

Interview with: D. Williams
Occupation: Wife of Fisherman
Port Community: Stonington, ME
Interviewer: Lisa Colburn. Amy Gerber is also present.
Interview Location:
Date:
Name of the Project: Women's Oral Histories Project
Logger/Transcriber: Amy Wilson Sanger
Interview Duration: 1:11:35

LC And Dianne, could you for the transcriptionist identify your name, address, phone number, things like that?

DW Dianne Berlew Williams. 41 Whitman Road. Stonington.

LC Thank you. And Lisa Colburn is here interviewing.

AG And Amy Gerber is here learning how to interview.

LC Great. Thank you. So, just going back to you know, sort of the larger community impacts that you were saying was the, as you see it, it's the results of the impacts and the other fisheries have forced everybody into lobstering more full-time.

DW That's right. And for people like my husband who have been primarily lobstering most of his life although he's done ground fishing and shrimping and scalloping, he sees the difference in the number of traps in the water. The number of people who didn't kind of grow up lobstering when there were understood to be certain areas and territories that were fished by certain groups of people, usually by a loosely connected family group. Fathers and sons and sons-in-laws and anybody connected. So it's a more of a struggle now. A lot more in-fighting, I think, among the fishermen out on the water about traps and it's more crowded and more variety of people.

LC So there's been encroachment on traditional space? Or, or areas that people have traditionally...

DW That's right.

LC ...occupied...

DW Yes. Where there used to be just general understandings and there was enough space for everyone to...fish. Now when word gets out that the lobsters are to be found in one area, of course everybody crowds over there. But there's just so many now that it's, it's put a lot more pressure on the lobsters but also the fishermen. This used to be, you know, I suppose you know, Stonington had a pretty big ground fishing industry. And shrimp and scallops and...

LC Why don't we just stop it.

AG Do I... record again?

LC Nope, just push stop.

END of TRACK

START of NEW TRACK

LC And you should see it beginning to advance?

AG It's...counting.

LC Yeah.

AG Five, six, seven, eight...Okay.

LC Recording. All right. Let's see. What would you consider to be the hot topics right now in Stonington in relation to fishing?

DW Well, seasonal topics are probably hottest right now as to the number of shutters and where they are and where people are fishing, that's what I hear most of them chatting about. That's, that's temporary. You know. That changes a lot. The whale gear is a continual topic, both discussing what different people do to meet, try and meet, the regulations and what works and what doesn't, and...

LC So that would be coming under protected species issues, I'm thinking.

DW I mean, there's a ...most of the fishermen are doing it, at least they're trying to. They're trying to meet the requirements. There's a lot of resentment about it. Because most of the whale kills are not by small lobster fishermen. They're by the big, Navy tankers, and tugs and what not. And they feel that they're being singled out a little unfairly and over-regulated by people that don't understand fishing gear.

I remember when they had the first big wave of 'Protect the Right Whale' and they had a lot of public meetings, as they usually do. And most, most everybody assumes they've already made up their minds but they have to fulfill the obligations of the public meetings. But in this case, the meetings were packed. There was, I remember, we went to one in Ellsworth and there were so many people they had to hold, wait and have a second one right after the first one. And people got up and gave very, very emotional speeches about...what lobstering was, and what it meant to them as far as...more than just the business. It's a tradition, and a way of life and all of that.

And one of the fishermen brought up on the stage, it was a dinner, a buoy; some rope; a toggle, and a trap. And nobody up there had seen any of that. They had no idea how lobsters are caught. What the equipment was. What it involved. They were quite interested. But we felt it was unfortunate that they didn't have a little background before they were sent out to decide people's livelihoods.

LC Now, was this a public hearing of some sort?

DW Yes, it was a public hearing. Actually, on trying to close down the lobster industry, almost entirely, to save three hundred right whales.

LC OK. So it had to do with entanglement issues. Yeah. When was that?

DW I'm trying to think...it must be seven or eight years ago.

LC OK. In the mid-nineties.

DW Yeah. It was when that guy Strahan, S-t-r-a-h-a-n, was ...had gotten a federal judge to declare the Right Whale I guess an endangered species and to try to close down the lobster fishing. Or the fishing. It was a pretty horrible suggestion. But, as a result of that, it—it, they have come up with changes in gear which, you know, may help save a few whales. I don't know. I don't think they're going to save them by that.

LC Had there been any other government regulations that you're aware of that have had either very concretely impacted the community, or your home, your family?

DW Well, right now there's three generations fishing in my husband's family. A son, a son-in-law and then he has a grandson going with him as sternman. And the trap limits... sure. Sure. You change your whole way of fishing. Now it especially impacts his son and son-in-law, the grandson doesn't plan to be a fisherman but will probably always do it part-time. When he's not in school. But my husband is, it came right at a time when he was perfectly willing to slow down a little anyway. And he's been lobster fishing for well over fifty years. So he didn't mind the regulation because if it hadn't been enacted, he would have, probably would have kept on, tried to keep on just with the number of traps he used to fish. And, so that, for us, that's worked out all right. But it's hard on his son, he fishes year round. Lobster fishes year round. But he goes quite a ways off-shore, too. So. That's all right, but... I'd say the trap limits and the difficulty in, for new people to come into the community and start out. I'm thinking of his son-in-law, who married his granddaughter—grandson-in-law, who married his granddaughter. And could only start with, I don't know, something... a hundred traps, or two hundred, the first year. Has had to work up from that. And that's been hard to support a family on that. And he's doing well, and he's a good fisherman, but still it's a struggle to try to make a living on so few traps.

LC How does that work? Do you start, they allow you to start, with a hundred? Or some...?

DW Don't quote me on the numbers but, yeah. If you're new to an area, he already had a lobster license and he went as Bob's sternman for two or three years when he first moved here, and then wanted to go out on his own. And you have to apply for tags. For nametags. They have to go on each trap. They give you maybe so many extra tags, in case you lose some, but it's only like twenty or thirty. And all your traps have to be tagged. So your first year, I don't know how many, it was a hundred and fifty or two hundred. That he could apply for. This happens to be one of the few zones where new licenses, new people can come in and start fishing. A lot of the zones don't let any one new in and you have to wait until two people leave before one new licensee can come in.

LC Okay, and it's a zone by zone, what the particulars are...

DW Yeah.

LC Yeah. Okay.

DW Which is somewhat regulated by the fishermen, that was the theory behind it. That the fishermen in, I think this was Zone C, would run Zone C but only after you meet all the government regulations. Naturally. But I think all the other zones are closed zones but this is still somewhat open.

LC And, you know, sort of in terms of community...the larger profile of the community, what events are there that celebrate fishing in any way?

DW Well, we just had a Fishermen's Day in July, late July, which is sponsored by the Fishermen's Wives Association. And it raises money for scholarships. It has lobster boat races. Vendors. It's all on the fish pier down town. Kids' games. Rowing blindfolded.

LC Are the scholarships specifically for fishermen's families? Or are they for the larger community?

DW I think it's for the larger community. I'm pretty sure. This says, it's a small school, so. I think it's for anybody who wants to apply. And they do a big fish and fritter fry on the pier that's gotten very popular in the ten years, I guess, they've had that.

As far as other ways to celebrate fishing... I don't know. There's always a fish report in the local paper. Landings and whatnot. But that's a big thing. Well, no, that's different. The boat races are on a different day. And then Fisherman's Day is different.

LC They're sponsored, are they sponsored by the same organization?

DW No, the boat races I think are sponsored by the town. I'm not sure. Or maybe there's a coastal race committee—there probably is.

LC Yeah.

DW Of course you'd have to find out about that but there's those two events in the summer.

LC Are there any other events throughout the year that you can think of? Balls, or other fundraisers or...

DW Yeah, I think the Fisherman's Wives put on a dance. Around Christmas time, or Valentine's Day one of those holidays. And then they give out prizes and awards for this, that and the other. Fishing. Records and stuff.

LC Do you participate in that?

DW In the Fishermen's Wives?

LC Yes.

DW No. No. Never did.

LC Who are they?

DW Well, they're mostly, they're mostly the generation younger than I am and they are wives of fishermen. It was started less than twenty years ago.

LC Okay, so it's relatively new.

DW Yeah. Yeah. And they do raise a lot of money and they help a lot of people, any fishermen are injured, or drowned or lost at sea or anything like that. They help out the family. They sponsor different, different events. They contribute to other charities, also. I think they have a 501-3C number so they can help kind of be financial partners to other organizations that are raising money.

LC OK. And are there any other fishing associations that people...

DW The Maine Lobsterman's Association.

LC OK.

DW And the Down East Lobstermen's Association are both pretty big in this town. I'd say the Maine Lobstermen's Association is probably bigger. Then there's the Fishermen's Forum every March at the Samoset in Rockland. Rockport.

LC Have you or your husband ever gone to that?

DW Oh, we go every year.

LC I tried to go this year. It didn't work out.

DW It's interesting. It really is.

LC I've heard that it's great. And that the workshops that were on the roster this year looked fantastic.

DW Yeah. It's changed over the years. We actually met at the Fisherman's Forum, twenty five years ago. And at that point it was more of a party than, I mean, there were people that went to the meetings and stuff. But there was a lot of partying. And as the prices went up and fishermen matured or something, that seems to have stopped, for the most part. It's pretty serious participation. Usually the Governor's there, or makes an appearance, and Senator Snow, and this year Senator Collins was there, too. Senator Snow led a seminar. They usually have a couple of big speeches. But it's interesting. A lot of—they have a trade show there, also.

LC What's the, if you just had to throw out just some rough estimates of numbers in the Stonington/Deer Isle area, I mean, how many fishermen are you talking about? That might be member of those organizations, or...

DW Hm.

LC Best guess?

DW I'd say between three and four hundred.

LC OK.

DW Yeah.

LC It's substantial.

DW Yeah. I would say that it's a big part of this island. And it's culturally a big part and financially and other businesses of course depend on good fishing for getting their income.

LC What are some of the key businesses? Are there any, what do I call it, engine...engine repair...

DW Well, there's Billings' Diesel Marine. Which is the biggest marine repair area business north of Portland.

LC OK.

DW And they've been there a long time. That's right down town here. You haven't been down there. It's off a little, over a little causeway.

LC Is there somebody over there in particular that would be good to talk to? That you might know of?

DW Well, Harlyn Billings is the president. Now, after his father. His daughter, Suzette Billings, works there. Suzette Grindle works there. And son-in-law Pete Grindle. They work for him in the office. Those are the three that come to mind. And they have a big machine shop and a paint shop and they used to build boats. They most, they just repair them now and store them. Big storage business. But the Mayflower, replica of the Mayflower that's down in Massachusetts, that comes up about every eight or ten years for overhaul. Stays there for the winter, usually.

LC And are there any—

DW But, excuse me, they also have a big pleasure boat business. So.

LC It's be interesting to know what the percentage of, you know, servicing the fishing industry versus the pleasure craft industry.

DW I'd say that's switched now, to pleasure craft would lead the fishing industry.

LC Yeah.

DW They rent a lot of moorings. In a Marina like area there. So a lot of fish buyers and dealers, here,. And a couple of big fish pounds [pans? 17:25] on the island. On both islands. So, I think it's less and less. But...

LC But it's still, I mean, your sense earlier was that it's still substantial.

DW Yes! Yeah.

LC And is it perhaps the largest... industry...

DW It's the largest industry in the town. The interesting thing is that the lobster fishermen have always done their own regulating in Maine, as you probably know. They have had their own regulations which were always much stricter than Massachusetts or New Hampshire, any of the other new England States. Or any other states. You can't take an egg out of a female, and you can't take—size. Strict size measurements that are changed once in a while to eliminate even more. And because that was successful and lobster fishing has always been good within the normal and natural ups and downs of the curve, I think there was quite a bitter resentment for the federal regulations, because Maine fishermen had always done a good job on that, on their own. And I think the Maine Lobsterman's Association was, has always been instrumental in getting those regulations in and kept up to date and what not. But again, a little bit of the feeling that the feds are a little heavy handed and not terribly aware of much of the industry.

L:C That seems to be a universal perception. Even outside of lobstering.

DW Yeah. Sure.

LC What are yours and your husband's plans for the future in relation to fishing? I mean, do you see there as being a future?

DW Yes. I think there'll be a future for lobstering. What will happen probably is what's always happened: there'll be a few really bad years. And they've always happened. Naturally. They'll be good somewhere else, but they won't be good around here. We've had some tremendous years in the last ten years. And that will get rid of a lot of the fishermen who will jump into something else. But there'll always be, we think, a lobster fishing industry here. On some scale. As I say, this has all come about at a time in our lives when it meets our needs to slow down anyway.

LC Yeah.

DW As far as Bob's health issues, as long as, he says, he can be wheeled down in a wheelbarrow and the centerboard is XX on a crate [20:57] ,so he doesn't plan to stop fishing, ever. He'll always goat least for a few months.

LC You had said the grandson doesn't have plans to be a fisherman per se.

DW No.

LC Why is that?

DW Well, He's, he wants to be a fine furniture maker.

LC OK.

DW He's been fishing off and on since he probably, you know, in the stern since he was probably about ten years old. And he's just been accepted into the Bennett Street School of crafts.

LC In Boston!

DW In Boston. And he'll start February so he can get the fall fishing in. So. That's what he wants to do. And he realizes he's not going to make a living at that right away so he'll probably always go summers, at least for a while. It's a good backup. He can make some money.

LC Yeah. Interesting. I mean, one of the themes that seems to emerge is the diversity that the, if you can have more than one thing to fall upon that you can make it last. You can keep it going into the future if you can do that.

DW The other interesting thing is that more and more, it used to be in the high school year book when they told the plans of the graduating seniors, a lot would go fishing. Plan to go fishing. And then it dropped off. And maybe one or two might. Now it's coming back up. I noticed that not only are more graduates, most of them boys, plan to go fishing, but a lot of them have been fishing all through high school, have big boats, make a lot of money, and will fish as hard as they can. For a long as they can. And I think probably a lot of that is because the price has been good. And they're good at it. They come from fishing families, doing it all their lives any way.

LC Do you consider this community to be a fishing community?

DW Yeah.

LC What is it that makes it a fishing community from your perspective?

DW Well, of course that's changing, too. I mean, more and more people are moving here from away. And building multi-million dollar houses. And raising land value and property, house...value way, way, way pout of reach for even the best fishermen. But it's still, it's still a fishing community for the native population. And I think that a lot of people who have moved here from away love the idea of a fishing community and like, think it's picturesque, but you see zoning in—not into Stonington, but in Deer Isle where in certain areas you can't pile traps in your yard. And people want to buy up property on the water but not here lobster boats start up at three, four o'clock in the morning. And when the wind blows a certain way you're gonna smell bait.

LC So there's a certain issue of gentrification that you're competing with.

DW I think one of the most important things that happened to Stonington was, it must have been in the late 80's maybe, that a group got together and got money from the government to build the fish pier because the water front property was going fast, in the 80's. People were speculating: buying, selling, buying, selling. And I was on the comprehensive planning committee, at that point, trying to—our whole purpose was to try and save the working waterfront. And it, every body was in agreement. We sent out questionnaires, we sent out questionnaires to the high school, and all over. And everybody's in agreement; this is great. Save the working waterfront. But. Anybody who owned property said 'Don't try and tell me what to do with my property'. You know? 'If I own waterfront property, I'll sell it to whomever I can get the most money from.' And

you can hardly blame them. I mean, somebody who paid maybe three thousand dollars for a house on the water down town Stonington with a fish pier now maybe forty years later could have gotten half million for it.

LC Yeah.

DW And a million, now. So, you, I could see it so clearly from both directions. But we didn't get the zoning passed. But we did get a moratorium on change of use for I think two and a half years. And during that two and a half years, the bottom fell out of the market.

LC So, there's a bit of a reprieve.

DW So people—it came to a natural halt anyway. For a while. But it's going fast, now.

LC But what would you say makes the community a community? I mean, do you—are there things that, net works of people in the fishing community that tie, bind, them together? Is it based on, you know, in-shore off-shore boat size...

DW No.

LC What holds the people together as a community that fishes?

DW Now, do you mean, are you talking about the community of Stonington or the community of the fishing people in Stonington?

LC Fishing.

DW Yeah.

LC Yeah. I mean, if you're calling it a fishing community—

DW Yeah.

LC --and it's a very sort of nebulous term, actually. But it has profound implications for my work.

DW Yeah. Well, of course what holds it together primarily is an obsession with fishing. Fishermen talk about fishing. They dream about fishing.

LC But they don't necessarily have to talk and dream together it's just, that love and that passion...

DW That's right.

LC ...that creates the bond...

DW But they will, almost all the fishermen, I mean, it's kind of, it always has been kind of families that fish. And extended families and those are the people that most fishermen talk with about fishing. Bob's son comes over probably a couple of times a week and they just sit and talk, or he goes over there and they just sit and talk fishing. And talk about other people's boats and lobster gear and, and very—you know, small details about knots and things or new engines or whatever. And friends, too. You know, fishermen have friends that are usually fishermen. Not always, but. There is a, just a network, a very loosely associated network of people who are fishermen.

LC Are there—who are the key fishing families? You know, sort of historical...

DW Ohhh...

LC You know, down in Point Judith there's a handful of historical family, you know, families that fish. You can name them all on one hand. But they're big families.

DW Yeah. Yeah. Well, some of the families names' here are so big that you'd have to mention, if you mentioned them you'd have to be right, because there's so many of them. Like the Hardy's and the Haskells and the...but I, you know, I can't think that there're any big fishermen from those families but I... you'd have to ask somebody else that. I, I really couldn't tell you. My husband might be able to but I couldn't tell you that the longest standing, traditional—

LC Multi-generational...

DW Yeah.

LC You said his family has been fishing for...

DW Well now, Bob's, yeah, uncles and things that fish but his father didn't fish and his grandfather didn't. Neither of his grandfathers did.

LC OK.

DW But he did, and his son, son-in-law, or grand-son-in-law, and grandson did.

LC OK. We've been talking sort of about larger community issues. The, sort of the next set of questions would be more focused about you and your family's response to fishing over time. If that's okay with you.

DW Mm, yeah. It's not perfect because we didn't get together until we were in our early forties. So I wasn't raising a family. Our kids were mostly, although we have eleven of them, were mostly grown when we got together. Just a couple of teenagers left.

LC Then some of the questions won't apply. I mean, I'll ask them any way to see if it in any way has some bearing or you might have anything to offer, but. That's, there's no perfect profile here.

DW No.

LC Everybody has a unique history and story, so. That perfect historical, multi-generational family doesn't really exist very well anymore. These are questions of a more personal nature. If you find any of them that you prefer not to answer you just need to say so, or if you prefer to say it off the record we can turn off the recorder and then turn it back on. Or if they make you feel uncomfortable in any way just let us know and we will move on to the next set of questions. Could you tell us your age, Dianne?

DW Sixty-eight.

LC And you had said that you, you met your husband in your forties and up until that point you hadn't been involved in fishing? Or that's that point at which you...Okay. All right.

DW I didn't live on the island. I lived in Brooksville at that point. Across the reach.

LC And do you have any particular religious orientation? You or your husband, or...

DW We don't attend any church but we both consider ourselves to be moderately religious.

LC Ok. And ethnicity? What would best describe you?

DW Both of us—well, actually my husband's grandfather was Armenian which is unusual on this island. His family's been on the island for nine generations. I mean, the ninth generation's his great grandson, children, and mostly British Isles. Welsh. English. Scottish. Mine too, plus German.

LC OK. And what was your educational background?

DW I've had three years of college and Bob was just high school.

LC Did you have any informal mentoring or training? When you look back on your life, were there people that were particularly influential in your educational—and I don't mean formal-- but in you know, sort of in the informal sense. In the sense of East Africa, where people are mentored to people. Are there any people like that in your life?

DW Not really. I've always moved a lot. I married quite young, when I was twenty and moved every few years while having five kids so I never landed anywhere long enough to kind of develop a relationship like that.

LC Where was your place of birth?

DW New Jersey.

LC What was the role of women in your upbringing in terms of the—were they housewives, were they working, or a combination of things?

DW My mother never worked outside the home. She was an artist, and painted. My grand—her mother—did some writing for... they lived in Greenwich Village and she did some writing for the Village Voice sometimes. Nothing much. They were both very strong, intelligent women. Pretty much ran their households.

LC What's been, since your involvement in fishing, in your forties, what's been your experience in terms of the role of women in fishing?

DW It's very important. It's hard, of course a lot of people go fishing. I've gone, and a lot of women go in the stern. A few have their own boats. More on [Vinyl Haven? 35:29] But, I think of two right off the top of my head. That have their own boats here. One is the daughter of a fisherman and goes to college and fishes summers. And the other is married to one and has her own outboard. In the old days, before maybe thirty years ago, fishermen's wives usually knit the heads for their traps and woolen mittens and wristers cuffs to catch the water and helped with the baiting hooks and stuff if you were setting trawls or anything. It isn't—now, of course, most of the younger wives work full-time or part-time and they most everybody can be bought ready-made now, so there isn't as much the demand for someone that can do all that. But I think it's a—wives are still a support system for fishing. Bookkeeping.

LC Do you do that?

DW Yeah. Yeah.

LC In your family?

DW To some extent. We're incorporated, so I don't do the corporate books. I mean I keep the monthly book but not...I tried doing that. It was horrible. But yeah. You,

someone's out all day too, you have to conduct a lot of phone calls and business set-up, like calling, I had to call this morning to get his, someone to come down, the [bell? Fellow? 37:28] that he sells to, come down and pick out lobsters tonight. Get the weights from the last time he did and tell him what percentage to take off, give the grandson. Just little things like that. Or ordering new equipment or something if he can't get in in time. That's about it.

LC So you have, you said you're originally from New Jersey, do you have any siblings in the area? In terms of family connections for you, do you have any in the area or are most of yours primarily your husband's family?

DW They're all-- up here, they're all his family. I, my kids are scattered. Hither and yon. I've got a son in Prague, and more in Austin and Houston and...nope.

LC So that's three of twelve, did you say? Or three of ten? Where are the rest of them?

DW Well, there were ,we had eleven kids between us, and Bob's oldest daughter died four years ago. He has just two children left living on the island. Another outside of Ellsworth and she comes, she's down here a lot. And a son who's living overseas, and a daughter who lives in Florida and... we're...we're still kind of the central dispatching unit for all information when requests for I don't know, opinions and sometimes money and whatnot. But...and then I, well we have fifteen grandchildren between us. So they're all around a lot.

LC And what are the age range of the grandchildren? You said one's married...

DW Yeah. Christy must thirty one or two now, and the youngest is three, and then there's three great grand children, who range from about eight months to nine years.

LC Wow.

DW It's a mob of people. Somebody always has a birthday.

LC Let's see. In terms of your relationships with other women in this area, are they related to the fishing industry? I mean, how would you say in terms. If you looked at sort of the balance of your friends...

DW No, they're not in the fishing industry.

LC OK.

DW No. Well, when I first moved to the island, and I had lived in Brooksville for five years and I moved here in '81, '80 or '81, I felt very coldly received by most of the women. And the men, no. They were much friendlier and more willing to talk and be pleasant. Gradually, I felt much more comfortable over the years that I've lived here, with the women. But, not terribly involved. Could have been, had I wanted to push it. But it didn't interest me that much. And I, no, I'm in a writer's group, where most of my friends are and that was a little bit of a struggle for them, at first, how 'Why would anyone be married to a fisherman?' and you know. They've come to terms with that, I guess.

LC Yeah. Maybe we, you've already mentioned this, so just remind me if you did, but what would you say are some of the differences that you see between younger women in the fishery compared to twenty-five years ago when you were first involved, You said the

mechanization end of things has changed it a lot. You said women used to do, knit the mittens and the whatnot. But is there anything else that you can think of that is really different now for younger women?

DW Well, as I said, most of them now work. Some of them are very involved in organizations to do with the fisheries, and have become a pretty vital part of it.

LC Like? The...

DW Well, Fishermen's Wives. But also Jen Bubar. She's in some state organization, I think. Fisheries organization. I'm a little vague on that but you could find it. And a lot of us attend a lot of the meetings and try to keep up on what's going on.

LC Where are the meetings held, Ellsworth?

DW Well, some—if they're, if they're...yeah. Ellsworth. The Maine Lobsterman's Association has meetings and then, of course, the Forum.

LC Yeah.

DW Occasionally there'll be some issue there where they are required to have, hold three hearings in various places. And we usually go to those. A lot of the wives do. When they were trying to set up this whole new system of zones there were a lot of meetings, and usually there was a good turn out of wives. So I think they are very interested in the issues. But there a lot more issues now.

LC Yeah.

DW There didn't used to be, you know....

LC A lot more regulations.

DW No.

LC Yeah.

DW They were all...Everybody regulated themselves and that was that. But now, yeah. Big regulation issues, always. And of course the bookkeeping gets more complicated. A lot of fishermen are incorporated, which some people...but yeah. That's a big chunk of what women do.

LC And in terms of your family, so this would somewhat apply to your husband, I mean it would, his history in the fishery, you said that he came from a family that two uncles fished but his father didn't fish. What was his decision, what was his decision to enter the fishery?

DW Well, he got married when he was seventeen between his junior and senior year of high school. Well, he had fourteen dollars at that moment, and a pregnant wife. So he went clamming before school and after school and worked the woods all winter. He's always been a very, very hard worker. And had been sternman for people, relatives and other neighbors. And was perfectly aware that that was the only way that he was ever going to be able to make any money. Was fishing. By the time he was twenty-one, I think, he had four children, so... or twenty-two. Anyway. His wife did not want him to go fishing. Because she came from a large, very, very poor family and her father had been a fisherman but his health wasn't very good. He couldn't go a lot. But he did, but she didn't want him to be a fisherman. And he tried other things. He tried going to Connecticut and working in a factory, and he tried, we worked on the quarry for a while, but he—he hated it. So he finally bought a second hand boat, fixed it up and started

fishing. Just kept at it and at it and at it. He's been fishing for, well, working—he started working when he was probably around twelve and he's sixty-seven now. And he's never missed a day of work to illness or accident. If his boat breaks down he just stays up all night and fixes it.

AG That's pretty impressive to not have any injuries considering fishing is such a dangerous occupation.

DW Yeah, it is. It is. So that's, he's been successful and of course that engenders a lot of jealousy among people who haven't been successful but it's more of an attitude than any great ability to fish better. His son is the same way. You just, you just work til you're done.

LC Yeah. Now, has he ever taken time out of lobstering at all? Like, you know, for winter or...

DW Yes. He used to do other fisheries in the winter. Well, when he first started he would work in the woods in the winter with his father. And then he started going, as he had bigger boats, he would go shrimping in the winter, scalloping and ground fishing, so. Then it as more electronics came out and whatnot, you could go further out more safely, he would go all winter. He just stopped going all winter about, I don't know, seven years ago.

LC Right.

DW Seven years ago...?

LC So what's his cycle now?

DW Well, he's usually got his boat out of the water and his traps up around Christmas time. It varies. If there are alot of lobsters then he'll go longer and if there aren't then he'll be up a little earlier. And he used to set out at the end of April but now it's the end of May. Spring fishing is, hasn't been that good in the last four or five years, so he's waiting longer and trying all the time to just, to cut back a little bit so he can keep going.

LC Yeah.

DW So, he fishes now from about first of June til the end of December, approximately.

LC What does he do in that other...

DW Well, in the winter he works on his boat, works on gear, takes a little bit easier. We usually take a vacation. Late winter.

LC We, I think you have mentioned all the fishery organizations that you could think of. Are there any women from the fishing industry that you can think of that are involved in any local politics? In any way?

DW Well, how do you mean local politics? Town politics? Or, local involvement with national politics?

LC Could be.

DW Yeah.

LC But, I mean, women from the fishing industry that gives that potential for representation at a different level, but being a woman.

DW I don't think so. I'm trying to think if there's been any on the school board. I can't think of it. I almost think there have been but I can't bring it to mind. I can't think of any

fishermen's wives that have been selectmen. It's a pretty small town. There aren't a whole lot of political positions.

LC Yeah. Would you describe in terms of your sort of community support systems, would that be mostly your friends from your writers group that are the ones that you turn to?

DW Yeah. I'd say so. Yeah. No, I have friend across the reach. Actually, we grew up together since we were six years old and she's also married to a fisherman who is retired now. And that's about as close as I have to family anyway. Of my generation. So. But that has nothing to do-- that occurred long before there was any fishing industry in our lives.

LC Yeah. Do you...what is your husband's outlook, or your outlook on sort of where the fishery is going?

DW Well, he hates the regulations. He does feel that fisheries, he realizes fisheries have to be managed. He doesn't think they're being managed correctly, or with enough knowledge of what it means to be a fisherman and make a living at it. I mean and the hours that, say, the ground fishermen are given. You can't make a living. It's just impossible. You can't even make the boat payments. He realizes that it's all going in the direction of big business. That it will soon be and he feels that the government would rather have larger, large corporations owning all the fishing boats and hiring fishermen, that it would be easier to regulate. And...yeah. He's against that. But it isn't going to impact him that much. He doesn't like the direction it's all going. He keeps fishing and not paying too much attention to it except when it's right in his face.

LC Have there been any marked impacts in, you know, at the household level for you over the years, in relation to government? Changes in government regulations? Something that caused your family to earn less money because, you know, of some restriction or another? Any ways that you can think of, real concrete ways?

DW No, I think that it's been true for some people but not for us.

LC OK.

DW No. I wouldn't say it's made that big an impact.

LC We've sort of talked about this but I'll just ask it. Would your husband be encouraging any grandchildren into the fishery at this point?

DW Well, he's encouraging this one grandson but merely as a backup so he can do what he wants to do and not starve to death. He never wanted his own sons to go into the fishing business. And one son was a fish dealer for quite a while and his oldest son John is a fisherman, and quite a good one. But he had to be convinced by other older relatives to let John be a fisherman. Not that he ultimately could have stopped him but—

LC Yeah.

DW To help him get started.

LC Yeah.

DW But because he thinks that it's just such a hard life. And I don't think...no, he's got two grandsons in their twenties and other grandsons in their twenties and neither one of them fishes. And he'd rather not see them fishing. It's a hard life and it's you know, it's

a... so labor intensive. There's no way to make money unless your body's out there fishing. I mean, you can invest, but that's as far as that goes. It's just a hard life. He likes it but he doesn't wish it on anybody else.

LC So, right now, it's you and your husband in the house.

DW Um-hm.

LC And no other grandkids or...

DW Nobody lives with us, no.

LC And how does it work in your household in terms of personal property? Do you both share the deed to the house?

DW The corporation owns the house.

LC OK. So, the corporation owns the whole...

DW The corporation owns the house, the shore property, the boat, the vehicles... the reason that we did that... Bob has a very, very strong feeling of family continuity. And this has been family land for a long time. And that's the house where he grew up next door, behind that barn over there, and his grandfather's house over there, and cousins down the road and whatnot. He wanted to save his land, especially the waterfront land and the wharf and not just have it sold as soon as he died. Our lawyer said that trusts are too easy to break, and suggested a corporation. Technically, after he's dead, anyone—I mean, he'll have people in the corporation in the family that will—the intention will be, to maintain the property. But as our lawyer also said, you can't control from the grave which is what he fully intends to do.

LC Yeah.

DW So anyway, that's, that—and also it helps financially cause the tax rate is different but...but then, you know, I have some money of my own. Not much but he has some and we share some. So. It works out.

LC Yeah. So, the corporation ultimately it's the people that are in it that own in it?

DW He's the only one in it.

LC Gotcha. OK. All right.

DW He has—other people are stockholders or investors or something...what do you call them? I can't remember what we call them. But his son and one daughter, I think, so far.

LC Officers of the corporation?

DW Yeah. That's it. They're officers. They are. I think I'm vice president but I'm not a paid employee. And no one is except him. Just to keep it simple. A lot of fishermen do that.

LC And what percentage of the house, your household income is from fishing? If you looked at the overall, you know, total...total...

DW Well, less now, because he fishes less. And we're both drawing social security. But until then, geez. Probably ninety percent. Over ninety percent. Ninety-five percent.

LC And the other five or ten percent came from...?

DW Investments and stuff.

LC OK. Now who does the money management? You said that you do the monthly kind of books?

DW I do...well, we both do. I mean, I keep checkbooks and we both have our own investments. A few together. And he keeps aware of those. Knows what's going on. But I do the nitty-gritty part that involves banks and writing checks and things.

LC What about household chores?

DW Ummm... I'm trying to think of one that Bob does.

LC OK! That answers it.

DW He goes to the dump cause he likes to bring stuff back from the dump. Ah...no. He doesn't do any household chores, per se.

LC His domain is fishing and your domain in the household.

DW Yeah. Pretty much. That's pretty accurate, yeah. Yeah. Now, his son, John, does a lot of the cooking. Gets interested in landscaping, things like that, but. They have different personalities.

LC You mean in terms of his family?

DW Yes. I'm just saying that Bob isn't totally typical.

LC And, just in terms of health issues and things that come up related to stress. A lot of people in Southern New England talk about the stresses of the occupation. And so, sort of then next set of question gets at, or attempts to get at, some of those issues. Do you or Bob experience anxiety related to your involvement in fishing?

DW I do, only as I think some of it's very unfair. The regulations. But it doesn't bother me as much as it bothers him. Because he's so much more closely involved. But he'll get wound up about problems on the water and about regulations, about this, about that...but he pretty much drops it when he comes home. He might be sputtering for a while but...he doesn't, he's not a very stressed out person. High energy but not very stressed. He can always close his eyes and fall asleep.

LC Yeah.

DW And doesn't drink. Much. You know. Hardly any. Doesn't smoke. He enjoys life. He has a great capacity to enjoy life even when things aren't going perfectly. So. That's a great attribute when you're in a stressful business.

LC Yeah. It means that your stress and anxiety is less.

DW Yeah.

LC So he's pretty much been in this job, how many years did you say?

DW Oh...

LC Forty?

DW Fifty-two or something. Quite a lot.

LC You said that he's been in it continuously but he's done winter work, his winter work varies...

DW For the first probably ten, ten or so years he worked in the woods in the winter. Then he would go into other fisheries in the winter.

LC Has there ever been any sort of issues, issues sort of in your relationship, impaired relationship from stresses in the fishery?

DW Nothing serious. I woke up one night at about two o'clock in the morning and I felt a hand come down on my face really hard like that. And I was all under the covers and I said, "I gotta get my hands out. I gotta get my hands out." Save my life. And it probably too like two seconds but it felt like ten minutes to unravel my hands from the blankets and I thought there was somebody in the room who was going to rob us or kill us or something. And he woke up and said "Oh! Was that your face? I thought it was a coil of rope about to go overboard!"

AG I've had a very similar experience to that.

DW Is your husband a fisherman?

AG Just, one of my boyfriends was a fisherman and he was trying to like, pull off his boot or something. And he had a hold of my head.

DW Oh, yeah. Same thing.

AG Yeah.

DW So they do dream about it.

LC It's not always a perfect separation.

DW No.

LC So are there any—we're really on the home stretch here—any sort of physical ailments or sort of issues with mental health that you could identify that are related to stress in the fishery?

DW Aside from a few pre-cancerous spots on his ears, he's an extremely healthy person.

LC And then the last set of things is just household stressors. Have you ever experienced any of these in relation to stresses in the fishery. Money problems?

DW Not...not that have caused us any stress. Well, yeah; fights with the IRS. Very stressful. We just finished another one of those. But, yeah... that's just part of life, as far as I can see.

LC Any health problems for you or for him in relation to these...

DW No.

LC Marital? We kind of already covered that one. You don't have children so that doesn't apply... drinking, drugs or any other kind of abuse that somehow might have been experienced in relation to stresses in the fishery?

DW No.

LC OK. Congratulations you just survived. I'm just wondering before we close, is anything...anything that we didn't ask, a question that you think might be important that we didn't ask.

DW Well, people often ask me, “Don’t you worry about him when he’s out on his boat fishing in bad weather?” Or just out, anyway. And I don’t. Because he’s so cautious and so careful and experienced. Besides, I – raising children I realized long ago not to worry about anything you can’t control, so, that’s about the only thing. I was thinking though, there are two women whose husbands are fishermen. And they run Island Fishing Gear place down town...

LC I think we’re headed there next!

DW And they are—

END OF TRACK.