at certain times can go in there and clean the scallops up that are supposed to be probably going to die anyway from old age. Now, I really didn't mind closed areas that much, except

the areas that they chose, because what it appears to me that they did was, they simply took the areas where everybody fished the most, and closed them. You see, which was the best bottom. And, you know, not necessarily the most productive bottom for as how much fish you could catch per tow, but it was the most productive bottom in the sense of, you could catch plenty of fish per tow, but you'd also get your gear back. So...

AC: I see. So you did bottom trawling? I'm sorry, bottom-trawling, throughout your career, that was?

SW: Yeah, mostly with flat nets.

AC: So, going to meetings, council meetings, I mean you just don't even really, that's not your world anymore?

SW: Not at this point, no, because the problem with, see what our business was always about was about production. Two old sayings that I would refer to is, number one, "It all comes out of the hatch", okay? Whatever it is you're going to spend money on, it's going to come out of the hatch. It's got to come from catching fish. And then the other one is, "No fish, no money." Now, using the principle of "No fish, no money", there really is not a direct correlation between going to meetings and filling out paperwork and expressing opinions and actively catching fish. And there has been many a fisherman who has allowed himself to become so involved with so many groups and with so many meetings and accomplish absolutely nothing, and watch his business become non-existent. So, no, I'm not a fisheries activist in that sense. I certainly have my own opinions and my opinions are like probably like most of the people that you've talked to.

AC: Somewhat, well, different. Everyone has a unique take on it. You certainly are in a unique place, geographically and, you know, how you've shifted and done cable work, and that's...you have a unique story for sure.

SW: Well, I'm resilient, in the sense that this is a small business; replacement value of that boat today would be about \$1,300,000. I probably have \$800,000 or \$900,000 invested in the fishing business if you take into account the boat and all the tools I have. I have gear in two or three locations besides being on the boat, I rent two lockers up in Fall River that are full of welding machines and steel and stainless steel because I do all my own work. You know, I've become skilled at all of that stuff over the...the only thing I don't do much of is electronics.

AC: Now have you kept all of the fishing gear, too? All the net drums, and the...

SW: Mm-hmm. Well, I've only got one net drum on the boat but all the nets and so forth, yeah I have all of that. But a lot of those are probably illegal today, you know? I mean when one sifts through the ever-changing regulations, I don't know what I can use and what I can't, I'd have to research it. Um, but...

AC: If you were given more Days, for instance, would you go back and fish, or is that something you don't think much about doing? What's your thoughts there?

SW: Well, I don't know, I just...

AC: Okay.

SW: And that's, I just, I don't know. At this point, we have lost the markets that we had for our fish. There are a very finite amount of fish cutters left, and fish processors to handle our fish. It's very easy to glut the market. Fish, fresh fish, fresh domestic fish is out of reach of the average consumer, financially. And frozen tiger shrimp from...

AC: Bangladesh (laughs)

SW: ...yeah, Bangladesh and tilapia from China are readily available. We have no service infrastructure in the sense that if I couldn't do most of my own welding and engine-work and so forth on my boat myself, I'd be lost. And, but there's no young men coming into the business, or young men in the business with any goals that I know of. And you've been sitting here now for an hour, how many young men did you see walk by? None.

AC: Right, there's not much happening on the docks today. This is a typical day, this is not...

SW: Yes, right.

AC: ...okay.

SW: So there are, you know, young men are not going into fishing as a career choice today, and I don't blame them because it's too uncertain. It's not a career-choice where you could go in and say, "Well, gee, I'm going to fish for a couple of years, I'm going to put a down payment on a house and I'm going to raise a family." It's not going to happen. The question was if I were to get more Days would I fish? I don't know. When I stopped fishing about 50% of the time I was fishing alone. You know, I rigged up the boat so I could run everything myself.

AC: Wow.

SW: Yeah, and that's not wise. So, the damage has been done. There's certain things when you damage something enough, you really can't resuscitate it. And our government thinks if you just throw money at it, it will come back. Not necessarily so, not all the time. And this business certainly has had enough money thrown at it in the past thirty years. It's been, was, you know, became over-capitalized very quickly, then they had boat buy-backs, and then they bought, they took groundfish Days off my permit and they reimbursed me for them. Well that's like making a treaty with the Indians to buy Manhattan for \$4, yeah. And our story as an industry, our story as far as the influence of government and geographical and infrastructure change...

AC: It's analogous to...

SW: ...parallels, yes, it's analogous to what happened to the American Indians. And we live in a more collective, collective-minded society today. We don't, we have a tendency to have more distrust in somebody who does something on their own, or someone who takes a different direction. And we really, we've moved away from respecting and revering the individual, and that's the way it is.

AC: Right. Now, do you feel pressure, or does "Uncle Louie", as you call him – I love that – is he feeling pressure to have all commercial activity be removed from the dock? Or is that something he's...how has he managed to keep, and I'm looking at half a dozen yachts next to you, how does he manage to keep that at bay?

SW: Well this side of the dock is vacant because when there's an overflow from one of the marinas down the street, they tie yachts here. They lease portions of the property out at different time(s). The yachting center leases a portion of the yard. The yachting center during some of its shows leases the entire north side of the dock. And if you notice, the property's for sale or lease. So they've made that decision, collectively. The only reason why it's still here is because a viable buyer has not showed up yet. Now that part, you would have to talk to them about because that's none of my business and I don't get into it.

AC: They're not pushing you to leave, they're not asking you to leave?

SW: I pay them rent!

AC: Is it a significant amount, is it fair in your eyes?

SW: It's fair in my eyes, yeah. And sometimes they hire me to do repair work on different things around the dock, like...well they didn't hire me to fix that boom, but stuff like that, and when they do, it comes off the rent.

AC: Okay, so you have a good, you have it worked out.

SW: Oh, I have a good relationship with them, yes. No, they're not pushing me, and I know that down the road if they strike a deal on the property that sure, the boat will have to leave and go someplace. I know that. The only other place where it could go around here is the State pier.

AC: How about boat insurance? Do you still have to maintain that?

SW: Yup. I don't have to, but I do.

AC: You do? And health insurance? Do you just pay for your own personal health insurance out-of-pocket?

SW: Yup. Well right now, see last year, and the past few years my health insurance was about \$12,000 a year, and this year I'm on Medicare, so there's a difference.

AC: Yeah, super. How about your sort of social networks? How does that look for you, do you find your friends are other fishermen or have you kind of have a wider net of folks that you hang out with and...

SW: Not really, there's a few people around town that I'm friendly with, and their families. My girlfriend and I are always doing things together all the time, I'm friendly with these guys, but we're kind of like, the way it's always been is we're more or less friends down here, we don't socialize too much out of here. I'm basically a loner anyway by nature.

AC: And you're good with that, you accept that and it works for you?

SW: Yeah, I stayed out at sea one time, I was out on a cable job and I didn't have a crew member, he got unruly and I had to discharge him and I stayed out for forty-five days in Ernesto. You remember Tropical Storm Ernesto?

AC: Oh, yeah.

SW: Yeah, I'm fine.

AC: Are there other boats that tie up here occasionally, or what's the...

SW: Yes, yes, well there [are] a lot of day boats that took out today. There's usually, and has been, a few scallopers that come here in summertime. There's a boat from Long Island who brings his trips in here, there's, I'm trying to think of how many of those there are. So yeah, there's, yeah.

AC: Okay. Now do you still do the cable operations occasionally?

SW: Not right now because I've got two reasons: there's no jobs because of the recession, and before I do anything with that boat I got some maintenance projects I've got to do to get it ready to get it up to snuff again to..., so that could take me two months, that could take me six months, I don't know until I get into it.

AC: And that would be Fair Haven, where if you were to haul out, would it be?

SW: No, I probably would haul out in Providence.

AC: Any other thoughts, Steve, about just how you've seen things change in the fisheries, I know you've been removed slightly from it, but you have such a neat perspective because you're not actively fishing, but you live in amongst, you know, at the pier, at the docks, so you have, sort of, you see things, even though you might not be directly involved on the water day to day. Have there been things you've seen, especially since sectors started that have stuck out in your mind, changes the industry's gone through? Specifically maybe due to sectors over the last three years? Or any thoughts on that?

SW: Well, apparently from what I've read, north...New England fisheries have been declared a disaster, is that correct?

AC: There's going to be some disaster-relief money, that's what I've heard as well.

SW: If sectors were, if anything that the government has done so far, had been effective, then we'd be sitting on a pile of fish, wouldn't we? And we're not. So, it appears that..., it does not appear to me, and especially me because my, let's see, I don't have my allocations. I have them in writing someplace, but I could show them to you, but what I would have to do is, if I joined a sector is then I'd have to buy allocation to go fishing.

AC: And you had said that's not what you, principally what was, you don't feel that's...

SW: No, I think I've invested enough, you know? You know, I've spent, well let's see, I got the other boat in (19)'77, and, so that's thirty-five years, and done everything that the government told me to do and paid my taxes on top of that. Paid my license fees, so, in a sense I've hired the DEM (Department of Environmental Management) and try to find something wrong so they can lock me up, and I think I've gone as far as I want to go. And asking me to buy my own fish back or ask me to buy fish before I catch them, I don't think that's the right way to go, and I don't intend to do that. I've got enough of an investment in fisheries and I'm not going to invest more.

AC: Do you have any other friends who are in the commonpool as well, that you, or I mean obviously you're not fishing directly, but do you know anyone in the area who's in the commonpool and maybe on the water, regularly, or is there, do you socialize?

SW: I can't say for sure. I can't say for sure.

AC: Okay, so it's like you said your social circle is sort of more diffuse.

SW: Yeah, and I don't, in the afternoon I don't go to the bar. I'm not a, I don't socialize a whole lot with anybody. I'm a, what do you call it? A curmudgeon?

AC: Lone wolf.

SW: I'm a curmudgeon.

AC: You don't seem that way at all (laughs). Now is there, say a story about a personal experience or a story that you have that sort of epitomizes your experiences in fisheries that you would want to leave on the record, or something you'd want to share with maybe future generations who would listen to this? Or advice, anything that sticks out?

SW: Not at the moment. The only thing I would say is that when I was young, that's Joe Silvia...he's seventy-nine years old, and he, he's just been retired a couple of years and he ran the local welding shop. He's a very talented man. I mean, he's a mechanical genius, and he owned half of Thomas Crawford's Blacksmith Shop down on Waites Wharf, and sold out of that a couple of years ago, he's a real gentleman. And he is very knowledgeable about local history, and the history of all of these wharfs, his father was a fisherman, so his father is, and he's a wonderful man to talk to, so I should introduce you to him. I don't know if he's in your purview or not, does it have to be a fisherman?

AC: Well, I personally would love to chat with him, for this project probably not so relevant, but I would love to meet him.

SW: Well it would be (relative) because he's seen a lot of guys come and go and he's a good storyteller. Um, but no, the only thing I would say is that, and this always sticks in the back of my mind, a guy that I know who had a welding shop and was very successful in business, when I was a young guy, he said to me, he said, "You know somebody gave me some advice that I'm going to pass on to you, when government gets in your business, you get out." And I didn't, so here I am.



AC: (Laughs) And that's advice you would, would you pass that advice on to someone else then? You're saying, you would?

SW: Yeah, yup but the problem is, is what is there that government doesn't have its hands in?

AC: Yup, forestry...yup, it's true.

SW: Everything! And even if you think they don't, they're there. You know, from the time you get up till the time you go to sleep, you're dealing with government and a regulation, and a tax.

AC: You could skip to a different government and live in a country that has less government I suppose is one solution, but still there's going to be some force in your life I suppose...

SW: It's not going to happen, it's not realistic. It's not the way we've become, you know, I heard on the news the other night if we're not careful in four or five years or ten years, we won't be celebrating Independence Day on July 4<sup>th</sup>, we'll be celebrating Dependence Day. Well think of it..., that can happen.

AC: Well Steve I've taken up a lot of your time today...

SW: No problem.

AC: I appreciate it, if there's any other thing you would want to say in closing feel free.

SW: Well if I think of something I'll let you know at another time.

AC: Sure.

SW: But I can't think of anything, and if you have other questions of me, feel free to call, okay?

AC: I might just do that, thank you Steve.

SW: Alright. You want to go upstairs and meet "Uncle Louie"?

AC: Okay, thank you for your time, again, this is Azure Cygler, I'm with Steve Wilkes, and it's the 21<sup>st</sup> of September, 2012, thanks Steve.

SW: Very good, thank you, Azure.

END INTERVIEW

[01:00:15]