

Name of person Interviewed: Willis Blount [WB] [NOTE: *Blount* as in *count*]  
Hannah Blount [HB], daughter, present during interview

Facts about this person:

Age (if known) 60

Sex Male

Occupation Fisherman

If a fisherman (if retired, list the ports used when fishing),

Home port Nantucket

and Hail Port (port fished from, which can be the same) Nantucket  
/ New Bedford

Residence (Town where lives) Nantucket

Ethnic background (if known) European American / English

Interviewer: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel [JGF]

Transcriber: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbormaster House

Date and time of interview: Sunday, Sept. 25, 2005

INDEX (minutes:seconds) / KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS: Shipbuilding; Engineering; Wooden vessels; Steel vessels; Shrimpers; Dragging; Quahogging; Storms; Unusual catches; Swordfishing; Rhode Island; Nantucket; New Bedford; Long Island; Block Island; Dorries; Stern trawling; Eastern rig; Western rig; Technology; Regulation; Boat fire; Russian fleet; Marine scientists; Marine biologists

[Start of Interview]

- 00:00 Tape intro; Born Putnam, Connecticut; Moved Warren, RI age 3; Father, Luther formed shipbuilding business, Blount Marine; Started working with father age 5
- 3:00 Started fishing with dad age 5 or 6; Swordfishing with dad; Alone in swordfishing dory in fog while father searched for dory from big boat
- 6:00 Dory in fog (continued); Swordfishing knots; Fished every day after school
- 9:25 Fish caught during after school trips; Father's business, helped him design first stern trawler
- 12:09 Benefits of stern trawler setup; Stern trawler didn't catch on as soon as father thought it would; Engineering major in college, then decided to go into commercial fishing because loved fishing
- 15:02 Vietnam after college; First commercial boat a cheap used shrimper from south; Converted boat to do quahogging first year; Quahogging work; Started dragging 1971
- 19:02 Quahogging hard work and hard on boat; Built boat in his father's shipyard '79, steel boat "Ruthie B."
- 22:00 Building his boat; Captains boat today; Getting boat back up and running from a recent fire
- 25:00 Worked with Jack Jakobsen before getting own boat; Changes in technology; Regulations today are stressing resources because of how put in place
- 29:32 Regulations (continued); [Good story] story of Ruth Francis almost sinking
- 37:59 [Good story—very funny!] Shark story
- 46:30 [Good story] Big waves story—learning the hard way how to interpret forecasts
- 52:55 Scientists should listen more to what fishermen know/can offer about cycles, where fish are at certain times

[End of Interview]

## TRANSCRIPT

00:00

JGF: Yeah, if you can tell me your name.

WB: My name is Willis Blount.

JGF: OK. That looks like it's doing well.

This is Janice Fleuriel, I'm interviewing Willis as part of the 2005 Working Waterfront Festival and today is Sunday, September 25<sup>th</sup>.

So normally what we do is just start with a general question about where and when you were born, and a little bit about family history.

WB: OK.

I was born in Putnam, Connecticut, in, 1945. June 19<sup>th</sup>. My father's Luther Blount. And, he's a shipbuilder. When I was three we moved to Rhode Island, and I grew up there.

JGF: OK. On the coast, apparently. I mean it would be hard not to, wouldn't it, in Rhode Island? [laughs]

WB: Yeah [laughs]

JGF: Huh.

So, did he take his shipbuilding business up there?

WB: Oh, no. Actually, he formed it there, in Warren, Rhode Island.

JGF: I see.

And where was your family from originally? What country?

WB: Well... How far back you want to go. My father was from Warren, my mother was from Minnesota. My father's relatives go way back, so.

JGF: Is it an English name, Blount?

WB: Yes. Well, English via William the Conqueror I guess, so I don't know it might have been Scandinavian originally. But we would be considered English. Yes.

JGF: OK. Interesting.

So, you must then have been pretty exposed to the whole shipbuilding business growing up?

WB: And fishing as well, yes.

JGF: Yeah? How active were you growing up? What parts did you do?

WB: Well, when I was five I started working. It's hard to believe I did but I did.

JGF: Yeah? Wow!

WB: I think I got paid fifty cents a day. [laughs]

JGF: [laughs]

WB: That was good money, actually, probably.

JGF: So you were working for pay?

WB: Right.

JGF: Was that for your dad?

WB: Actually, it was a fellow who was buying a boat from my father. And I helped him. And he paid me. So it was great.

JGF: That's great. What kind of help did you do as a five-year-old?

WB: Well at that time I was bolting seats down on a ferry. I was a little guy, I crawled right under the seats and bolted them right down. [laughs]. It was no problem, so.

JGF: Oh, so that was probably great, because they couldn't get under there.

WB: Right. Exactly. It was an old man and me [laughs].

JGF: Oh, that's awesome. Huh.

WB: Yeah.

JGF: And did you like it right from the start?

WB: Yeah—well, I don't know. It wasn't a question. My father always told me I had to work, so.

JGF: So you just did.

WB: I started working. Yeah.

JGF: How did the kind of work change as you grew older?

WB: I pretty much stayed working on boats my whole life, I guess.

I own a fishing trawler right now. And, we had a fire on it a year and a half ago.

And I basically did—the settlement wasn't enough to do the repairs. And so I ended up doing most of the work myself. So, it all pays off.

JGF: Wow! That's good. Huh.

[03:00]

JGF: So when did you go out on your first fishing trip?

WB: Probably five or six years old.

JGF: Wow!

WB: Well it wasn't really a trip. My father used to go swordfishing. We'd go out for two or three days, swordfishing, off Block Island and Martha's Vineyard. And then I went on a trip there—could have been cod fishing, too.

When I was eight or nine, I was out in dory, and pulling a swordfish. And, I guess—I could say I started fishing in a dory when I was young. When I was thirteen I was alone in the dory. My father was [?]. He used to—back in those days, they just had basic Lorans then. And it was pretty simple stuff. I remember a couple times my dad left me five, six hours. Came back and found me, you know? And, you'd drift a long ways. And he always found me.

JGF: Wow!

So this was a dory from the fishing vessel?

WB: Yeah. He had a nineteen foot Grand Banks dory. Made in Nova Scotia.

JGF: So that came out with the vessel? And the dory went separately?

WB: Yeah. What you'd do is you'd harpoon a swordfish and then you'd drop off the dory on the—you'd pull the fish from the dory because you can pull it much faster and much more effectively from the smaller boat. Because when the fish pulls, it pulls the boat through the water. And a big boat, he can pull against it and rip the harpoon out of him.

JGF: Oh!

WB: So, that way, you can put the stain to him and he can't pull off the dory.

JGF: OK! So that's why then. So it's the same basic process as whaling.

WB: Right. Exact—very similar to whaling.

JGF: Yeah.

WB: A lot of knots and everything, all the same.

JGF: And how big are the swordfish?

WB: Swordfish, those days, used to average 200 pounds. Dressed, with the head and guts cut out of them, and the fins cut off.

JGF: Yeah. And as an eight and nine year old, were they pretty hard for you to handle?

WB: Oh, that was great! You know? When you're butchering them, and all the blood up to your ankles. And their stomachs are the size of golf bags. And you dumped it out to see what they age. It was fascinating.

JGF: Oh! Hands-on science. Yeah.

WB: Oh sure.

JGF: How much did your father know? Did she know that you were out five and six hours alone?

WB: Oh, yes. There was a couple times, my mother was terrified. Fog set in one time. And, they just had basic radar then. And my father got up to me, be fifty yards from me, but he couldn't really figure out where I was because the radars weren't that good. And I can remember my—I thought it would be neat to be lost in the fog [laughs]. I don't know why, I was crazy!

JGF: [laughs]

WB: But anyway, I can remember sitting there. And, my father coming out to blow the horn so he could hear where I was and I didn't do it. You know? I was just...

JGF: [laughs]

WB: And I heard my mother crying and all my sisters crying. And I felt [laughs] sorry for them. So I blew the horn. I had a little hand horn you blew so they could find me.

JGF: Oh, that's so funny. Is this the first time you've heard this, Hannah? You look surprised.

HB: Yes [laughs]

JGF: This is great. [laughs]

WB: [laughs]

[06:00]

JGF: You never knew what you'd find out, huh?

HB: No. This is interesting.

JGF: Huh. Wow. So you weren't the least bit, scared? [laughs]

WB: I had great conf—I had more confidence in the dory than I did in my dad's big boat.

JGF: Really. Why?

WB: Well, it was just, made—I knew men fished in them for... In hard weather, in bad weather, everything, there. Just working with it....

JGF: They were meant to say upright on the water?

WB: Yeah. And they—They're a little tippy but they don't... You get a little water in them and they'd be fine. A little weight in them and they were wonderful, sea boats. Yeah. Great.

JGF: Yeah. Huh.

And of course those you would have to row, yes?

WB: Right.

Pegs. Didn't need oarlocks, we had pegs which was great. That's how they used to do it.

JGF: You'd just stick the oar on the peg?

WB: What you'd do is—well either the oar is tied to one single peg or double peg, you'd put the oar between the double pegs.

JGF: Oh, alright. Huh.

You mentioned the knots being the same. And actually that's nothing that's come up in any of my interviews with anybody. Can you talk a little about what the knots were?

WB: Well there's one knot we used when we tied the dock strap on to the warp. And that's the line that goes between the harpoon and, we used kegs. We didn't have plastic balls. We used water kegs. Painted red. And they were—the swordfish would take off, he'd pull them right under. They weren't as big as the plastic balls they use now.

And...But the knot was a different kind of a knot. It wasn't what they would use in the lobster industry. It was...I can make it for you but... You wrap around the rope, go around the rope like three times then you come back through the loops.

And it was a knot that would *never* let go but it would be very easy to undo. And never, no matter how tight you pulled on it, would never lock up.

Now a bowline, or a sheet bend, is easier to—is fairly easy, you can almost untie them. But, they sometimes—if you put a lot of strain on them, they will get tight. You can still get them undone. You may have to take a hammer to it. But it will come undone.

But this knot, even under tremendous pressure, would never get that tight.

JGF: Oh, wow! Huh. And did it have a name?

WB: Oh, a swordfish knot. But I've seen it before, you know, in whaling too. So I'm sure that's where it came from. Because swordfish is just one step beyond whaling. All the same terms and everything were used.

JGF: Huh! Interesting. So it's like the direct—well, I don't know if descendant's accurate. Were peoples fishing for swordfish when they were whaling?

WB: Well I would imagine... The Indians, they fished for the whales. But I would imagine they fished for the swordfish, too. I'm sure that was something that was done by the Indians before White men got here.

JGF: Yeah. Right. Interesting.

So what kind of fish—growing up, and up maybe to when you started working professionally, what kind of fishing did you do? A lot of different...?

WB: Well, I just loved to fish. I used to... Every day, after school I had a pencil with a string wrapped around it, and a hook and a sinker. And I would go over to—I would stop by this clam, this place that bought quahogs from the quahogers. I would bum a broken quahoger from the proprietor. And we would go fishing. We went fishing every day. Unless it was too cold, there was ice or something wrong. But other than that, I just loved to fish.

[09:25]

JGF: Yeah. And so there, of course you would catch whatever swam by?

WB: Yeah. That was, up in the bay. So that would have been tautog(?) and chaugies(?), and, we had tom cod. Once in while you'd get a striped bass. That was rare. And scup. We got a lot of scup sometimes.

JGF: And were you taking them and eating them?

WB: Yeah. My mother was pretty good. If I got enough for dinner, and it was big enough [laughs]. We'd probably have it. She would cook it up. She was a good sport.

JGF: Uh huh? Oh, that's good.

She must have been, to—maybe all mothers that are fishing mothers are—but to let you go out on that boat so young.

WB: Well, that was my father's idea I think. [laughs] So.

JGF: Interesting.

So, what kind of boats was your father making?

WB: Well, he builds like medium-size boats. Like, between fifty and two hundred feet long.

JGF: Uh huh? And wooden?

WB: It's steel.

JGF: Oh. So he's still in the business?

WB: Yeah. He's still going. He's still working.

JGF: What's the business?

WB: Blount Marine Corporation.

JGF: Oh, OK. I'm probably the only one in this area that doesn't know about it, but [laughs].

So, when he moved up to Rhode Island, originally, was he in the steel?

WB: No. He had a farm in Connecticut for a short while. And then he went back up and in 1950 he formed—'49, maybe—he formed Blount Marine.

JGF: Uh huh. And he started building the steel boats right from then.

WB: Mm hm.

JGF: Interesting. And so would they be, what they call the western rig, then?

WB: Well, he built a number of eastern rigs. He built about fifteen, twenty fishing boats. Most of them are in New Bedford here even to this say.

But then, in, what would it be, sixty? Sixty-one? Sixty-two? He built the Narragansett, which was the first stern trawler. And that was a western rig.

Although there were western rigs before then. Western rig would be the pilot house forward. Actually [?] but I helped him invent the stern trawler and the net reel, and the automatic winch.

JGF: Really?

WB: Yeah.

So I was in—a junior or senior in high school. And I was working in his engineering department. And he came up and said, "I got this idea to wind the net on a drum." And he said, "Make it work."

JGF: Oh, how cool!

WB: So I was playing around with all the hydraulics and stuff. And how the hookups had to go and everything. And, he had a couple ideas on that and we worked it all out.

And then I worked out—on his winches, we worked out the braking system and the clutching system. He gave me all the books and I did all the footwork, and drew all the pictures, the mechanical drawings. And they built it.

JGF: Wow! Oh, that's so cool.

And what was the first—Narragansett you said it was called.

WB: Narragansett was the first one. Yeah.

[12:09]

JGF: And was the benefit of that that the net could be bigger? Or is there more to it?

WB: The benefit of that is that rather than having the net having to be brought over the side by hand, it was wound on a drum

JGF: Oh, alright. OK.

WB: Basically mechanized it. Plus, one of the problems they'd have with the net... Sometimes they'd foul up on the boat. Because, a stern trawler you're always hauling back under power, you didn't need to take the boat out of gear and so the net would be hauled up from the stern. And, being underway, everything would stay behind so you couldn't get—chances of getting the gear snarled on the propeller were pretty slim.

JGF: Oh, right. That's fascinating, huh? So they caught on quite quickly?

WB: It revolutionized everything. I can't remember my—Although it didn't catch on as fast as my father thought it would. He thought everybody would jump to it and they didn't.

And he built the second boat—I think the [Canyon?] Prince. And, anyway... That boat he had it rigged up so that—I had a sister who was... She would have been like sixteen. And she did all the gear work. Which was revolutionary. Because, all the men—you know, it took a lot of strength to bring it in on an eastern rig, you know. Because the men were handling the net by hand. For a *girl*, to be able to do this was really something.

JGF: Yeah! Yeah. So she did it on the boat out fishing?

WB: Yeah.

JGF: Wow.

WB: However most of the men were not impressed with it right off. They were—they might have been impressed with my sister [laughs] but they weren't impressed with the technology.

JGF: [laughs] Really?

WB: It took a few years before the guys were really into it. Now, there's almost no eastern rigs left.

JGF: Right. So they figured let somebody else test it and make sure it worked?

WB: Right. Exactly. That's the fisherman, you know. Right.

JGF: So when did you actually get your first boat?

WB: I had a—I wasn't sure what I was going to do in life and I... Actually, I wanted to go into wildlife management and I liked nature and I wanted to be in the outdoors. And my father insisted I go into engineering. So since he was paying for my college education I tried it. And I made the Dean's List the first—and every successive semester after that. So, he said, "If you're doing good you're staying in it." So, I got a degree in engineering. But then when I got *out*, I *really* didn't want to work with a tie on behind a desk. That just wasn't what *I* wanted to do. So, I thought, well... I had been fishing all my life and I really liked it. And I thought well, it wasn't what I *intended* to go into but at least it's something I enjoy doing, so I made the choice to decide to do what I *enjoyed* doing in life rather than what I thought would make the most money.

And so I went into commercial fishing.

[15:02]

WB: But first I got drafted and went to Vietnam. And when I got out of Vietnam... As soon as I came home I clashed with my Dad and I could see, it just was not going to work to work for my Dad. This was not going to work. We're just too much alike. And we're, just kind of lock horns too much. And I'd just be too frustrated. So,



because he'd invented the stern trawler and I was involved and all that, and I thought well, that's pretty close so what I can do is I'll kind of stay on the periphery of him but I can still not be working for him, and I'll... I'll go into commercial fishing as something I *kind of* always wanted to do anyway.

But he wouldn't build me a boat. He said, "Well if you want to do that you'll have to..." First he was going to build it then he said he wouldn't. So then, he said, "You're going to go down south and get a cheap boat down south." So, that's what I did. I started off with a friend of mine. We slept in the back of a pickup truck. And we drove all the way down to Corpus Christi, Texas, and hit every little port along the way. And found out what all the cheapest boats were. And finally found a boat for fifteen thousand dollars in Gulfport, Mississippi.

JGF: Did you have it built or was it a used boat?

WB: No, no, it was a used boat.

JGF: Yeah?

WB: I couldn't afford a new boat.

So I had—I think I had five thousand, or ten thousand dollars in savings from my life savings. And I took that money and bought the boat. And we brought it back up north. And, I rebuilt it and did what I had to do. Converted it over.

First I started ocean quahoaging. White quahoaging then ocean quahoaging for a year. And I was selling to my cousin. Blount Seafood. And then, I wanted to go fin fishing. So I switched over to ground fishing.

Let's see that would have been 1971. '71 I think.

JGF: So sort of in time for all the regulations to kick in?

WB: Oh, they didn't come in until what, '94. Actually, there was some stuff earlier.

JGF: That wasn't until it really stung? Was '94?

WB: Right. Well, that was when limited entry went through. There was some stuff before then.

[Interruption/tape paused]

JGF: --about quahoaging. No one's brought that up either.

WB: Well I used to... The old-fashioned way used what they called a rocking-chair dredge. And it was a dredge that had these big teeth. And it has a pan, or a plate, up above it. And what happens is the dredge goes down, takes a bite, and then jumps out. And it jumps, and then tips down again, with these teeth. So it goes along the bottom, jumping, taking bites out. Because you can't pull it through the bottom, it becomes a dredge. But this way, the minute it digs in, the pan tips it, rocks it out. And it just keeps jumping like that.

JGF: And so the quahoags are in the sand like the clams would be?

WB: Right. So you get a lot of broken ones, but not that many.

JGF: Yeah. Would that affect how you could sell them? The price?

WB: Well, you just, when you dumped them out you just sorted out the good ones. Threw away the shells and the bad ones.

JGF: Yeah. Yeah.

WB: And we would, catch—I don't know, we would catch... When I started white quahoaging, we were allowed I think like thirty bushels. For just a few months in Rhode Island. One of the last times they opened it up commercially I believe. And then, to dredging.

And then, I switched over to ocean quahoaging. We started doing that out of Stonington, Connecticut. And we were shipping up to, a plant for being processed in Warren, Rhode Island.

And then after—about a year after—that was 1971, and I had saved enough money so that I could make the necessary conversions and I went dragging.

[19:02]

JGF: OK. Was that because there was more money? Or were there other reason?

WB: Well... Yes, it probably was more money. It was not as hard on the boat. And... Still wasn't a lot of money [laughs] but it was more money than quahoaging. I mean, we were getting like, between a penny and two-and-half pennies a pound for the quahoags. So, it was a *lot* of work. We had to lift them like four or five times before you sold them. So. It was a *lot* of work. And doing it for a while two-handed too. It was... How would it be? The cage was, eight hundred, no three hundred pounds? I don't know what a cage was. I mean, we'd get like, twenty-five, thirty thousand pounds in a day. And you had to lift them three or four times.

JGF: Wow! Huh.

WB: You know, so. There was two guys hustling. It was a lot of work.

I remember one time I was doing it two-handed for a week. And at the end of the week we got exhaustion. And both of us were so exhausted we finally just collapsed on the deck. And just lay there. We were... I started to steam home and I collapsed on the pilot house floor. And I didn't have an auto pilot or anything. So the boat was just—I don't know what the boat was doing. And I just laid there for an hour, with the boat steaming around.

JGF: [laughs]

WB: And I just couldn't get off the deck, I was just exhausted.

JGF: Oh, you were so exhausted. Yeah.

WB: And I just lay there for... My man, he was out on deck. And he couldn't move either. We just had overdone it. And I can remember... And then finally, I remember after an hour I crawled up. We hadn't hit anybody, and I figured out where I was and we steamed back to the port and, somehow we got enough strength to unload them. And then, we took the next day off and slept [laughs]. We were so exhausted from the labor.

JGF: Wow. [laughs] Now does two-handed mean—are they in bags and you're lifting them?

WB: No, two-handed means two people did everything.

JGF: Oh, OK. Right.

So did they get packed into bags?

WB: No, we were putting them in steel cages.

JGF: And you didn't have to shuck them?

WB: No, that would have been... We would have been killed.

JGF: Two-handed would not have...

WB: Yeah. Shucking really slows the process down. Right.

JGF: So, was a quahoag trip just one day at a time?

WB: Yeah, it was just day fishing. We'd go out at like five in the morning and we'd be back by, like two or three in the afternoon.

JGF: Uh huh. And what was the depths that those would be at?

WB: Twenty to thirty fathoms. We were fishing in Rhode Island Sound. Taking out of Stonington, Connecticut.

JGF: So then you switched to the dragging.

WB: Right.

JGF: And that was around '71.

And at that point—so you would have had—it was a steel boat.

WB: No this was—the first boat I had was a wooden boat. I take it back. The boat I—later on, my father allowed me to build my own boat. In '79. In his shipyard. So. It's the boat I have now.

JGF: What's its name?

WB: Ruthie B.

JGF: Is that like a family member?

WB: It's named for my wife.

JGF: Yeah. I think it's fun to hear what people name their boats.

WB: Yeah.

JGF: It's kind of cool.

[22:00]

JGF: So, did you... When you say build it yourself you were actually hands-on...?

WB: Right. I had a degree in engineering. So, I... And I'd grown up in the shipyard. So I did all the engineering on it. I did—I would do engineering until noon. And then in the afternoon, well I was foreman on the job and did the job as well. In the yard, and I had up to twenty, twenty-five men helping me every day.

JGF: Wow! That must be huge.

WB: But I was subcontracting them from my Dad. And I was in charge of them, and directed them. And I did all the blueprints and the drawing. And I did—I didn't do a lot of the—some of the electrical work I didn't do, and, designing I didn't do. And the purchasing I didn't do. Other than that I did everything in the boat.

JGF: Uh huh. Wow.

So how long did it take to build?

WB: It took a year and a month.

JGF: Yeah? Wow.

WB: It took a long time.

JGF: No wonder they cost so much [laughs].

WB: Yeah. It had thirty-two thousand man hours in it, so. That's a lot. Wouldn't want to pay for it now [chuckles].

JGF: No! I can't even believe it when I hear, what they cost today.

Actually, I was talking with one person about the licenses today. Those are, *hugely* expensive!

WB: The scallop licenses are.

JGF: Yeah? Are they not as expensive for the draggers?

WB: Probably not. There's a lot of money in sea scalloping, so. That really fuels what they're worth.

JGF: Huh. Interesting.

So do you still make trips today?

WB: Oh sure. Oh yeah.

JGF: You're the captain?

WB: Yup. Yes, sir. Yup. Mm hm.

JGF: [laughs] How often are you going out these days? As many as days at sea will allow.

WB: Well actually I had a fire, I said, a year and a half ago.

JGF: Oh, right.

WB: And we're just about done with the boat. In fact, I'm hopefully going to get my Coast Guard sticker and the final survey done by the marine surveyor. And, in fact, we'll seal my insurance. And, I just got a few things left to do. So, it's kind of exciting.

JGF: Yeah, that's exciting.

WB: Yeah. I've been waiting a long time. My family's really missed eating fish. Huh, Hannah?

JGF: Have you ever been out?

HB: On the boat?

JGF: Yeah.

HB: I went once. Do you remember that? And washed the penboards?

WB: Well, you came to market with me then, yeah.

HB: I wasn't fishing. I went to the market.

WB: See, I live in Nantucket. So... And although I—since '87, and before that too in, I think '80 and '81, I was taking out of New Bedford here. And I've taken out, '87 since, also in New Bedford here. So, I'm kind of viewed as a New Bedford boat. I live in Nantucket, the boat's based out of Nantucket.

JGF: I see. Interesting.

Have you ever—well, I guess what I sort of wanted to ask, your Dad was more of a boat builder, so. Were there any people like captains, or people that you sort of looked up to as, models in that aspect?

[25:00]

WB: As a boy... See, I grew up swordfishing and we did a lot of—out of either, Old Harbor, Block Island, or Menemsha Bight, on the Vineyard. There was a lot of old timers there that I looked up to.

And when I went to go dragging, my father said, "Well, you've got to get some experience." So *he* had sold the Narragansett to Jack Jakobsen[?] from Fairhaven. So, in 1960, I called him up and asked if I could have a job to get some experience. And he said, "Sure." So I went on as a trainee with him for a few months. And then we went down south and I found—you know, looking for a shrimp boat to buy. Inexpensive one.

JGF: Huh. Oh, so the first boat you bought was a shrimp boat?

WB: Right.

JGF: But then did you convert it to a dragger?

WB: Right. I converted it—quahoaging to start with, and we converted it to a dragger. My father was convinced I had to start quahoaging. The family was into shellfish, so.

JGF: Huh. Oh, interesting.

So you've probably seen then, a lot of the changes in technology that have taken place.

WB: Mm hm.

JGF: What do you think of...?

WB: Been hands-on with it I guess.

JGF: Yes, you have. That's right.

So... How would you say things have changed for the worse or the better.

WB: Well it's definitely—stern trawling is a lot easier, and a lot safer therefore. Easier to do, and it's cut down the manpower needed. Actually, stern trawling is probably more efficient. It can catch—that was one of the things demonstrated here, was, it could produce more fish, than a side trawler. But...

JGF: So, by more efficient... It's not that the nets necessarily bigger but just because of the...

WB: Well, you can haul back and set out faster. And it takes less men to run.

JGF: Oh, right. Yeah.

WB: So, you become more efficient that way.

JGF: And so more profitable because you're sharing with less people?

WB: Yeah. Right. You get more tows per day. There's more fish.

JGF: Uh huh.

And, you must—I mean, I haven't heard anyone say the don't like the changes in the communications, the electronics technology.

WB: Right.

JGF: That's really, made leaps and bounds it seems like.

WB: Right. Well, everything is like, just constantly, getting better and better. The problem with—I don't want to say we're too effective, but, we've become far more effective at catching fish, and therefore probably in need of regulations to control it. [?] conservation.

JGF: Do you think what they have in place now is enough? Or...?

WB: I think it's more than enough. I think that it's far in excess of what's necessary. I think that the environmental community has gotten involved to the detriment of the fishing industry. And so things—rather than being run on a management basis, which is best for all, both people and fish, it's now being run on a... Well it's not management at all, it's basically, hands-off, don't touch nature. And they want a hundred percent of the fish to come back before they really open us up. And I don't think that's wise, that you should run a fishery that way. You never run deer at a hundred percent of the range. You never run any kind of wildlife of what they're...

JGF: Hmmm, that's true.

WB: ....[?] control, because you're looking at a stock failure.

JGF: Right.

WB: And, so to try to bring the fish back to a maximum level, I think is dangerous. It's not good management. Good management is bringing back to fifty, sixty, or seventy percent. Don't let them get below thirty or forty percent. And I think if the resource is stressed it'll continue to produce far more than if... If it's not stressed, what happens is it will binge.

And so you'll have a record amount and then all of a sudden total collapse. And usually following record, banner years, you'll see stock failures.

JGF: Hm.

WB: And you have the same thing in deer. Too many deer on the range, the whole system collapses and has to rebuild again.

JGF: Huh. Interesting.

WB: So, I think where the environmentalists are going right now is headed for disaster. They're going to—what's going to happen is they're going to get the fish stocks up close to the levels they want, all of a sudden there's going to be a total collapse.

[29:32]

JGF: And they're going to say it's the fishermen's fault?

WB: It's the fishermen—it's always blamed on the fishermen. Sure, that's how they make their money.

JGF: [laughs] Yeah.

Now how would they even know what one hundred percent should be?

WB: Well, this is true. I don't know how they do that—I'm not sure [laughs] how they do any of their figures.

JGF: Oh, OK, but they have their figures.

WB: You know, I wish I knew. Maybe with some of my math skills I could probably check them out. I wouldn't be surprised if there's errors, frankly.

JGF: Yeah, I would think...

WB: I don't know if anybody's ever sat down and checked all their math, but...

JGF: Yeah, that would be interesting.

Well one of the other questions we sometimes like to ask people, is have you had any particularly memorably trips, either from storms or any other reasons that...

WB: One of the neat things about commercial fishing is, it's a very *interesting* occupation. There's rarely a dull moment. And every trip you have stories to tell.

JGF: Really?

WB: And it's all exciting. Some were *too* exciting, maybe, but...

JGF: [laughs]

WB: The *downside* of commercial fishing is you don't always know what you're going to make. You don't always make an income—you know, you don't always make what you *need* to make, and so, sometimes you live hand to mouth and sometimes you're rolling in dough.

JGF: Right.

WB: But... So that's kind of hard. That's hard on families. And, being gone. For a father to be gone all the time is hard on families as well. But... The... We'll *always* have lots of stories. There's *no* guy that doesn't have a story to tell.

JGF: Uh huh?

WB: So which one? That's the hard part.

JGF: Right. Which is the one that you--? Yeah.

WB: Well, I don't know. I've got all kinds of them. Hannah, what is one of your favorite stories?

HB: What about when Ruth Francis burned?

WB: Burned? When did it burn?

HB: Didn't it?

WB: Sank.

HB: No, sank.

WB: Sank.

HB: Yeah, your Ruthie B. burned. Ruth Francis sank.

WB: I had... This shrimp boat I had, I think it was in March. And I was—I'd been fishing in the channel. It was a sixty-five foot boat, and it was an old boat. And probably I had no business going down there, but. You have to do what you have to do to make ends meet.

So, I used to go the lightship. But then I went *beyond* the lightship into the middle of the channel. And we sat out and we... And, let's see we had a couple of really good tows. Like, two or three thousand pounds of fish, which for that boat was really good.

And so then we got... We got about four of five tows in. And then—not according to the forecast, all of a sudden the wind just started screaming out of the north. Northwest, that's what it was. And we were caught, because there was just nowhere to go.

And, it was a small boat. Like I said, it was sixty-five feet long. And for winter fishing, I had no business being there.

So. We started jogging up for Nantucket, which was the logical place to go. And I'm going along, and I'm not sure what happened but, it was a wooden boat, and some of my caulking I guess opened up.

And so the boat started flooding.

And I remember we—I had built bunks up in the forward part of the boat. With plywood nailed on to the sides of the planks and the ribs.

And in the height of this storm, one of the guys was sleeping, he... When the bow would work, several inches, you know? And so, everything was creaking and groaning and this guy rolled over and his thumb got caught between the plywood bunk and the planks. And I heard this guy *screaming* because...[laughs]. He didn't break his thumb but it *hurt*, I guess. And so then he... He had to wait for a couple more waves. So we dug in another wave and it opened up and he released his thumb.

JGF: [laughs] Oh, no!

WB: But anyway, we...

Well, that was another story. That's when we almost sank.

But anyway... I can remember we tried calling on the VHF and got nowhere.

And so then, I had an AM radio. And we called and got Bar Harbor, or Cadillac Mountain or Bar Harbor. A guy answered and he called down and then Brant Point came on and, we were too far for Woods Hole. And, they sent I think the Coast Guard Cutter Jackson out? And also a helicopter. I remember it was blowing so hard a helicopter couldn't even stay over us. And he couldn't—he had trouble even getting near us. But they dropped like three pumps, we got one of them.

And, I guess we got town pumps. They would drop the pump in the water and then drape the line over us. They couldn't drop the pump to us. It was just physically impossible.

And so anyway, we got... We had two pumps... Maybe we got three pumps on board and one we couldn't get on board. But, two pumps didn't work. So we never tried the third one. I had an emergency pump and I got that to work finally.

And then after that we got almost up to the—the water was almost up to the engine. I figured, "This is it. I've lost her." And then... And then this pump of mine would start working. Da da da da da da da. But a gasoline pump, and the water'd come

down a little bit and then it would clog up. You know? Boat'd be filling up again. And I can remember we started bailing it out. And we... We bailed a bucket of water and—five gallon, we got a brigade going. And we were getting the water down doing that. And then we took a sea into the engine room hatch where we were bailing it out from. And twice as much as water came in as the guys bailed out. And they said to me “We quit.” [laughs]

JGF: Oh!

WB: “It’s just not worth it.” You know? So they closed the thing so the water wouldn’t go down it. So.

But, finally, we got... You know, the pump started working, and we had... One of the pumps the Coast Guard Cutter dropped us too. That would—was doing the same thing, it was running, clunk, clunk, clunk, clunk. And all of a sudden whirr it would run again too. And I don’t if it was the gas we had or what. And all of a sudden we started running good. We got everything pumped out.

And after that... I figured the leak had to be high, because after that it wasn’t a problem. So we got into Nantucket, this horrible mess of... Everything had wrapped around the propeller shaft. Everything was in the water because the water was over my waist in the engine room. You know? And so, a horrible mess to clean up.

But we were... [laughs] It was nice to be tied to a dock again!

JGF: You were all home [laughs]!

WB: Right.

JGF: And of course, was this at a point...? I don’t how difference it is now, but, it sounded like before the real technology... It wasn’t necessarily easy to let families know what was going on.

WB: No. Those days, it would be up the Coast Guard to notify the family.

JGF: I see. Yeah. Huh.

HB: So, your Mom telling the story of picking up the phone and hearing about how it sank.

WB: Well, actually what happened was the... When the pump started working and it was... Actually my, my wife who then was my fiancée was going to a small bible school. And, she... I don’t know how they... They got—I guess they told my parents, that it was happening. We were sinking, and then, she called another friend, who called my wife-to-then, my fiancée found out. So they all started praying. And a whole bunch of other people started praying.

JGF: Wow! Hmm.

WB: And that’s when the pump started working.

JGF: Oh...! Really?

WB: So. So I guess my wife said she wasn’t sure if she wanted to marry me, but after that when she almost lost me, she decided she did want to marry me.

JGF: Wow! [laughs]

Was she from a fishing family, or...?

WB: No, no. She actually, was, indirectly from... Minnesota, but, her parents had been missionaries in the Philippines most of her life. So.

JGF: So that was brave. She had gone through what it might be like to lose you and she decided it was worth to....



WB: Mm hm.

JGF: Wow! Oh that's interesting.

So would you share a lot of those stories with your family?

[to HB] It sounds like you know them.

It's like, I think sometimes people don't, and sometimes people do.

WB: We got a whole bunch of stories we tell. [chuckles]

JGF: Yeah?

HB: Yeah. It's one of those dinner conversations that randomly'll come up every once in a while. Every once in a while we'll hear one...

WB: Or they'll say, "Tell the shark story." Or, "Tell the sinking story."

HB: Yeah, the shark story.

WB: Or, the big wave story. [laughs]

[laughter]

[37:59]

JGF: What's the shark story? We don't have any...

WB: Oh, the shark story? Oh well...

Well that was another one—although I've got caught bigger sharks with my boat, now but...

I was out fishing south of Nantucket and we were fluking. And, we were towing on the south side of the island where there's no harbor or anything, but. We would tow all during the day and then we'd take like four hours off at night and then we'd go back. We were two-handed. Fishing two-handed there, too.

And, we hauled back this big bag one night.

And, there was a *thing* in it. I didn't know what it was. It was a big fish.

And so, the guy went out and he popped the bag. And the fish went all..., went up to about his knees in fish. And he couldn't get out of it.

And there was this thing... I wasn't sure what it was, but when it came out of the bag, it was maybe... It ended up being a shark that was probably three, four hundred pounds. You know?

JGF: Wow!

WB: But it looked like an alligator. Because the mouth... I mean, you see a shark, has a small mouth, but like a wolf, when you open its mouth, the lips keep going back and back and back and back.

So, I never realized how big a mouth they had when they opened their mouth up.

Oh well, this shark was just going [slapping sound], he was, biting *everything* in sight. And I thought, *Oh no*. My man was there and I says, *he's going to get bit*. But fortunately I had a little bit of a list and he... I mean, he was, what do you do? I mean, I couldn't—the guy was stuck in the fish, and I was on the capstan, I couldn't let go, to save him, or drag him out of the situation. And fortunately, the shark didn't realize and see him, and slid to the side. And got his jaw caught under a checker holder, steel checker holder, he bit onto that.

It was a good place for him, he was out of the way.

And I can remember, it was late at night. I said, "Well, we'll just leave the fish and we'll just let him—we'll give him a little time he's not going to be so frisky." You know? [chuckles]

So we went and had dinner. We went back out and picked all the fish all around him. Because, see if you grab hold of a shark's tail, he can reach right around and grab your hand because he's got cartilage.

JGF: Oh, boy!

WB: So you don't just grab the tail and start dragging him away. Because he'll turn around and bite you.

JGF: Ooooh!

WB: You know? So you've got to be careful how you handle a shark.

So, he... He'd slowed down a little bit, and would still turn around and bite you.

But we were careful. We kind of held him down so he couldn't do it. You know?

JGF: Yeah.

WB: And we got the fish picked up and the fish down.

And we'd heard this story. They just caught a great white shark in California. And it was—I think it weighed like three thousand, some odd pounds.

And the guy brought it in. And because it was a three thousand pound shark, and it was a great white. And the great whites—this was before Jaws had come out, but they were beginning to have notoriety.

And... Maybe Jaws had come out. Anyway. It was like... somebody paid them three dollars a pound. So this single fish was worth ten thousand dollars. Which... I started fishing and fish were worth two and three cents and four cents a pound.

So... A ten thousand dollar fish was, "Wowwww!" This is some *big* money, it was the whole trip for one fish. You know?

Of course now they've got tuna worth thirty or forty thousand. But, that was a lot of money then. So, boy... We got this get rich quick scheme [laughs]. We were going to sell this shark for three dollars a pound. You know?

So we gutted it and dropped him in the fish hold. I think we left him on deck that night. We gutted him but we left him on deck. Because he was still squirming and biting. You know? Even after we gutted him. You know?

JGF: Reallly!!

WB: So, we didn't want to cut his head off. Because we figured we could sell the head too, you know.

JGF: [laughs]

WB: So we left him on deck. The next morning we put him in ice in the fish hold. Then, a day or so later we went into Nantucket. I went around to all the restaurants, and tried to sell this shark. We tried to get three bucks a pound and, *nobody* would give me three dollars a pound. They all laughed at me. And they said—I mean swordfish probably wasn't worth three dollars a pound then. But anyway...

But we finally got... The best offer was seventy-five cents a pound. And I turned that down. I wish I hadn't. I wish I'd sold the whole thing for that. But anyway. So, it turned out to be a sand tiger shark.

And this one guy went and did some research on it. And he found out, that, this shark had either, bitten people on Nantucket. This species of shark. Or, if he'd bitten someone somewhere else, it had been a person from Nantucket. That's what he told me.

So, I had a crewman and I. We were.... Since we didn't get the money we wanted, we were going to cut everybody out and we were going to sell it ourselves.

So on Nantucket they have little—on the main street, they sell vegetables and different things. Peddlers.

So we were going to peddle it.

So, he had a Volkswagen bus. We got this shark. And we skinned it. It was a lot of work. You've got to soak them in salt water or an acid or something and it would neutralize. Because they urinate through their skin, so they can--. So they have a problem—their meat develops ammonia very easily. But if you soak it it's fine. You don't even know it's a problem.

So anyway, so we soaked it in water so it would be fine. And we had—he had a display, he had it sitting there, with the door open in a Volkswagen bus. He had a couple totes of, those wooden fish tote, boxes of ice with the steaks in it. And then we had the *head* for sale too.

So, I had a couple kids by then. So we went outside and saw how he was doing. I said, "How you doing?" Yup, and he was all set and he'd sold a few steaks and stuff.

So I went off, said, "We're going to go for a ride. And we'll be back."

So, we come back about, you know, couple hours later. And here is a *big* crowd of people all around his car. And he's sitting, he's got his arm in a sling.

And I said, "Jim what *happened* to you?"

He says, "It *bit* me!"

I said, "It's dead. How can it bite you."

He said—we had the mouth propped open with a stick. He said, "I was fooling around with the people. And I was sticking my arm in his mouth. And I bumped the stick. And it closed on my arm and I tried to pull my arm out real quick. And I tore my arm on his teeth. And the people had to help me and I had go to the emergency room to get sewed up." [laughs]

JGF: [laughs]

WB: So anyway. Whatever we made went to pay for his medical bills. [laughs] But anyway.

Interestingly enough, everybody that bought it came back and wanted to buy more because it was so good. So anyway.

JGF: But that was the end of your shark business.

WB: No, that's not the end. The head never sold. Because we wanted too much money for it. We wanted like thirty-five bucks for the head.

So, we took all the stuff back from the boat, Monday morning and went fishing. But this time we went fishing inside the [?] which is on the north side of the island. And we threw everything over the side. You know, got rid of it. You know?

So then, *every day* thereafter, at least once each day. We would *catch*, that *shark head*.

JGF: [laughs]

WB: And the guy—this guy would pop the bag. And out would come this head.

JGF: [laughs]

WB: *Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump!*

You remember Jaws when the head came bouncing down?

JFG: Yes [laughs].

WB: Remember that? It was just like that except it was *shark's head going Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump!* The shark kept trying to get this guy.

JGF: I think Alfred Hitchcock could do something with that!

WB: Right. Oh, yeah.

JGF: [laughs] Oh God, that's soooo funny.

WB: So anyway.

But finally... Finally after a couple weeks it was gone.

JGF: Was the guy laughing or was he freaking out?

WB: At first he freaked out [laughs].

After a while it got humorous to see, when we were going to catch it that day. You know?

JGF: Oh, that is so funny. Oh my God, that's great. [laughs]

You must have good family dinners. [laughs]

WB: [laughs]

HB: It's pretty interesting.

JGF: Do you have time for the big wave story? Or, do you need to get going.

WB: Do you have a story you want to tell Hannah? Why don't you tell a story?

HB: I never heard the big wave one. Did I?

WB: You have. You probably don't remember which one it was, though.

HB: I remember when Luther was stuck out in Hurricane Bob.

WB: Well, that's, yeah. Those weren't *big* waves but that was a lot of wind. Do you have a story you want to tell?

HB: All the stories I've heard, you were going into so much more detail. I don't know about three quarters of them. I only knew the part about the shark's head biting someone's arm.

JGF: Ah.

[46:30]

WB: Well, I'll do the wave story then.

JGF: OK.

WB: When I first got fishing, I didn't really know a lot what I was doing. I learned everything the hard way. I started out fishing without experience. I'd gone, like, two or three months with Jack Jacobsen, but. I really didn't know what I was doing. So, I got an old timer to help me a little bit. But, he just... He wasn't making any money so he didn't stay with me very long. And... We were getting like five cents a pound or ten cents a pound for yellowtails then. And, you get three thousand pounds that would be three hundred bucks. Which... Well, wasn't much money then, but, a lot more than it is now, obviously but.

So anyway I was learning how hard lessons about weather. And we were—I had a bank payment to make and we were in—I think we were in New Harbor, usually we were in Old Harbor. Maybe I was in Old Harbor. Anyway.

I was listening to the weather. And they forecast... They said the forecast would be fifteen to twenty-five out of the northeast. And I said "Well, if it's fifteen, we can handle that. That's like calm." You know? "And twenty-five isn't too bad. So, let's go for it." You know?

I had guys that had never been fishing very much before. Green crew. So we down off of [Shinacoke?], off of Long Island.

And... Rule of thumb is, if want to guess what the weather's going to be, if they say fifteen to twenty-five, you add the two together, that's forty. That's probably what you're going to get.

JGF: Ohhh!

WB: When they start doing stuff like that, so.

So anyway—but I didn't realize that.

So, anyway... So we went down there and, picked up about five, six thousand pounds, of yellowtails and gray sole and stuff.

And, all of a sudden it started to *blow*. And it *blew*. And it *blew*. It blew a hundred miles an hour out of the northeast.

JGF: Oh my God.

WB: And when you're down, south of Long Island, the land runs basically east and west.

And so, the problem is, there's no lee. It's like, east by north, and so on. So when the wind's blowing out of the northeast there's no lee at all.

JGF: And by "lee"—I'm sorry.

WB: Lee is when you're getting out of the wind against the land.

JGF: Oh, OK. Yup.

WB: So, my choice was either to go, run with it. And go to New York City which I didn't have the charts for. Or try to get back to Block Island.

JGF: Oh boy.

WB: And so, we started jogging back to Block Island.

And... It was interesting that—the Russians were around then. And I got in the middle of the Russian fleet. And they kind of kept an eye on us, and we slowly jogged along.

And, I can remember we... The waves were just *huge*. It wasn't far from us, a Norwegian, freighter, I think, broke in half. And all the men were lost.

And the seas were running, supposed to be running—the wind was blowing a hundred miles an hour, the seas were supposed to be forty-five feet tall. That's what the report was from the freighter that went down.

And, I passed it somewhere. I didn't see it.

But the waves were just *huge*. And I had this wooden shrimper. It was a small, sixty-five foot wooden shrimper. That's the one that I almost sank in before. And it was snowing out. And, down in the trough there was hardly any wind at all. And you'd start up this huge wave. And you'd go over a shoulder. And you'd start up over the top and the top of the waves would be six to eight feet of boiling white water.

JGF: Wow!

WB: And then the boat would come out—almost completely out of the water and it would freefall down.

JGF: Oh, God!

WB: And then, we'd go down over the shoulder and down in the trough.

And, the boat needed to be renailed. And the problem is when a wooden boat needs to be renailed, the nails will sometimes totally rust away. But the planks will stay there because the water pressure and the caulking will hold them in place.

JGF: Uh oh! So when you come out...

WB: But when you haul them, like in [?], you haul a boat, and as they're hauling out all the planks start falling out of it.  
So I knew that. So all I had was visions of—and I knew it needed to be renailed—is the planks just falling out of her and going down in seconds.  
Now, but... And when we would hit—the boat would be freefalling though the air and then, it would be so far that where we were—it was a western rig—and the stern wheel would be ahead of the point of the fall of gravity. So, when you'd drop down your feet would come right off the ground. You'd be floating in the air. You know? You couldn't even hardly steer the boat.  
And... It was just crazy. And it took...  
And I had one guy decided he wanted to get off. He didn't want to go through anymore of it. And he was a problem because he said he didn't care, he was going to jump overboard, you know, "Get me off, now! *Get me off now.*" He said, "I'm going to sabotage the boat if you don't get me off." And I said, "There's no way we can get you off. You can't even get a helicopter in this. We can't get the Coast Guard. *No one* can do anything with weather conditions like this." "Well," he said, "Get me off!" So we had to have one guy—I had four men. So one guy had to watch him all the time. One guy had to run the pumps and one guy had to steer.  
And we went like, thirty-some hours like that.

JGF: Oh, my God!

WB: And, at one point, the steering chain in the [lazarette?] broke. And I can remember, we rehearsed what we were going to do. And we turned and went with it. There was a reason... You could go with it but you couldn't go against it the way the water was. But anyway.  
So, we..., I guess maybe put it in reverse and just rode it out that way. But anyway. We rehearsed it—I went out, the guy opened up the hatch, I went down the lazarette, I put—another guy turned the chain one way, you turned the boat the other way—I fixed the chain. Then he turned it one way, put it on the guide, the other way, on the quadrant. And then we were all set. And he went out. It took a hundred and twenty seconds or less to do it. And that amount of time, the water, filled the lazarette half full of water. Filled it halfway full. That much water came in. And it took us *six* hours to get back to where we *were* when it broke. You know? And so... We got up to the twelve mile limit. The Russians let us go. Actually it was in the evening, it was starting to simmer down then.  
And we finally—Finally we got up underneath the land.  
But, the waves were *huge*. The fact that—you figure a church. The waves were about the size of a church.

JGF: Oh, my God.

WB: That's how big the waves were.

[52:55]

JGF: Well and I was going to ask you, were you praying? Or were you too busy to pray?

WB: Oh... Yeah, I definitely did some praying.

One time we took a queer sea. That's just a strange wave that behaves funny. It just kind of hit the boat in one place and knocked the window right out. And it filled the whole pilot's house with water right up to my waist. And, I had all my—we were

depending on electronics. Because you couldn't see anything. Because the minute you went up to the top of a wave, the whole ceiling went white.

JGF: [Telling next interviewee about five minutes]

WB: So anyway, the... What was I...?

Oh, all my electronics quit. Because they all got wet. So I thought, "Oh, no, I don't know where I am. There's no way to tell where I am." You know, all I had was a compass and I had no clue where I was. Because, we were using Loran to tell where we were. And I had to try to get out of the wind. And I was hoping to get under Block Island on the southwest light, to try to get out of the northeast wind.

And, I can remember just, not knowing what to do. And so I remember I took a towel or a rag. And the Loran was just spinning from the salt water in it. And I just prayed and I wiped it off, the outside of it off. And it started working again.

[laughs]

JGF: [laughs]

WB: [laughs] And so... And when it happened a guy was helping me. I mean, he had glass shards in his shoulder right through a winter jacket.

And... What else happened? A couple other things happened. But anyway, we finally got up under the land. And, I got up to—we laid the rest of the night under, got right up as close as we could the beach, southwest light, Block Island. And the next day it came around out of the north, and it was nice, because it was off the land. We went around and, I was fishing out of Newport in those days.

I went in and I had this bank payment to make. We had six thousand pounds of fish. Now, six thousand pounds of fish in *those* days was maybe, would be, you know, ten cents a pound so it would be six hundred bucks. And that's nothing. You know? That wasn't enough. It would be a couple hundred dollars settlement. I think my bank payment was a thousand bucks, something like that.

And so, I was just really dejected. And I went up to get paid, [?]. And I went up to get paid, he says, "This is your lucky day." He said, "The price is..." I don't know, it was big money. It was like, twenty-five or thirty, forty cents a pound. It was *huge*.

JGF: Oh, my God!

WB: Compared [laughs] to what we were getting before, you know? And I had gray sole, and they were worth a lot of money, too. And so I got like, two thousand bucks, which was a lot of money, for me, you know?

And, I can remember it—the bank payment was due that day—and so I took the money, did my settlement. And I had just enough money to make my bank payment which was around a thousand bucks.

And so I went running up to the bank about three o'clock in the afternoon, just before my loan officer went home. Went in and saw my loan officer. Went down, and threw the check right on his desk and I says, "There it is!" [laughs]

JGF: [laughs] Wow! Maybe the prayer group was praying then too.

WB: Yeah. I don't know [laughs].

JGF: Oh, that's fascinating. I wish we had all day. Your stories are great!

WB: So anyway.

JGF: I do like to wrap up—I think this is probably the next person—I like to ask people what would you want to have the sort of average festival visitor understand about the fishing industry?

WB: You know, I haven't thought that one through. I mean, there's... [thinking]  
I don't how to answer that one. I could say, just in general the fishing industry, one of the saddest things, is the split you have now between the scientists and the fishermen.

And, I think the fishermen have a tremendous amount to offer in management, to the scientists. I think science is beginning to realize it now. It's typical for—we just had a typical case in Nantucket—we had a bumper year of bay scallops and now there's a crash. Which is typical to come right after a bumper year. And the scientist there, the marine biologist there, conclusion was “Oh, we've got to have limited entry. We've got to buy out the permits. We've got to stop fishing.”

And... Now a fisherman would have a totally different viewpoint than that. He would be horrified at something like that. Because they're terrified of being told “You can never fish again.” You know, or my son'll never be able to fish again or something like that.

And I think that the fishermen can have a tremendous amount to offer in foresight, in management, in knowledge and everything else about the fishing industry. And I hope in the future that that breach can be—that there can be a restoration of confidence in each other.

JGF: Mmm. That's nice. Yeah, I think some people feel that way about SMAST a little bit. I don't know.

WB: Right. Yes. They're coming out more on the side of fishermen.  
And it's to—U Mass Dartmouth you mean?

JGF: Yeah.

WB: And it's to their—they're smart. They're really smart. Because, this man's reaction—“OK, we've got to stop total fishing.” What he doesn't realize is there's other things to consider, in Nantucket, in halting the fishing on bay scallops. Because one, they're going to lose the market. You lose the big price they get. Doesn't necessarily mean there's no scallops. Just because they don't see them when they're diving doesn't mean they're not going to get them when they're dredging. It may not be as *bad* a season as you think. Apparently there are plenty of scallops in the west end. But just one of the places has a failure, they want to stop, halt the fishing.

And so the two think differently. Not only can the fishermen help the scientists understand about the fish, and vice versa as well. But the fishermen can also aid in how you view things and how they think, how scientists can think as well.

And so, even though they may be an immigrant, and he may not have any knowledge, not knowledge...

JGF: Folk learning, kind of?

WB: Folk learning.

JGF: Yeah.

WB: Doesn't mean they're dumb.

JGF: Right.

WB: They're by no means dumb. Or they'd never make it to where they are now.

JGF: Yeah. It's interesting. Someone else today mentioned that issue about, you know, we wouldn't give up after one drag, or one dredge. We would try this, try that, try that. And they weren't doing that.



WB: Right.

JGF: Well thank you. Very much. This has been [chuckles] wonderful. And thank you, Hannah, for prompting some of the stories.

HB: [laughs]

JGF: They were great!

WB: OK. Alright.

[End of interview]