

Name of person interviewed: Jon Broderick [JB]

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 27, 2013

Interviewer: Markham Starr [MS]

Abstract

Jon Broderick has set net for salmon in Bristol Bay, Alaska with his family for over 25 years. Many of his sons have embraced the tradition. He talks about the history of the community in Nushigak Bay and provides a detailed description of daily rhythms of the set net fishery in Bristol Bay. He touches on the impact of imported, farm raised salmon on the wild fishery and the situation with the proposed Pebble Mine. He also talks briefly about the Astoria Fisherpoets Gathering.

Demographic information

Sex: Male

Age:

Ethnicity: White

Occupation: fisherman, retired school teacher

Born: San Francisco, CA

Homeport: Bristol Bay, AK

Key words

Role

Fisherman

General Social and Cultural Characteristics

Social networks (family, friends, neighbors, co-workers)

Fisherpoetry

Social and Cultural Characteristics of Fishing

Daily life in the Bristol Bay set net salmon fishery

Pebble Mine

Imports

Farm Raised Fish

Gear and Fishing Technology

Other gear and technology

Set Net Fishing

Salmon

MS I'm just gonna start off with, I'm Mark Starr and I'm interviewing Jon Broderick. And even though I just said you're name, I'm gonna ask you what's your name and where were you born?

JB Oh I'm Jon Broderick and I was born in San Francisco, California.

MS And was your family in the fishing industry at all?

JB Oh no. By no means. My dad was a lawyer and a superior court judge and I guess kind of wanted to have another adventure before he went down. Well I was looking for alternatives, you know. I don't know if it was a good decision. But here I am. And I know I went to Alaska, went to University of Washington to college and then, what a guy from the west coast, and women too, when they're lookin' for adventure, they head north to Alaska. That's where I ended up in 1976, got a good job on a seine boat in Kodiak and fished in Kodiak salmon and herring in the spring and fall, spring and summer until I ended up with my own boat not, I didn't seine in Kodiak 'cause it's quite an elaborate outfit. I wanted a simpler, I didn't trust myself to be able to run all that equipment, so I got a gillnetter and southeast Alaska, a little simpler outfit. Plus I was gettin' married and my wife and I were gonna fish together. So we did that for about five years. We started havin' children and they weren't really able to join me on the boat. We were living in Bellingham and running the boat, oh I don't know how far it is, seven days, a thousand miles maybe up to the fishing grounds through British Columbia up into the Pan Handle of southeast Alaska and it wasn't a good place to have a baby on the boat. The boat's quite small. So they started staying home and I started fishing alone. And we did that about five years. And then decided to do something else. That was, I started teachin' school in Seaside, Oregon, taught English and French for many years. I just taught 25 years of that, but, and I had given up fishing I thought, for a conventional job. But fortunately, a buddy of mine came through. I knew Bristol Bay was a terrific salmon fishery, but it was very expensive to enter. In Alaska they have the salmon fisheries are managed with limited entry permits. In order to enter the fishery an individual has to own a permit. And there are only a limited number of them and they're fetch market prices in those days Bristol Bay was going gangbusters and to get a drift permit in Bristol Bay would cost a hundred thousand dollars or perhaps even more. I don't remember, but I certainly couldn't touch it. And a friend of mine from Bellingham was visiting us down there on the Oregon coast where we'd found work teachin' school and told me about this set net operation he does. It's gill netting, but instead of drifting in a boat you're net is anchored on mud flats. Nets are fifty fathoms or a hundred yards long and you just chase the tide from high water down to low and back up. There's about twenty feet of tide there most of the, well of course there's a high high and a low high and a high low and a low low. But between the low low and the high high there can be twenty four feet of water and the flats are pretty expansive so you really have to be movin' your net from high water to low water. Anyway he told me about an operation he had in Nushigak Bay, one of the smaller bays off of Bristol Bay at the mouth of the Nushigak River and it sounded pretty promising. The season is pretty compacted. It's just about six weeks in June and July, fits a school teachers situation pretty well. So I went lookin' for an outfit that might be for sale up there in Bristol Bay and it turns out that one was available within a few miles of my

friend. So I still see him every summer. And that's the only time I see him. We cross paths I pull up along side of him and deliver him a few fish or something. And we keep tabs on each other for about three hours every summer. That's how a lot of our friendships are out there. But anyway that's where we've been for twenty five years. That worked real well well the teaching gig and then...Set netting is real family oriented because you can't live in those boats, we're just fishing open skiffs and so we have to live on a, we live in a camp, a fish camp, it's the site of an old, well actually its the site of one of the original Russian settlements if you go back far enough. And if you go before that of course it was a Native American village, Nushigak. Some high ground there where the Nushigak Rivers come together, the head of Nushigak Bay. And it was the original native settlement there. The Russians came, what did they call it? I forgot what they call it. I wanna say Newark Angel, but I'm not sure that's not, I may be confusing it with Sitka or somethin'. Darn I forget. Anyway the Russians came and it was the first Russian settlement in western Alaska. And in fact until about the late 1800s, Russian was probably the language that was spoken on that point. And there's graves in Cyrillic, graves up there. On the head, on the bluff. Anyway there were a couple canneries built there in the early, late 1800s, a guy named John Clark from Lake Clark and Clark's Point and some of that country was available. I read up on him last year. He was originally working up there for I think it was Western Union, they were racing to get telegraph built to Europe and they were racing the transatlantic people and Clark was pioneering through the west. They were gonna go across Siberia and so he labored as a young man in the cold trying to dig holes for telegraph poles through the frozen tundra. These guys were just tougher than nails. And when they got word that the, the first Atlantic cable had been laid, they had, they just abandoned everything. And then his expertise in the Arctic came to the attention of the Alaska commercial company and so he was engaged to be a agent for the Alaska commercial company in Western Alasaka. And at that time too they were buildling canneries, just starting to exploit the fisheries up there. And so he was the effective I guess kind of Mayor of that region. I forget the two key canneries. The Alaska, there were two canneries, darn it I forgot the names of them. It's well documented. There are photos of them. They were standing there on Nushigak Point until about 1940s. They were abandoned finally in the late 30s when the channel moved, a lot of meandering of the mud flats there when the channel moved and they moved the canneries, dismantled them, took 'em over to Dillingham on the other side of the river. And so there's a lot of debris from the canneries. A lot of pilings that are sometimes covered, sometimes bare. And the settlement that was Nushigak, you know if you look at a picture of Nushigak Point at the turn of the last century there are two canneries, there was Alaska commercial store, there was a native village on the bluff up above, a Russian Orthodox church, it was a year-round place. And now it's entirely different. I can often think of John Clark could see Nushigak Point, he would, well he could 'cause he's buried up on the hillside, but he would never imagine that its in the condition it is, pretty lonely place I think in the winter. But in the summer its full of set netters now. We all come out there and we've built, using, a lot of us got materials and lumber left over from the canneries, some of the old cannery buildings. Native corporations own some of the land of course and so some fellows are squatting and some are renting I suppose, some of the land's privately owned, we built little cabins. You know they start out with little plywood things and they still are just temporary plywood cabins, but we've been livin' in 'em for a long time, probably well

I don't know, let's see, I count sixty or so boats out in front so there's sixty or more families so there's probably two hundred people on that little stretch of high ground every summer between, well through June and July. It's a wonderful collection of people from, about three quarters of them are Alaskans I suppose and the rest of us from down below, all of us who work seasonally at one thing or the other so that we can come up there. Some of our best friends in the, some of our best friends are people we only see briefly you know, work together doing that. Anyway it really suits the family well. When my youngest boy was old enough, I think he was, or actually my oldest boy was old enough by the time he was about nine I think, I started bringing 'em up to stay in the cabin. But he wouldn't stay, he wanted to keep comin' out. So he came out and fished with us. One man had one boat, one permit and my son and gradually I started taking kids from my wife Doreen and bringing 'em up and giving her a little break at one point she was down there with five children under nine years old in the summer time. And so I started bringing up Pete and then when Perry could come up I'd bring up Perry. And then I'd leave Perry home and bring up Max, 'cause Perry and Max couldn't be in the same boat or state together for a certain period in their lives and then once I became aware... One season I remember I had hired a deck hand to help and Pete was about fourteen and Hand was a nice kid, college graduate, but he didn't know a nine sixteenths socket from a crescent wrench you know and I realized about halfway through a big season that Pete is my second, my first mate, not my deck hand. So I stopped hiring guys. I said, "Pete you're it." So it was Pete and I fished together for a couple seasons and then we started bringing up his brothers, Perry or Max. Then there were three of us on the boat. Then four and then the way the fishery works you can own only one permit, but you can own two sites to fish that one permit and so we acquired another site. And if you have two sites well then you can acquire another permit. You know it's just, the geometry of the thing encourages accumulation of permits or sites. But it works out because if you have kids you can get permits. I put a permit in Peter's name once he was fourteen and then we could fish two different places, kept us busier. And we were able to move to a different place to fish. If the wind blew one way we'd go to one site and if it blew the other way we'd go to the other site. Gave us some options. Until today we find ourselves with all four of my boys, I got a daughter who's a twin with my youngest son and daughter 21 now. But they've all the boys and Clare my daughter came up one summer too, but she's got some other things goin'. But the boys have been fishin' with me for, since each of them was around ten or twelve years old. So my wife came up once, oh well once we expanded. We bought, a friend, we bought Bill out next door to us. So we ended up with his cabin and we had a big crew and it was nice to have a lot of support on the beach 'cause we really fish all the time and my wife was wiling to come up and help to support on the beach, make it feel a little less like a military campaign and a little more like a, like home. So when she's not busy in the summer, she comes up for a few weeks and helps us out. So I've had a very, very, very rare privilege of workin' with my kids. Farmers can do that. Fishermen can do it. I don't know who else can do it. Dairymen? Dairy families. But in our day and age, very few people do that. And I'll tell you somethin' else that I've noticed. I've taught high school for a long time and I'm really, fond of kids of that age although there's not a lot about them that's likeable, but I know that my kids have always been like other kids that we know from our work, they've always been vertically integrated. I know lots of high school kids, I don't know anybody

who isn't seventeen years old, that don't spend anytime with anybody who isn't seventeen years old or doing what seventeen year old do. And my kids and my friends, fishing friend's kids, they grew up together on this beach and when they were little there were old guys who don't go out anymore but still came up to, maybe they had a permit or maybe they made it out in fair weather or somethin' to young bucks, beer drinkin'. There's not a lot of dope smokin' on the beach, but there's plenty of beer drinkin' and stuff. You just let the, you know, go down there by the burn barrel with with the boys drinkin' beer, it's o.k. You don't have to, it's just this is what young bucks do when they gather. They seem 'em workin' hard so they're comfortable with people of all ages and have seen people of all ages working and contributing to a community. So I think that's helped them feel comfortable with where they are in life. There have been times I've been so proud of 'em when we're out there, they're fourteen years old and it's, we fish, we don't fish in high seas, when we fish in protected water, but when I say protected, it still can blow. You can't fish anything over about thirty knots I suppose, you really can't, you can hang on, but you can't do much and you runnin' a twenty four foot skiff with fish net through five foot, four foot breakers, that's just a lot of work. And there comin' on a period of about six seconds so there's just no, it's just relentless. And those guys are out there and they don't know any different. It's dark, pull up to a tender in the lee side and deliver your fish and they're just workin' and I thought, gee this kid's a freshmen in high school. Man I know, I know I haven't know anybody who would think this is normal. But it's just what we do. I'm really proud of my kids and all the people who've worked up there. Anyway.

MS Can you describe a typical day then?

JB Well the way the fishery's managed now, naturally it has to become more political of course. People want their proper share of the resources and the resource is very, very healthy in Bristol Bay. It's well managed, there's no, well so far there's no competition for the natural resources up river. That's changing with the Pebble Mine proposal, but Alaska doesn't suffer the kind of damage to its biosphere that down below has and salmon are tough as nails but they have to have pretty clean water to thrive. And cold. In Bristol Bay there are two user groups that are using the fish and that's the drift boats and their oh they're top guns, they're out there beatin each other up at the lines and they've probably made some TV shows about that. And they're mobile. And they fish nets that are twice as long as ours. And they usually have more cash in potential. Although if you lace together a couple set net sites, you can do pretty well too with a lot less capitol investment. You don't have to buy into a hundred dollar boat or more or even a permit like that. You can't start piecing it together which is what we did. We started with one permit, now we have three and three boats and people runnin' those. But at any rate the set netters and the drifters, it was about ten or so years ago, I'm sure it was the drifters rather than us, decided they wanted to allocate a certain of the fishery to set netters and a certain amount to drifters. Well who's gonna win that political battle? At any rate, what happened was is that the set netters now since we can never catch our allocation we fish twenty four hours a day, they just let us fish all the time and the drifters get these openings and closures, very carefully managed. They watch the escapement up the rivers to get the maximum, not even the maximum, the target level. The Wood River, it's usually about a million fish they want to escape, sockeye salmon. In the Nushigak River it's about half a million that

they want to have escape. And on the way to those goals, they let us fish pieces of the run. Set netters who fish the shore can't stop much of the run that's not on shore so we tend to be able to fish all the time. And the drifters are the ones who are largely managed and have short closures to let squirts of fish get up these rivers. There might be as many as twelve million fish goin' up there and they only need a million so you're gonna catch a lot of fish. Anyway so in a set netter's life, our net, if you caught us in the middle of a season, you'd find, we got kind of dialed in now, in the old days, we used to try it with just Pete and me or Pete, me and another guy, or one crew. We'd try to fish twenty four hours a day. The short openers would disappear early in the season as the fish build and they'd extend us and we'd end up with a twenty-five hour extension, one tidal cycle. And then another twenty-five hour extension, and another one. And pretty soon you didn't know when you could go in and you had to go in and you always missed fish, it would always drive you crazy. You'd try to think, low tide, we can go in for a few hours and all of a sudden there was a blast a low tide and you just felt sick. You know I still think about two lousy thousand pounds I missed some time twenty years ago. But the, nowadays that we're fishing all the time, most crews have gone to shifts and it's really made it quite civil. When the fishing's managable. And one boat with two or three guys in it can handle the volume. We fish from high tide to high tide. Or sometimes low tide to low tide, thirteen hours. And we just shift out when the tide is slack. We used to shift out at high water 'cause at high water you can run the boat right up to the beach to the cabin and get in and out real quick. The problem is the high water slack is brief and it's a good time for fishing. Low water slack, there are usually fewer fish. The entire bay is emptied out, scoured out and you have a little more time, but the problem is gettin' back to the cabins from low water is a lot of work. We don't fish near the cabin. We're several miles away and navigating the sandbars and the current and walkin' across several hundred yards of mud to get back to the cabin is a lot of work, but you have more time off. So we've been switchin' out at low tide this year. It worked out pretty well for us. One crew is takin' care of the cabin and has a meal waitin' when you get in and the other crew comes in, changes it's gear enjoys the meal. The other crew get's it's gear on and heads back out and the net never comes out of the water. We do that for five weeks or when the humpies run every couple of years, we'll continue into August fishin' eight weeks or so. So if the fishin's really heavy and it should be every year for at least a few days, one crew can't handle all the fish and so you have to bring out re-enforcements and so it always, we hope it happens. You'll just get in and pull your gear off and get ready to hit the rack for awhile and the radio crackles and "We need a little help out here." You gotta get your gear back on and go back out for another thirteen hours or more. You never know how long. But that's, the fish arrive so heavy that you can't keep up with them. Like one of our friends says, you're pickin' fish in self defense. They just don't stop comin'!

MS What would, like a typical, the heaviest day...what kind of poundage are you talkin'?

JB Our best day, fishermen aren't too inclined to tell you, but I'll tell you, 'cause this is science. We never tell anybody how we do. Some guys will, young guys will get up there "Oh yeah, we had seven thousand pounds this day!" You know every fishermen knows the answer. Every veteran fisherman should be sayin' "Oh we did pretty good, we did ok. Not bad." or somethin' that's all you can say. I have my best friend up there, I won't tell

him. He wants to know and I won't tell him how I, how well we did. It drives him crazy. And he tells me all the time. I know he's bullshittin' me, you know. He's inflatin' stuff. Or how bad he did. Last year they missed 'em. But anyway, I'll just tell you a very good day, some of our best days have been over 20,000 pounds. That's a lot of work. We've done better than 20,000 pounds a couple times, a few times. Typically though if you can catch two thousand pounds, that's, we call it scratch fishing. That's a good day, two thousand pounds of fish. That's ok. But the price has been as low, I started fishing in Bristol Bay in '87 I guess. The price was two dollars and thirty five cents a pound. The farmed fish came in, hit the market and the price of fish dropped to thirty five cents. So that changed the dynamic a lot on the beach. Also the price of those permits fell. Those permits that guys bought into with the big boats for a quarter of a million dollars were fifteen thousand dollars. But gradually people have re...through marketing and good science and good sense, people have realized that wild fish are plentiful and good for you. And farmed fish don't offer the same benefits either to the health or the health of the environment that people hoped. So now the wild fish market's quite strong and the price went up to a dollar finally again a couple years ago. And then last year we got a buck and a half which in Bristol Bay which is remote, we get the lowest price of all the sockeye fisheries in Alaska, but we're quite remote so. We were pretty happy with that.

MS How do you actually get rid of the fish? I mean do you catch them and put them in the skiffs?

JB Yeah they go in our skiffs and nowadays, part of the reason our price is better I think is we're taking better care of our fish. Year's ago, years ago before I got started they used to just keep 'em dry in a boat, even in the drift boats, pull 'em off, throw 'em off with a pew, long stick you know with a hook on the end of it. Throw them into a bit barge and the barge would hold 'em dry and they'd all go into cans. Well for a long time we've been puttin' 'em in tenders we call those tenders. Some boats are built specifically for tenders and these bit scallopers and draggers out here would make terrific tenders, big boats. We deliver to boats like those that usually they're off season, they're typically crabbers in Alaska. But a lot of boats are built to tend and particular for us set netters we need a shallow boat and we don't need a boat that can hold a quarter of a million pounds, a hundred thousand pounds is good. Those boats have refrigerated sea water in 'em. And so we've been taking out into our set net skiffs which are small boats, ice, we've got our totes. I built a new boat three years ago with this in mind. And I've got four of those insulated totes they'll carry about about, well we only put about 800 pounds of fish in each one. I'll carry more. We put ice and sea, refrigerated water in there, make a slush so we'll put 800 pounds in those once we get that, those 800 pounds full we just go over to the tender. Tenders, if they're not makin' the rounds, then they're anchored off a specific places and you run over and just deliver when you're full, just a routine. if the weather's good you can do that. So if we get clobbered with fish we can't keep 'em all iced, we don't have room. But you deliver them right away so then you just go deliver them dry. But we were deliverin' terrific quality fish. That's helped our price too. And the market, we're finally seeing the kind of fish that wild Alaskan Sockeye that we've enjoyed all the time, frozen, vacuum packed filets, they're beautiful. We eat 'em all winter long.

MS Is there a company that owns those, those carry away boats?

JB The tenders? Yeah. Well if they don't own 'em they just have a contract with the fishermen. There used to be quite a few canneries in the Dillingham Area. Now there's really only two in upper Nushigak, Peter Pan Seafoods, we deliver to them, they're the oldest operating cannery, continuously operating cannery in Alaska. And then there's another outfit that's had several incarnations. They're on the Wood Rive. I think I don't know who owns it now. It's an Alaskan family, drag net, we fished for them for a long time, that Alaskan outfit. But it's been sold, went bankrupt, that's another story. I lost money on that one. But there's been some consolidation. But I think whereas the price of fish has gone up lately, other processers are interested, fishermen who are ambitions sometimes building co-ops and I think that's making the processing market expand a little bit, kind of custom markets. The reputation for Alaskan wild salmon is high and so I think there's a market value that people are willing to pay for. Copper River fish certainly are the first, I don't know about here on the east coast, but in the west coast, when the Copper River reds come out in May it a big deal. And they command top dollar until some other reds appear elsewhere in Alaska and sockeye and reds are the same fish, red salmon and sockeye. So there's some market, what do you call the term, product recognition. But we're really delivering 'em a nice product nowadays.

MS What do your sons do when they're not fishing?

JB Well they've been going to school. So we've been able to pay, they've worked, for free, to go to, earn their college money and go to school. So this has put our kids through college which was terrific. But now they're starting to graduate from college and they wanna know what am I really gettin' paid? [laughs] That was a hard question. Of course when they're going to college you're payin' pretty well because that's, you know you write that off as an expense. But now, I can't, God if I pay 'em that... I want my sons to come back. I still pay 'em pretty well. I've got my youngest, the twins are still in college, they're seniors now at the University of Oregon. My oldest, Peter, unfortunately he's retired. We're proud of him, he just graduated from Stanford Law School so he's just startin' a job this week in San Francisco and he'll come up and make some cameo appearances. He really likes the work. He's thirty years old and has been fishing for, well like since he was ten, twenty years, but he can, he's still able, not last year, he was studying for the bar, but he still hopes to be able to get a couple of weeks off and join us and if he guess right he can be there right for the very heart of the run, which we'd really appreciated two years ago when he came up. My other son Perry who insists he's not a fisherman, he has never particularly liked it, has found himself working in Portland, Oregon as, in an outfit called the wild salmon center, doing some graphic work for 'em for awhile and now he's, as an intern and now he's on the staff. Their job there is to protect healthy salmon streams in the north pacific which includes Russia as well. A lot of the staff are Russians. So it's one of those NGO's that are doin' some really terrific work. So he works for them and they like havin' a wild salmon fisherman on staff. So they grant him three weeks in the summer to come up and fish with us and he's still doin' it even though he insists "Im not a fisherman!" That's a funny line because years ago, Peter and I were near the end of a season and I don't know Perry must have been seventeen or eighteen at the time and we

were talkin' about some fish we'd caught. You know we work with our neighbors very, very well. But the most competitive of them, you want to beat 'em. You know. You wanna catch more than they catch. And you don't tell 'em how well you did, but we caught a lot of fish in the absence of one of our neighbors one time. And he's such a competitive son of a bitch that you just love to beat him. And but we weren't gonna tell him. And Perry was felt we were lyin' to our neighbors. "You say these guys are your friends, they're not really your friends." I said, "Perry, Perry," I said, "Tom doesn't wanna know that he missed five thousand pounds of fish last night. It would make him sick to even know that. I'm not gonna tell him that." I says, "Just don't tell him anything about last night" I said Perry. He said: "You guys just lie to your friends," He said. I says, "No its what fishermen do." And he says, "I am not a fisherman." And Peter and I looked at him and he's wearin' his rain gear and he's covered in blood and scales and it's pourin' rain and we looked at him, "Somebody ought to take a photo of you of you and show you, you look like a fishermen to me buddy." He, so we laugh at him all the time. He's a fisherman, Perry. Today he works for the Wild Salmon Center. Max, his younger brother, he's a year younger, he's now, he runs one of the shifts. He likes the fishing business and he just takes to it and so he can skipper one of the shifts. Perry usually works with me 'cause he and Max still can't work on the same boat. And Perry is really saavy. He's bright and ever since he was fourteen, he's made observations that I thought were, that's pretty sharp. He's looking a couple steps ahead. So now I laugh, I tell everybody that Perry runs the boat and I just have to steer. And in fact I notice that lots of times that the older guys let the sons start to make the decisions on the boat. And then Perry wasn't there all the time this year he had to go home a little early to go to work and my youngest son Henry was on the boat and he would ask me what are we gonna do next and I'd gotten in the, I was in the habit of just lettin' the kids make the decisions and honestly I really just kind of do steer the boat unless I feel strongly about something. And it gets to the point where I can't even make a decision anymore. I was telling Henry, "Henry, what do you think we ought to do?" And Henry would say "Well you decide Dad" "No you decide" I said "Henry, I just got tired of making decisions." He said, "Dad that's just learned helplessness, you make some decisions." He tried to retrain me to make my decisions because...and Perry told everybody, "Dad doesn't like to make decisions really." I said, "I do like to make decisions, but every time I had to make a decision on my fishing boat with three sons, there was an argument, you know? I had to argue about everything. So finally I just said, 'here you guys decide' if it's not important, you decide" So the decision making process is kind of left to me at my advanced age now, I'm a little ill-equipped to run a boat anymore. I've lost the habit of making decisions. I'm actually aware of that because it's not unlikely in years to come that it will be Max and his friends runnin' one boat and me and maybe Henry or couple, they days of having all the boys and all the family on the boats are probably drawing to a close. So I'm gonna have to start making decisions again about how to run a boat! [laughs] I need practice. Henry's making me practice "Dad! That's just learned helplessness." "You're right Henry. Ok well let's go set up high water now." "Good, good Dad."

MS So how does, what does your wife think of all this?

JB Oh she's a trooper. She fished with me of course in southeast Alaska for a few years and she loves bein' a part of it. She's worked hard raising the kids at home in the summertime and now she's gone back to school to learn to be a school teacher. So she was earning her masters degree in summers. But now she's got that and has got work teaching school she might be able to join us again this summer a little bit. No she's terrifically supportive. And there are families on the beach. The women and the children it's a, it's a terrific community. So I would say it's not just the fish, you know, it's the whole community of people there.

MS That's rare today to have a community that comes together around a certain job. It used to be everybody worked in this factory and everybody on the streets, parents worked in the factory. Today, he works over here, he works over there you don't even know your neighbors so it must be pretty interesting to be in a community that's

JB Absolutely, that's something we understand is rare and I think even though our community is tight there at Nushigak Point, we spend a lot of time together, the fishing community, at least in Alaska, the salmon community is relatively tight even so. I assume it must be like that in other fishing communities on different coasts, but these are people, like for instance, some of these tendermen, they're buying fish from us, are people that I knew thirty years ago in Kodiak Alaska who were fishermen there. And sometimes you haven't seen people in years, and there, I know that boat. And they pull over and, Ron Jolands is tendering for you. And you have a visit with him and, I see my old skipper, the guy who gave me a job fishing in Kodiak, he's a terrific fisherman, Gerry Gugle Jr.. He's one of, if you name five top salmon fishermen in Alaska, he'd be one of them. And I run into him in Bristol Bay. He's got a piece of Bristol Bay too. So we just pull along side each other, my little skiff and his big boat and have a little visit there. Yeah it's tight knit and far flung is what it is, this community. And people care about each other. We compete, but boy they pull each other out of a bind to if your in a tight spot. I think that, you know I don't have much experience with the ranching community in eastern Oregon. I had some friends that were ranchers and I've hung with them a little bit and they live far, far apart. But when there's a sale of cattle or something like that, they're all together and they do stuff. And I suppose people are more connected nowadays with Skype and so forth. But we're kind of off the grid and I don't mind that. I don't think it will last. But bein' off the grid can kind of knit you together too. Your time together is a little more precious if you don't talk to somebody every day. It's been good for my marriage [laughs].

MS Is it, so there's not power or anything there, it's just...

JB We didn't have power for the longest time. We do have running water, a nice spring up on the hill. And people cobble together cystersns and plumbing. There hasn't been power, but now we have a lot of us have little Honda generators and stuff which are handy for tools mostly. So you can run some power tools. But I know my buddy Ole who is the rancher, he's a problem solver. He teaches his, he cobbles his outfit together with all kinds of scrap. He's an auctioneer in the wintertime now too. He also, used to be a sheep shearer till he got kind of busted up. So he's always got equipment and he loves

equipment. So now he's got, he's gonna have generators, so now he's got, the sound of a generator runnin' I just thought, no. "Oh yeah we're gonna have generators, we'll have power, will run some power down to your place." "No Ole, no thanks. I don't want to listen to a generator." But we actually, a lot of us have put solar panels on our roofs and so we got some solar panels for lights. But that's not, Ole's not gonna, some guy from Montana is not gonna have a fuckin' solar panel. He's gonna have himself a generator. He's gonna burn some oil. He's gonna make some noise. [laughs] He doesn't want any passive. Passive is just not in his vocabulary.

MS Do you cook on wood stoves, or?

JB Oh well we have, we use gas, we, you know Dillingham is a fully outfitted frontiertown. It's nothing to look at, the whole town exists to keep, really to keep, well to keep the locals outfitted for the wintertime. But it exists around the commercial fishing and the sport fishing up river industries. So yeah we can get everything you need in Dillingham.

MS And the boats, what are they built, fiberglass or?

JB Typically now aluminum. We used to fish out of some fiberglass. My first boat was a fiberglass boat it wasn't really built for that fishery. But the material of choice up in Bristol Bay is always aluminum. There were some plywood boats, and they worked well, but they didn't of course last like the others. There's only one or two of them left now and they won't be replaced. Some of boats are home made and they're horrible and some of them are quite nice. But they're pretty dysfunctional you know, there's no, there aren't any seats in them, you're gonna be in there for twenty four hours with no place to sit. Oh I got a seat in mine actually come to think of it. My new boat's got a seat right behind the wheel. I do have a seat. Anyway. Aluminum is what people make boats out of. But I think some of the bigger boats, the drift boats, quite a few of those are fiberglass. But there aren't many fiberglass skiffs, gettin' kind of heavy I think, the core sometimes gets waterlogged. That was a problem with mine.

MS Are they outboards, or inboards?

JB We, they're almost all outboards. We used to, that too is, I started with, when I first got there, everybody had 50 horsepower Mercuries. They're a devil to start, pull start, and it wasn't long before people went to Evinrudes. So my first boat went and had an Evinrude and that was a 55. I saw some 60 horsepower motors, always tiller handles and then when we got into new outboards and moved up I got a new boat in '99, aluminum boat and put a 90 horsepower Yamaha on it. So then we had two stroke Yamahas on there. And as I was just gettin' on that the bigger guys were gettin' into 150s and so forth and here came the four strokes. And the real, the real alpha males up there they got 200 horsepower four stroke motors. My new boat has got a, I can stay with two stroke and a carbureted engine because I wanted it to be simple and if it breaks down, the four strokes are kind of fussy. And that kind of fishing that we do in shallow water, chewin' up a lot of mud, sometimes the fuel has got dirt or water in it, troubles the injectors. Anyway I'm up to a 150 horse two stroke motor. It just [imitates sound of sucking gas] just drinks gas. So

we probably, when the fishin's slow, we bust out the old boat and use the old one. So we have an Escalade and a Toyota. And we pull the Toyota for slow fishing out, just park the big boat. The big boat has some hydraulic assist on it now which is helpful in the big boat 'cause you can't slide the boat underneath the net. A little boat you can slide under the net, with a big boat, you can't just pull the net across the boat. You harvest the fish by gettin' the boat up underneath the net. You have to lift the net up over the bow of the boat. And if it's full of fish, that's hard to do. And there's always current and always wind. And then you put the boat, the net between two fair leads, one on each side of the boat. And then the crew stands on either side of the net, one guys with his back to the bow, another guy with his back to the stern and you draw the net between you and you just shake the fish out as they come aboard. So it's nice to have some hydraulic help with that if there's a lot of fish. In the days before the hydraulic help, when we're on the little boat we don't have hydraulic help and there have been times when we three guys couldn't pull the fish into the boat. We had to get help. The ball of fish like this, it's just you can't believe. It's an athletic event. It's just unbelievable when the fish are there. And they're there. Fishing is like that in Alaska. I imagine it used to be like that in every west coast river from San Francisco north. That's somethin' to protect, you know. Which if you'd like me to talk about that Pebble Mine, I can do that. 'Cause that's a real threat to that environment up there is this proposed open pit copper and gold mine. Alaskan's regulations are archaic. They're left over from the 1890s. And modern mining corporations can exploit those regulations and have and so, this company called Northern Dynasty which until recently was in partnership with Anglo American, but thank goodness Anglo American just last week pulled out of the partnership. And they've been exploring in the headwaters of the Nushigak River and the Kvichak River that falls into Lake Clark, this country, they think it's the biggest gold and copper mine in the world perhaps. And they want to have an open pit mine and build a tailing pond behind the world's largest earthen dam that will be full of poison water forever, for fuckin' ever. They wanna have, "And oh don't worry, it'll be safe, we guarantee it." Are you kiddin'? They think they're gonna pull that off? It just, my blood pressure goin' up right now thinkin about it. What, what, what egotism, what hubris to think you could build something forever. We're gonna leave this for the rest of human history, to deal with this poison turd up here at the top of the river system. Sooner or later it would exterminate, the runs and even before it exterminates 'em it'll poison 'em and even before it poison's 'em, trace elements of heavy metals and shit are gonna appear in our fish and our market value is gonna plummet 'cause as soon as they discover, Cesium, that's radio active, as soon as they discover, yeah arsenic, the trace, the market advantage we have with wild fish over farmed fish, is just gonna, our price will be back down to thirty fuckin' five cents. That could happen right away. Anyway, everybody's not everybody, every fisherman, virtually every fisherman I know we're hopin' the EPA will exercise it's authority to halt the construction of the dam. But it's something that fishermen or people, not just fishermen, people who love the environment up there are gonna have to fight forever. It's a battle, if you lose once, you lose it forever. You have to fight it, always. You can never stop fighting. It's never over battling against that kind of money and influence. But so far, it's a death by a thousand cuts they say. Anglo American left Northern Dynasty without an important partner and so that's set them back. But that's, that's one issue. Offshore drilling and so forth is another. But that's not as critical as the upstream stuff I think. I forget what you asked that prompted that.

MS So and then you teach still now?

JB No I stopped teaching a couple years ago, so.

MS Do you do anything else in the off season?

JB No it lets me be free to come do some stuff like this Working Waterfront stuff. We have a event called the Fisherpoets Gathering out west in Astoria we started about seventeen years ago now. And I can devote more time to organizing that. We had about 80 people come participate, six venues, three days, 80 volunteers or somethin'. It's a little less organized, a little more cobbled together. A little bit more spontaneous than this. We not as well oiled a machine. But I spend a lot of time workin' on that in the wintertime. No I'm kind of recently, I guess you'd call it retired, so just kind of still figure out how to use that time wisely.

MS Well great. Well thank you very much.

JB Naw it wasn't hard to talk for forty five minutes I guess was it?

MS No, no. To use your interview, if it's ok, I need your permission if that's ok. She probably, Laura probably has this anyway if there are any restrictions you want to can put 'em on there. But like I say it's all to promote fishing.

JB That's one thing that I can see is true here.

MS Yeah, I don't know why she has it twice. Oh you can shut that off. It's alright.