

Name of person Interviewed: Mike Bruce [MB]

Facts about this person:

Age: 50

Sex: Male

Occupation: Fisherman (skipper, mate)

Home port: New Bedford

Residence: New Bedford

Ethnic background: Canadian (New Foundland), Irish, Scottish

Interviewer: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel [JGF]

Transcriber: Sarah Smith

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbormaster's House

Date and time of interview: September 24, 2006

INDEX / KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS: Newfoundland; multi-generational fishing family; drinking; drugs; illegal immigrants; medical insurance; taxes; days at sea; safety; regulations; technology; skipper; superstitions; closed areas; yellowtail

[00:00] Commercial fisherman on the *Seal*; born in New Bedford in 1956; parents from Newfoundland; father, grandfather, every generation before him was fisherman; family Irish and Scottish; some of the earlier settlers in Newfoundland

[02:43] Always in fishing; painted pin boards starting when he was nine or ten; when he was older he would be paid for lumping; fill in when guys didn't show up; father was skipper of *Crispina Bugalow*

[05:19] Started fishing full-time at seventeen; fishing for thirty-one years; working since age fifteen; always worked hard and saved money; bought his first house at twenty-one; bought an old Victorian house and redid it

[08:02] Studied woodworking with old timers; always hung around with old timers to learn from them; had lots of time because he never drank; put his money in the bank, not in the bar

[09:13] Lots of nationalities in New Bedford; Newfoundlanders started union; Norwegians used to sell their fish in New York; Newfoundlanders came around the 1950s; always hired Newfoundlanders; always got along; had a couple of Portuguese guys working for him

[10:10] Difference between yesterday and today; first got a quarter share, then got a half share when he could splice; got full share when you could mend twine; fishermen had an incentive to learn and work hard to get a bigger share; there's not the same tradition today of sons going fishing with their fathers; hard to get good guys so they have to give them all full shares to get them to go; no benefits today if they're not on a union boat – no medical, no pension; why would anyone want to get into dragging; even in scalloping there are no benefits; the kids in scalloping spend all their money at Foxwoods when they should save it

[12:28] Much more of a drug problem today than in the past; won't go out with guys that are into drugs; don't like working with those guys; hire people that have a home and a family instead of guys that run the streets; want to help Americans first by giving them jobs; help Americans before hiring somebody that's not legit; can see helping someone who's not legit if they have a family; should impose random drug testing; weed out the people with drug problems and maybe prevent some guys from getting into drugs; might help some people

[15:03] Thinks boats should have a training certificate for safety; every man on the boat should know what to do in case something happens; every guy should have a certificate, know how to handle life rafts, survival suits; might take two days of training – worth it to save your life; on the boat where he's the captain, everyone knows how to do everything; teaches every new guy on the boat safety

[16:39] Started out at a quarter share, took him six months to work up to a full share; went on his own to the old guys to learn how to do things and get a full share; it's not like that today

[17:37] Shortage of good people to hire on boats because it's hard to attract them into fishing; now everybody's looking for a job scalloping because the money's good, but when there's no money everyone will be looking for a job; core group of people on his crew

[18:41] First became skipper at twenty-one; worked with the same guys for fifteen years, now they're retired; what happened with the unions was terrible; if you're in a union you have a pension; he has no medical; fishermen have to buy medical insurance, but it's very expensive; fishermen are considered self-employed, but they can't write off the boat's expenses on their taxes; match their own social security; take away from the working man to keep the owners going;

[21:23] Buying days at sea to go dragging; the money to buy the days comes out of their pay; don't have enough days at sea on one license for a year's work; match up engine and boat size to buy days; lots of fishermen selling their homes because they can't afford to keep fishing; guys that make gear are going to go out of business because fishermen can't afford to buy gear; banks are closing; chain reaction in New Bedford because fishing is big business; seen the good, the bad, and the ugly

[23:28] The good is some the people he's worked with; some people are smart enough to fish and keep a family; bad is tightening regulations; they don't want to listen; bycatch is an issue; catching more cod than the weight limit and throwing it over; fishermen make what they made in the 70s because of the price of fuel and the price of days at sea; won't make as much this year as in 1977; he can sell his things and live when he retires, but guys just coming into it can't do that; no opportunities for new guys coming into fishing; who would want to start fishing?

[25:23] His son won't become a fisherman; he's the end of a long line of fishermen; his son would never be able to own a home or live the American dream; hopes he becomes a dentist or goes to school for medicine; will help him with college but won't help him become a fisherman; hasn't been skipper in five years; mostly works as mate on the *Seal*; needs crew to be a skipper; doesn't want to take guys that do drugs; could leave fishing at any time; likes the guys he's fishing with now

[28:36] Was in every gale there ever was; had a couple of close calls; in his first winter fishing they had fifteen to seventeen foot seas, and the whole boat was covered in ice;

some areas you don't want to be in the winter; now some of the safe areas are closed so it's even more dangerous today; more men going missing today; if a guy goes to a spot and the seas get rough, he's not going to come in because he doesn't want to lose his days at sea; seas build up bigger in some areas depending on the bottom; in some areas you're in the lee; they're forcing guys to stay out in bad areas; tried to tell them but they don't listen

[32:38] They (regulators) tell you what you want to hear but don't really listen; more of them (regulators) working than there are fishermen; they're all making over a hundred thousand dollars; they know how to stretch their job out, the bureaucracy; the ugly part of fishing; they need to have rules; it's hard to get fishermen to stick together; each guy is worried about himself;

[35:02] They had superstitions – one was you couldn't wear red shirts; won't catch fish with a red shirt on; this was the superstition of the Newfoundlanders; would fish with Norwegians that would take two cod fish and set them on fire when they weren't catching fish; whistling on a boat was bad; whistling used to mean something in the fog; can't turn the wheel into the sun while leaving the dock; can't turn the hatch cover upside down

[37:48] Didn't used to drink coffee, always drank tea; Newfoundlanders always drank tea; ate hard biscuits all the time

[39:01] Unexpected finds in his catch – found ammunition from the Navy and Coast Guard; found old bottles; found a pin from a harpoon; everything in his house is from the 1800s, including old bottles he's found; found an unopened bottle of Japanese beer; one time picked up a container with a body in it; found a piece of an airplane

[42:37] One time found a bottle belonging to a kid who'd thrown it in the water two years earlier; wrote to the kid; kid had beautiful handwriting, he has terrible handwriting because he went to Catholic school and you had to write everything down; kids today don't get the same punishments they used to;

[44:50] Technology has come a long way; you have better safety with EPIRBs and boat tracks; you can call home now whereas before you couldn't; electronics are better; gear hasn't changed a lot; gear size has gotten bigger; now you have plotters so you can save a spot and go over it again; engines are better; they emit less smog and you can plug a laptop into them to find out what's wrong with them; some engines are polluting a lot and it's going to get guys in trouble

[47:21] Next president will put in laws about polluting engines; will have to do things which are costly to the owner, this will affect the working guy; a license for a boat has more than doubled in the last five years; every boat with a scallop license has been sold or bought; there's money in scallops so lots of boats are being used to catch them; what makes a good skipper is what makes a good man – to enjoy your job and do your best; needs to be knowledgeable; needs to be able to work with people; know everything about the boat before taking it out; need to ask questions of older people and be interested in

what's around you; you need to think well; when he started fishing there were only Eastern rig trawlers; Western rigs are better, Eastern rigs were better in bad weather; some boats up here aren't made for weather up here; some guys buy shrimp boats from down South with a flat bottom

[52:07] There's lots to think about as skipper; his dad was a skipper; leaned a lot from his dad; likes meeting new people

[53:18] They're allowed five thousand pounds of flounder; last year they were catching fifteen to twenty thousand pounds of flounder per trip; they change the regulations so fast it doesn't give the little guy a chance; they had a net made for yellowtail for twenty thousand dollars but now they can't use it; it's hard to keep a steady pace making enough money in fishing; multi-species license isn't made to catch lots of species because there are too many restrictions; the people making rules aren't fishermen and don't listen; some of them have never seen an ocean

[55:47] Can't control what comes up in your net with a multi-species license; bring up a lot of things that die and have to be thrown back; would like to see that problem solved; would also like to see a mandatory drug test; every guy should have a safety certificate; should be mandatory for everyone to have medical training

[57:14] Could get insurance companies to implement this; may have to give people a reward; people think safety training is important but they may not do it without incentive because it takes time

[58:38] Likes the history aspect of the festival; things are no different today than they were a hundred years ago in terms of how hard they have to work; people should eat more fish because it's good for them; the doctors say to eat fish three times a week; would like to see the fishing industry put on a better display for selling fish in stores; someone should teach supermarkets how to display fish; they can get fish filleted in New Bedford, there are lots of filet houses there;

[01:01:06 - break in recording] Everybody thinks the way the government handles regulations is a joke; the joke isn't funny when you see the impact of two years of this rule; one time they closed an area to scalloping at midnight and all the guys had to come in; they take so long to make decisions and then they just make them; a guy spends the money to get his boat ready to go out, and then they get called back in, and he hasn't even made his money back; it's not fair; they don't think of the impact of what they do to people's lives; when he retires he will do hobbies like planting in the yard; will stick around here because his grandkids are here.

[01:03:59 – end]

TRANSCRIPT

[00:00]

JGF: Today is September 24, 2006, and this is Janice Fleuriel and I'm talking to Mike Bruce, and as I understand it you're a fisherman.

MB: Yeah, I'm a commercial fisherman on the fishing vessel *Seal*.

JGF: The fishing vessel *Seal*, okay. And, before we get into the actual questions about your work we just like to get a little bit of background on people, so could you tell me where and when you were born?

MB: Uh, I was born in New Bedford...

JGF: Uh huh

MB: ...April 15, 1956...

JGF: Okay

MB: ...my parents are from New Foundland

JGF: Alright

MB: And, uh, just tell my story of fishing or, uh?

JGF: Yeah, well, a little bit about your parents, did they meet - were they married in New Foundland or did they meet here and get married?

MB: Oh, they met in New Foundland but my mother came, and a year later my father came here in the 40s.

JGF: I see. And did he come to fish also?

MB: Yeah, he was a - he come to fish.

JGF: Okay, so you really grew up in it.

MB: So my grandfather and grandfather before him and before s- etcetera, etcetera have been fishermen since the beginning of time - back as far as I go -

JGF: ...as anybody knows, yeah...

MB: ...1600s.

JGF: Yeah, and were they in Newfoundland...

MB: Yeah.

JGF: ...that whole time?

MB: I'm the first generation, born here.

JGF: Wow, okay, huh. And where did – so were they – as far back as you remember your family had already emigrated like from England or Scotland or Ireland into Newfoundland, or...?

MB: I'm... I'm, uh, three-quarters Irish and one part Scottish.

JGF: Okay.

MB: They – they immigrated, uh... my father's side, the Bruce side, immigrated, uh... in the 1700s...

JGF: Wow.

MB: ... to Newfoundland...

JGF: Okay, interesting...

MB: ...from Scotland. And my mother is from the Irish side, they were 1800s came to Newfoundland.

JGF: Wow, okay. And how – the 1700s, was that – when was Newfoundland first getting settled by like the...

MB: Ohh, let me see...

JGF: Do you have any idea – I mean, I can look that up but I'm just...

MB: Oh, it...

JGF: It sounds like it might have been...

MB: ...they were – they were there before... the first were there – the - according to my father, a long time...

JGF: ...it sounds like they might have been one of the earlier settlements...

MB: Yeah, the earlier, earlier settlers, yeah. Cause on my mother's side, they owneded (sic) all that land and everything where the whole Naval base is, they took that away from 'em during war time.

JGF: Wow, is that in St. John?...

MB: ...and they paid 'em twenty-four thousand dollars for it.

JGF: Wow...

MB: Placentia Bay...

JGF: The whole thing...

MB: ...all that whole cliff and all that whole area...

JGF: Wow...

MB: ...where all that base was all my grandfather's...

JGF: Wow...

MB: ...land, they took it away from him.

JGF: Huh, is that the name of the town, Placentia Bay, or is that just the area?

MB: The area and town's Placentia place...

JGF: Okay, yeah...

MB: ...and, uh, Placentia Bay is the whole area.

[02:43]

JGF: I see, okay, great, alright. So since you really grew up in it, I wonder if you can talk to me about some of your earliest memories and experiences. As a child, were you ever, like, involved in the...?

MB: Oh, yeah. My father, uh, owned fishing boats, and, uh... let me see, the first things I did was come down the boat and paint the pin boards.

JGF: [laughs] I think that's...

MB: I was painting the pin boards when I was, oh my god, I'd have to say nine, ten, eleven years old, painting the pin boards on the boat for... what did I get, I think it was ten dollars. I was tickled pink.

JGF: For a day's work kind of thing?

MB: For a day's work, ten dollars I'd get to paint all... no, ten dollars to paint all the pin boards...

JGF: Oh, however long...

MB: ...whether it took me one day or two day.

JGF: Oh, okay.

MB: Yeah, there was a lot of pin boards, they caught a lot of fish then.

JGF: Those are the boards that are the whole...

MB: Separate, in the fish hold to the fish...

JGF: Mmm hmm.

MB: ...so you painted 'em white, the hull was always painted white and the boards were always kept white.

JGF: Huh. Well, so were you right in side the holds where the fish would get put to paint them, or would you pull 'em out and...

MB: Uh, we'd have 'em on deck and dry 'em after they made their trip...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: They'd lay 'em on deck and they'd dry for a couple days...

JGF: Yeah.

MB: ...and then I had to paint 'em. They'd take up so much each trip, like they'd take half up one trip and half up the other trip...

JGF: Oh, so this was constant.

MB: And, uh... well, no, not really, it was done mostly, uh, sp – you know, weather wise, good – good weather time, you know, six months, probably – every six months.

JGF: Yeah, so a lot more than most people paint anything on their houses.

MB: And then I'd get jobs lumping too, I'd, uh... when I was big enough to dump the basket on the chute I'd dump the basket on the chute...

JGF: Uh huh...

MB: ... and I'd get paid, uh – I'd get paid, uh... you know, lumpers' pay.

JGF: Yup.

MB: It was that – then that was quite a bit then, let me see, that was thirty-six dollars I think to dump then, back then. Thirty-six...? Back in the... that must have been, uh, let me see, in, uh, '69, '71, all that, you know.

JGF: Uh huh, uh huh, so you would have been about... fifteen?

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Yeah? Now were you – at that point then were you part of their union, or just sort of extra help?

MB: Nah, when some extra help fell in, if somebody didn't show up, or...

JGF: Yup.

MB: My father was running, uh, uh... was skipper of the *Crispina Bugalow* then. In Newport, Rhode Island.

JGF: Uh huh.

MB: And, uh, New Bedford lumpers would come and sometimes they only have two or three, they need an extra guy, and then I'd work.

JGF: Oh, okay, yeah.

MB: Fill in for somebody that couldn't come or...

JGF: Uh huh, uh huh. So he's just give you a call and say come on down or something...

MB: Yeah, when the boat came in I came down anyways.

JGF: You did? You just liked it?

MB: Yeah, right, yeah.

[05:19]

JGF: So it sounds like basically, maybe always, you figured that commercial fishing was going to be your life.

MB: Well, yeah. Uh... I guess in a way I'm born into it, you could say, and, uh... when I turns, uh... let me see, uh... school time, when summer was out, I went fishing in the summer... uh... uh... let me see, I was seventeen when I went actual fishing.

JGF: You were.

MB: And uh, when I graduated from high school, the next year, I went fishing full time. So I've been fishing now thirty-one years.

JGF: Wow.

MB: Fishing.

JGF: Wow.

MB: So I'm fifty, yeah.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Let me see, yeah, thirty-one, thirty-two years. [laughs]

JGF: [laughs] That's good! So, your first trip, do you remember feeling particularly excited, or...?

MB: Yeah, I was excited and uh... um... hmm... see I always worked even though I went to school I still worked a full-time job went to sch – you know we were always taught to work, ever since I turned fifteen I worked.

JGF: Oh, okay.

MB: And, uh... I worked, uh... after school, uh... six hours after school, uh... I was into doing carpet then year – years ago, and when, uh... when they built Rockdale West up there in the early seventies I – I did and, uh, I went to high school, I had a brand new car I bought right out of George O'Hara's showroom 'cause I worked hard and saved my money.

JGF: Wow... wow...

MB: You know I always had – day after I turned twenty-one I bought my first house.

JGF: Wow! Good for you!

MB: 'Cause I always saved the money that...

JGF: Well you'd been working full-time for quite awhile by then, right?

MB: Yeah. I've been working all my life, actually. I come home I'm still working.
[laughs] 'Cause I got two hundred and fifty feet of hedges to cut all the time.

JGF: [laughs] Oh, man! Oh, yeah...

MB: An old Victorian house I bought and, uh... and done over. 1871, house I bought, the guy was a hundred and two and the wife was ninety-five, and they didn't touch it and, uh, forty-five years it wasn't touched, so I went in there and redid it all over to its original, uh...

JGF: Wow...

MB: ...its original color, everything I got...

JGF: Wow!

MB: ...on the house, all done.

JGF: Did you have to research it or could you tell by scraping off old layers of stuff?

MB: Uh, research. Research and I got some pictures of - in the twenties, and stuff of way things... you know, there was a lot of missing moldings on it, I had to make 'em myself 'cause you can't buy 'em.

JGF: Wow!

MB: So I'm good with wood and the wood lays and stuff like that. Made up the wood for it, yeah.

JGF: Huh! And how did you pick up the woodworking skills?

[08:02]

MB: Oh, I, uh, studied it in school, and old timers. Old timers. I was friend - I've always hung with old people...

JGF: Ah! Okay...

MB: ... to learn the things - I've always - shops and stuff - I've always run into older peoples and they always took a - kinda like I learned to weld from a guy that's a welder, I'm not a certified welder, but I can do anything, like...

JGF: Right.

MB: ... 'Cause I learned from the older people, what - anything I tried to and didn't know what to do I'd ask somebody that knew...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: ...what they were talking about.

JGF: Yeah? That's great.

MB: [laughs] So I had plenty of time 'cause I never went fishing and drank 'cause that was a waste of time.

JGF: Okay, so you're one of the ones that don't...

MB: So I always... kept busy.

JGF: Yeah. So you got home from port and put the money in the bank, not into the bar, huh?

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Yeah, yeah. I guess it's...

MB: Bested it.

JGF: Huh. I wonder how that works, I mean you hear a lot about that and I wonder if it's, like, people like you who've grown up in it and seen the family side and...

MB: Yeah.

JGF: ...that you're doing it as a living for your future, versus people that maybe leave home and come up here sort of unconnected, I don't know if it plays out that way or...

[09:13]

MB: Well... you've got different nationalities here. Like the Newfoundlanders came here, and, you know, actually started the union, and then the Norwegians followed them from New York, they all hung in New York, sold their fish out of New York.

JGF: Oh, right. Okay.

MB: So they came, the – the Newfoundlanders started coming in the – I wanna say – forty-nine to fifty-something, the – most of them started coming.

JGF: Uh huh. Yeah...

MB: And, uh... they all got along together, the Newfoundlanders and the thing – they all worked together, you know, I've had... I've been skipper out of my time twenty-something years out of my time and I've had, uh...

JGF: Wow...

MB: ...that's all I've ever really hired myself, but...

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Oh, I've had a couple of Portuguese guys, but...

JGF: Yeah, yeah...

MB: I – you stick to...

JGF: What - you know, and what works...

MB: What works, right.

[10:10]

JGF: Yup. So maybe you could, um, just give me an overview of – I'm sure like the first time you went on a boat were you partial share, and working up to skipper, all that...?

MB: Oh! Yes, there's a difference today and yesterday.

JGF: Okay.

MB: When I started fishing... when I went out fishing I got, uh... I first went, the first trip, I got a quarter share. Then I got, when I could do something like, uh... not fully mend yet but once I could do stuff like splice wire, splice rope, anything, got a half share.

JGF: Okay.

MB: And when you could mend twine, and put a patch in, then you were considered full share.

JGF: Ahh!

MB: So it all depended on how much brains you had and how much you wanted to learn...

JGF: Right!

MB: So that way it made the guy want – like you're seeing a guy go home with fifteen hundred dollars.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Right?

JGF: Yeah.

MB: In the seventies.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: I'm going to say in the seventies, now. You see a guy go home with fifteen hundred dollars. And you're saying to yourself "Gee, I'm going home with five hundred dollars. Ain't it time I get a little smarter?" [laughs] So you learn faster that way. But today, there's no men to really go – you know, there's no – not a lot of tradition like there was years ago, and like fathers, sons going fishing...

JGF: Right...

MB: ...they're more or less taking different people.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Uh... and, ah... they give 'em full share 'cause they – it's hard to get somebody to go dragging where it was, you know what I mean, and...?

JGF: Oh! Really?

MB: ...as it was before.

JGF: Okay. Huh, well too...

MB: It's harder to find somebody that's, you know, gonna do the job because there's – now, there is no benefits.

JGF: Right...

MB: You don't have no medical. You don't have no pension. You don't have no nothing. If you go on a non-union boat, which most of 'em are, now, you have nothing. So who is gonna come into dragging? Who's gonna want to go dragging?

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Even scalloping they don't have it. But, they're making the good money so these kids are grabbing the money and riding around in new cars and...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: ...going to Foxwoods, not buy – not doing what they should be, I mean save a little, and thing and – that's...

JGF: Right, in case the stock goes down later or something...

MB: Oh yeah.

JGF: Hmm, interesting. Huh.

[12:28]

MB: There's a difference in now and there wasn't as much – there's always been a drug problem, but there's... more of a drug problem today than there ever was.

JGF: You know, it's interesting because having left last year's festival the impression I'd gotten was it had eased up. And then this year...

MB: Nah, it's not it...

JGF: ...I'm hearing things this year that makes it sound like that's just not the case.

MB: No, it's not the case. I've been fishing and I've been on boats and - and not knowing that the guy is you find out when you go... but, uh, I don't go again.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: I don't like it. I don't like working for somebody else that's sick.

JGF: Yeah!

MB: Till they heal up, I don't... don't like that.

JGF: Right.

MB: And I... I – I like, or I hire, people with a family and a home, that have to make money to pay bills, not people that run the streets, and that's the problem of people hiring... other people that run the streets, which shouldn't be allowed 'cause there's plenty of Americans and there's plenty of things to get – do – help your own country first before you're helping somebody...

JGF: Mm hmm.

MB: ...somebody else that's non legit, I can see a legit person that has a family like I say and things...

JGF: Yeah.

MB: ...but there are things...

JGF: It's all – all...

MB: ...that should be done a little different than they – they are, to weed that kind of problem out but...

JGF: Right... I know, somebody stopped by yesterday and we were just talking and they said they felt like the insurance companies... should impose like random drug testing past...

MB: Yes, I believe they should too

JGF: ...was it past the barrier? They were saying you have to get past a certain point in the harbor before people are actually going to start using the drugs on the boat.

MB: Well...

JGF: ...or something... I don't know.

MB: It would work... it would work if you just took a test because those guys that do...

JGF: They're not gonna stop.

MB: They're not gonna for the amount of time to uh...

JGF: Right, yeah.

MB: To do so you – you –

JGF: Just before they get on the boat...

MB: ...you weed out the bad ones and the ones that ain't bad yet maybe you'd be saving 'em because they'll learn that they can't do that now.

JGF: Yeah, that's true. And you know they...

MB: You know it might help, it will help...

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Even if you helped ten people...

JGF: Right...

MB: ...out of a hundred, you're gonna help something.

JGF: That's right. That's true.

MB: That's a start.

JGF: And then maybe entire families as a result...

MB: See a start... it's this thing that... we ain't gonna to happ - be anymore, which would be a great thing, you know?

JGF: And since there's no, like, corporate employer, for fishermen, say, who – who do you think should do – how should the drug testing be implemented, like should the Coast Guard handle it? Should insurance companies, or...?

[15:03]

MB: I think everybody on the boat should have some sort of training certificate... you know, in case something happens, the boat sinks, every man on the boat should know how to pump the boat out in case something happens – the engineer could bump his head and be knocked out, no one knows how to pump the boat out?

JGF: Wow.

MB: So every man on the boat should know his station, how to pump the boat out, and... and you should have a certificate that you've passed the test.

JGF: Uh huh.

MB: It shows you how to handle the survival suits, plus the life raft.

JGF: Right.

MB: Which wouldn't – how – how long would that take? Two eight hour classes?

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Two days out of your life?

JGF: Yeah.

MB: To save your life.

JGF: Right.

MB: Is well worth it. [laughs]

JGF: So as a skipper, are you pre – I know it sounded like from what I learned last year the skippers have some... leverage over how much safety comes into play. And so do you....

MB: Yeah. Oh, like the boat I am on, I'm not captain of this boat that I'm on, but the boat that I am on the captain... everybody knows where the EPIRB is. Everybody knows how to put a survival suit on. Everybody knows what to do if something goes wrong, and where to go, and what to, you know, there's no panic stuff, and "what do I do?" [laughs]

JGF: Yeah. So...

MB: Everybody knows before hand, and then when a new man comes on he lear – we go through it all again...

JGF: Okay, so you're in charge of training them through that.

MB: Yeah, yeah.

JGF: The Coast Guard must love you.

MB: Oh yeah.

[16:39]

JGF: Mm hmm, that's great.... So you started out as a quarter share... is that?...

MB: Quarter share, yep.

JGF: And how... how long did it take you to work up through different...

MB: Oh, probably... took me about six months, I guess you'd say. It probably, uh... uh, yeah, about six months I'd say, yeah, six months before I got full share.

JGF: Mmm hmm.... And by then you were mending nets and everything?

MB: Oh yeah.

JGF: Wow.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: So you really took it on yourself to learn. Well how many...?

MB: Well I went over to Ship Supply when I got in...

JGF: Oh!

MB: ...and learned... from like older guys, like Louie Doucette, so all that stuff I – no one had to tell me to do this, I did this on my own, I always went around and... I'd see the old guys, they'd show me this, show me that, so that's why I – I took a big interest because when I see somebody going home with fifteen hundred and I'm going home with five hundred I'm going to learn to be that guy too!

JGF: [laughs] Yeah?

MB: I want to be just like him? [laughs]

JGF: Good for you!

MB: But like I say today it ain't that way...

JGF: Yeah.

[17:37]

MB: There's such a shortage in – in – in decent people that there's nothing attractive for somebody to come in to go fishing today.

JGF: Right.

MB: It's mostly like... if they're making good money you – you'll see everybody looking for a job scalloping. Once the scallops - you know yourself every seven years they deplete...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: ...September time there's less so the trips are smaller.

JGF: Yup.

MB: Now you don't see as many of the guys looking for a job, do ya?

JGF: Ha ha.

MB: But when the money ain't there, now you're gonna have to be scratching looking for guys so they're going to take those kind of guys, anything they can get to go.

JGF: Yeah... yeah.

MB: You know, that's... same thing as the whaling days.

JGF: Yeah, right?

MB: In today's days.

JGF: Yeah? Huh. Okay.

MB: You can't get 'em, you Shanghai 'em. [laughs]

JGF: [laughs] That's a great saying...

MB: Yup.

JGF: So you must now pretty much... it sounds like you have pretty much a core group of people that you can count on to be your crew.

MB: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[18:41]

JGF: Yeah, that's interesting, huh... So when did you actually become like first mate and skipper and all that?

MB: Twenty-two years old, I first went skipper.

JGF: Wow.

MB: And the guys they had with me were for fifteen years, they all retired and they were... Norman Tigo... Ducky Tigo, well Ducky Tigo was my cook for years and years but he had a heart attack and... he wouldn't be able to go fishing anymore, he had uh... he had a bypass and he didn't want to chance it so he become a... became a janitor...

JGF: Oh, okay

MB: ...in the school, and he loved the job believe it or not, but he – he's been there quite awhile now, he's – he's probably... let me see, he's got to be retiring pretty – he must be near sixty – sixty now actually...

JGF: Yeah?

MB: ...I think sixty, probably sixty years old now, yeah, he was ten years older – so he's gotta be sixty.

JGF: Wow.

MB: But, uh, the other guys I had retired with me, you know, retired, but I was union then, you know?

JGF: How did – how did – was that a big blow for you? Actually on Friday I...

MB: Yeah, it – it....

JGF: I interviewed John Xifares...

MB: Yup.

JGF: And he just sounded very – even today, still sad about what happened with unions.

MB: Yeah. Which was terrible.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: I mean for the working man himself it's uh – it's no good.

JGF: Right.

MB: You know what I mean? You got a family and think, when you retire, you'd have a pension if you worked for – if the boat is in a union, you're paying a pension, a group plan. So a group plan on medical, a group plan on – like I have no medical.

JGF: Wow...

MB: So if I was to go buy medical, if a guy that come down go fishing goes on a boat, he ain't got no medical, so he's gotta buy it.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: If he ain't in a group plan, we're talking fifteen to eighteen hundred dollars if you got a wife and two kids

JGF: Yeah

MB: Now how can he afford... to pay his own taxes, match his own social security, which they made us self-employed which was the biggest mistake in the history of time... because you're self-employed, but you can collect unemployment... and you're, uh, according to them you're not self-employed. If I was self-employed, really self-employed, wouldn't I be able to take a share of the oil, the fuel going aboard the boat, and all the expenses? And put 'em on my income taxes? I'm not allowed. I gotta match my own social security. So there's a lot to this which took away from the working man to give to the – to keep the boats going, for the owners.

JGF: Yeah, because, yeah, I mean, some of that money, I mean those expenses come out of your – your pay in a sense but you can't tax those off.

[21:23]

MB: Yeah. Now we're buying fishing days, we only got so many fishing days to go dragging.

JGF: Yup.

MB: Now we just bought forty fishing days at nine hundred dollars a day. So that has to come out of the gang. So now we're dividing it by the amount of trips we do as a year, and they take that out, so that's more money out of my pay.

JGF: Who are you buying the days from, I don't understand.

MB: Other licenses.

JGF: Oh, oh, oh!

MB: You haven't got enough to go fishing on your license, to do a year's work, so you have to buy... time from like a scalloper guy who's got dragging and scalloping, he might not want to use his forty-five days, so you match up engine size and boat size, you can buy his time.

JGF: Oh wow!

MB: As of now, I don't know if that's gonna be next year, might not be so...

JGF: Wow, yeah right.

MB: Is there gonna be enough places for guys to go fishing, that are fishing? So it's just wiping out... it's just wiping out – if you notice, there are a lot of people selling their homes that – fishermen, selling their homes 'cause they can't afford to keep going any more...

JGF: Oh boy...

MB: There's a lot to this, more than just...

JGF: Oh, it – it's immensely complex now...

MB: It's deprec – yeah, it – it just goes on and on into – into, uh – and like you got your friend, you know, Radar and Chris - new wife...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Now he's gonna suffer because there ain't gonna be buying the gear – because the boats ain't going to use the gear or the thing he – his – his job – his business is going to be a little down, down, down so it... the banks going down, down, down, down, you see banks clos- there ain't one on every corner like there was before [laughs]

JGF: Yeah

MB: They're starting to not as grow as fast as they were before.

JGF: Yeah... yeah... well

MB: So it's a chain reaction in New Bedford, the fishing business is a big... money thing into – into this economy for New Bedford.

JGF: Yeah, so you've been in long enough to see all those changes in the regulations.

MB: Oh yeah, I've been in to see... see the good and the bad and the ugly, I call it. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

JGF: And what would you say is each? What's the good?

[23:28]

MB: The good is, uh... some of the people are good to work with, and...

JGF: Uh huh

MB: And... some are smart enough to make a living where you can keep your family going...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: The bad, is the regulations of getting tighter and tighter and squeezing more and more, but some of 'em they don't want to listen to like bycatch and throwing fish over, like... you go out – you allowed to the west in a thousand pounds of cod, to the east and the 67-40, you're allowed three hundred pounds of cod a day, so you haul back and you got... a thousand weight of cod. And you got your flounder. So now you already got your limit of three hundred pounds a day if you're only going seven days. So now you're throwing over the cod and saving the things so ninety percent of what you throw over dies.

JGF: Oh boy.

MB: There's trips where fishermen have thrown over twenty to thirty thousand dollars worth of catch over, and they're making what they made in the seventies... cause of the price of fuel, the price of the days at sea...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: You have to buy extra to be able to work, so you can work your round to make a paycheck for your family...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: So everything is cutted in... matching your own social security...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: ...you think – you know what I mean? So...

JGF: So...

MB: Your pay is – I made more 1977, I'm going to say for instance, my W-2 form said forty-eight thousand dollars. I was successful on a successful boat.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: And, uh... [laughs] last year I made... fifty-nine thousand the year before. This year I am not going to make forty-eight thousand.

JGF: Wow...

MB: So it's getting sad

JGF: Yeah...

MB: But... for me where I've been in it a long time and I'm established my own things and I've got some kind of thing when I retire, I just sell my things and I can still live, but the guy that's coming in here to start into this, he can't do none of that.

JGF: Right.

MB: There's no opportunity for him but just... work and maybe get enough, so who's going to come in to go fishing?

[25:23]

JGF: Would you – what would you even advise a young person to do today as far as going into fishing or not?

MB: I... well I know... my generation, my family's been fishing – my son... I got one son, and he's not going to go fishing 'cause there's nothing for him so it's the end of my family, the Bruce family...

JGF: Wow...

MB: ...to not be fishermen.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: So here's where it stops, right now.

JGF: After three hundred, four hundred years.

MB: Right. Here's where it stops because it – he'll never make it, he'll never own a home, he'll never own a thing, he'll never be able to... make the American dream of...

JGF: Right... is he going to go into any aspect of the industry do you know or is he too...?

MB: Uh... no. No.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: No. I hope to hell he becomes a dentist. [laughs] Trying to convince him to go into any of the medical

JGF: Yup, that's a big field...

MB: College, so I'm...he – he can do anything he wants...

JGF: Right.

MB: And I'll help him but... I won't help him in the fishing business 'cause we already know that's wrong.

JGF: Yeah... so the boat you go out on you don't own it right you're just...

MB: No...

JGF: You're skipper for the Seal...

MB: No, I'm not the skipper on the Seal, I'm... I go mate and when the other guy takes another boat I go on deck.

JGF: Okay...

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Wait, I don't understand. So you skipper most...

MB: No, I haven't been skipper in....

JGF: Oh, okay.

MB: They cut the boat up, they cut... I haven't been skipper in five years now.

JGF: Oh, okay.

MB: Well, no, I can't say that, I took Donnie Calen's boat out for... a summer there two years ago...

JGF: So it sort of depends...

MB: It all depends... on what I want to do, right now it don't matter. For me to go skipper of a boat I gotta have men to go, and I can't stand taking... guys that are on drugs, or things...

JGF: Right...

MB: That's all there is around and I'm not gonna do it, so I'm just easing out right now.

JGF: You are, yeah.

MB: I mean I could tomorrow say hey good bye and, you know what I mean?

JGF: You're sort of detaching yourself from...

MB: Yeah, I... you know, I'm in the position I can do that, but...

JGF: Mmm...

MB: Not many are, but...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: I can just say, yeah, you know, see you later alligator, and, you know, get fed up. I'm with guys – I like who I'm fishing, they're older guys and serious guys, not guys that are around today, there's too many...

JGF: It's like you said, some of 'em are starting to retire so you don't have your old crowd...

MB: Yeah.

JGF: ...crowd to choose from.

MB: Yeah, right.

JGF: That's... huh, that's... yeah...

MB: Sad. Sad.

JGF: Yeah, it is... and I wonder too like it – well last- I mean when John Xifares started talking about the whole disappearance of the union and the benefits...

MB: Yeah.

JGF: It just seems like this is... the result of that

MB: That's what it is.... And.... I don't know.

[28:36]

JGF: Yeah, interesting. Well, let's switch gears a little, if I can. We always like to ask, um, questions about things like some of your most memorable experiences, or close calls with storms, or anything along those lines?

MB: Oh! [laughs] You got the right guy here 'cause I've been out in every gale there ever was!

JGF: Oh no! And you're laughing about it! I love it! Oh my god.

MB: I've had couple close calls... I've had a couple close calls... I've been out... I've been out in a blizzard there that one of... been out in... been out in 'em all actually, the documented ones.

JGF: Do you remember was your first one particularly scary to you, or...?

MB: Oh! My first winter fishing... that was something. When we laid – had to lay, you know in a fifteen foot sea, in a seventeen foot sea, Northeast gale warning... February, January, every bit of water that touched the boat turned to ice. The day time you were chipping the ice off the boat laying, never mind – but you had to try to jog up, and keep the boat... in a level... like you – certain areas you don't want to be in in a Northeast wind and certain level bottoms like you'd fish you go to the uh... winter fishing grounds...

JGF: Okay...

MB: ...which is closed now, so you can't even go there in the winter where it's safe, you're – you're – you're locked into different places, you pick a place to go fishing, you're stuck in. So it's more dangerous today than it ever was.

JGF: Huh.

MB: That's why you got more men missing in the last... five years now than you did in the twenty before, put it that way. You know, the twenty-five before.

JGF: And they're more dangerous because of how the bottom is of the ocean, or other things coming in...

MB: Because where you're being forced, a guy goes out fishing... And you pick where you're going fishing, say a scalloper, dragger, what – you know, you pick where you're going fishing. So each day... you're only got so many fishing days, which are allowed, you got... to go. So now that guy ain't going to come out of there, if he comes out of there he's going to come all the way home, and wait so many days to go back out again, the three to four, three to five days before you can go back out again. You come out of there you're all done, that's the end of your trip, you – you gotta keep jogging in there even though it's... it's rough in there, where you could be going to the southern, let the boat lay and drift and let it... go with the tide to the southern on a southerly tide and get to a place where it's all even depth, smooth bottom, where the seas ain't as rough.

JGF: So the bottom is actually affecting...

MB: Yeah

JGF: how the seas are...

MB: Yeah

JGF: Interesting...

MB: Oh yes, the bottom, the uh... you know, the seas build up bigger in certain areas, they got rips here and, say you got all the walls over here.

JGF: Yup.

MB: So now you're to the southern of 'em in a Northeast wind that's already broke the seas down...

JGF: Yup.

MB: ...so you're behind here... you're more or less in the lee of the wind, like being behind a building where you ain't getting windy right? You get behind a building, so that serves as the same pur – purpose... the ocean...

JGF: Wow.

MB: ...the way that the depths are, so now you're in front of – if you're in front of it locked into an area where you have to stay into, if you come out you're going to lose your trip, so they're forcing the guy to stay in there and get beat up and the boat beat up

and you beat up. [laughs] You know what I mean? And that's the dangers of what... they have done.

JGF: Right, and that sort of speaks to what I've heard people say... over the past couple of years is that when they put them in place they didn't know fishing the way fishermen knew it...

MB: No.

JGF: ...and they wouldn't have ever have done anything like that.

MB: ...and... not too many wanted to listen, either.

JGF: Right. Did you try...?

MB: Cause I've spoke and I've spoke and I've spoke until I've turned blue, red, green in the face [laughs].

JGF: Uh huh.

MB: But it did no good.

JGF: Hmm.

[32:38]

MB: What they do is they like to look at you... and say "yeah, I agree with you", to make you feel good, they're saying what you want to hear, but they don't do what – what they're hearing.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: There is more of them working than there are fishermen that they're making... hundred something, hundred seventy is the... the other one's making, what, two hundred and eighty thousand dollars there, the Kirkland woman there, the other ones are all making over a hundred thousand dollars. Jobs created for them so long. And they know how stretch 'em out, they know how to put in a little rule, and then say they want to change it so they can last their job another year and another year, it just goes on, the bureaucratic stuff, power of people making money.

JGF: That's the ugly, huh?

MB: The ugly, that's the ugly ugly.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: It just goes on and on, it's just like uh... me saying uh... the government – I'm selling a hammer to the government for fifty-two dollars when it costs eight dollars.

JGF: Right...

MB: In a – in a word – so to speak...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: ...to make you understand

JGF: Yup

MB: There's a lot to fishing and there's a lot to... to be straightened out, but...

JGF: What do you think about – I mean the fact of having... closed areas, days at sea, do you think... for as bad as the regulations are and how they've been implemented, do you think any of that's really necessary, or would the fishermen sort of... be the stewards on their own?

MB: Well in every society and everything you have to have rules and regulations.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: And you have to follow 'em.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: And there are – sad to say is, it's hard to get fishermen to stick together... since the beginning of time each guy is worried about what he's gonna do or how much he's gonna make, more than this guy or that guy, so they don't really stick together in things...

JGF: Mmm...

MB: If they got together, and – and – and stuck together, but it's so hard to get... any group of... people to stick together.

JGF: Yeah, well...

MB: To be honest.

JGF: And... by nature you're all sort of an independent lot...

MB: Right.

JGF: ...out on your little boat in the open sea like...

MB: Right. So that just goes to show you, you know what I mean?... everybody wants to be the... the big guy [laughs]

JGF: Right. Well, yeah...

MB: So to speak.

[35:02]

JGF: Huh... interesting... Um, what I'm wondering you – since you're one – you really, you know, took advantage of the old timers' wisdom and... did they ever talk about some of their stories, or did they ever have, you know, you hear about the old beliefs and superstitions about like the hatch cover...?

MB: Oh, we couldn't wear red shirts...

JGF: Really? That was a...

MB: If you wore a red shirt... oh no my god, you can't wear red shirts, bad luck.

JGF: Did you get any reason for why it was bad luck or just... don't do it?

MB: It's just bad luck, you ain't going to catch no fish with a red shirt on.

JGF: Huh!

MB: Now that was the Newfoundlanders.

JGF: Okay.

MB: Now I've been with old, real old... when I was in my twenties, Norwegian people, I've been with guys that actually, when they weren't catching no cod fish, take – take two little cod fish and put 'em on the gallows and set 'em on fire [laughs]

JGF: Huh!

MB: As a thing to, uh... so you'd catch fishers, those that are real old, old superstitious ones...

JGF: Interesting.

MB: But you won't see that today, that's...

JGF: Yeah, the impression I get is that's pretty much...

MB: Gunnar would know a lot of those stories if you ...

JGF: Gunnar...

MB: Gunnar, the old... Gunnar – what is his last name now? – Gunnar Ingus? No. Gunnar... I'm trying to think now... one of the old... some of the old guys would tell you some of the old... silly superstitions, you know?

JGF: Huh!

MB: Or whistle, whistle on a boat is a bad thing.

JGF: Uh huh. Did you ever make that mistake?

MB: Oh, you know, you – sometimes, you know how you whistle a song and...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: They just – they - they'd look at you, "whistle – you can't whistle on a fishing boat!"... you know what I mean, I guess 'cause in the fog, and... years ago in the fog a whistle meant something, you know, like two blows or one blow on a whistle or...

JGF: Oh!

MB: So I guess that had to do with it, that's the way I figured it, you know...

JGF: Yeah?

MB: Just said to don't whistle – you don't whistle on a fishing boat, it's not proper.

JGF: Huh!

MB: That's what I was told when I first went fishing. What else is there now?

JGF: Well I've heard a lot of people talk about...

MB: Never turn the wheel leaving the dock into the sun. It's bad luck, turn the boat into the sun.

JGF: Really!

MB: So they – I've seen guys back away from the dock trying to get away from the dock and not turn the wheel into the sun and just keep going back and forth til they can get the boat out enough or spring the boat away if... [laughs] so they wouldn't do that.

JGF: Aha! And as soon as they were away from the dock then it would be okay...

MB: Then you're alright but what you'd t- t- to turn the wheel into the sun, leaving the dock.

JGF: Wow! Huh...

MB: There's – Mike McDonald don't – won't do it...

JGF: He won't?

MB: I've been fishing with him – old Mike McDonald, well he's, uh... he's only sixty-two, sixty, what is he, sixty-two now?

JGF: Yeah?

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Wow.

MB: Turn the wheel into the sun...

JGF: The hatch cover, have you ever heard the – don't put it upside down?

MB: Oh, yeah, don't put a hatch cover upside down?... And when I first started fishing the big thing was canned milk. You know, you had canned milk for your coffee or tea?

JGF: Mm hmmm.

[37:48]

MB: Well I didn't drink – well we drank tea, I drank tea all my life. I didn't have my first cup of coffee I was twenty-five years old, learned coffee cause they were all – drank – tea drinkers from uh... all Newfoundlanders drink tea – drank tea.

JGF: Huh!

MB: Not many drank coffee.

JGF: Yeah?

MB: My mother never had a cup of coffee and my sister, she's... forty years old, she's never had a cup of coffee.

JGF: Wow! Oh!...

MB: [laughs]

JGF: That's that old British Isles thing, huh?

MB: Yeah, I guess so, yeah. Scottish people, uh... they're all – all – yeah, British Isles.

JGF: Tea drinkers up there...

MB: Tea toddlers, I call 'em, tea toddlers.

JGF: Tea... [laughs]

MB: And, uh, the old hard bisc – oh Jesus, them hard... I don't know how I ate those growing up. I got the soft ones now. [laughs]

JGF: Yeah!

MB: You know the old hard – I don't know if you ever knew 'em, hard biscuits?

JGF: I've heard of them, but no.

MB: You'd have with the tea... I mean they tasted real good but they were hard, something like a baby cookie actually, you ever have – for the kid teething?

JGF: Oh, okay. I've seen... yeah...

MB: Something on that idea.

JGF: Almost like the Italian...

MB: Only they're round.

JGF: ...biscotti thing?

MB: Only they're round... Yeah, it's – I – except I don't even...

JGF: You would dunk 'em then or no?

MB: Yeah, you could dunk em or...

JGF: Break your teeth...

MB: Break... break em right – and you put the tea in your mouth, try to soften it up a bit. [laughs] Dunk 'em, yeah.

[39:01]

JGF: Huh. The other thing that came up last year for me for the first time was people bringing up unexpected finds in their catch... Like...

MB: Oh yeah?

JGF: Have you had any... of those?

MB: Yeah, I've had, uh... I've had things as ammunition, from the, uh... uh, Navy and Coast Guard throwing over.

JGF: Wow.

MB: I've had uh... well a lot of old bot – I still have today, old bottles. Uh... I got a... whaling uh... a whaling uh... one of the early ones, the – the - the front of the... where you put the pin in, so when it went into the whale, the little wooden pin would break and then it'd go this way so you'd catch it. And when the black guy – black guy in New Bedford was the blacksmith that designed that.

JGF: Oh!

MB: It was a Cape Verdean man that was uh... one of the – I think somewhere around 1890, I got an old – some old stuff.

JGF: Yeah... huh.

MB: Everything in my house is from the 1800s.

JGF: Yeah?

MB: My furniture in my house is 1800s.

JGF: Wow. And some of it's from the bottom of the ocean, that's neat.

MB: Some of the stuff I got, uh... let me see, I got a lot of glass bottles, old medicine bottles and stuff. I've seen a cruise ship uh... I've been fishing and I've picked up Japanese beer one time.

JGF: You're kidding, wow.

MB: Was thrown over, a Jap– all in Japanese.

JGF: Huh!

MB: Japanese beer bottles, k keikas (?), they must have thrown it over the date or something, you know, thrown it over when the...

JGF: So, it was still unopened?

MB: It was still unopened and, uh, we tried it and everything, some guys drank it, but I wouldn't. [laughs]

JGF: Ah! Oh really! [laughs]

MB: I wouldn't take a sip of it.

JGF: Ah!

MB: Out of the ocean... found a... shoes, old shoes, the nails through 'em all worn, you know, like uh... I don't know how they're still preserved.

JGF: The old leather...

MB: One time, picked up a... container, with all... with a – a guy was buried inside of it, thrown over, on a uh... years – well, they stopped uh... let me see, what year was that, seventy-seven? Seventy-eight. They stopped the Russians and the Japanese and the things they were... so there was a body.

JGF: You mean like a...

MB: There was a body and a...

JGF: Burial at sea?

MB: A burial, they had a burial at sea, but...

JGF: Okay.

MB: We were towing along and picked up the guy's – what they put him in, they put him in oil and they...

JGF: Oh...

MB: ...seal it all up, make – like he's like in a big sardine, actually.

JGF: Wow. So what did you do with it?

MB: Threw it back over.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Right where we got it.

JGF: Right.

MB: Yup. I wasn't gonna open it...

JGF: No.

MB: But it was a Japanese... it was Japanese.

JGF: Yeah. Huh... So with the ammunition, would you throw that back, or would you report that to the Coast Guard, or what would you...?

MB: Oh, there was a little... bullets, they were the... you know, the little bullets... that go into the gun that they – I guess they shoot the airplanes down with, and....

JGF: Oh! About like six inches long?

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Huh.

MB: And we threw, we just threw 'em back over but...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Didn't wanna... Oh! One time I got a... piece of an airplane, I got the wheel... of a private plane that got lost twenty years before, had the registration number on the windshield, I turned that into the Coast Guard and I come to find out that's what it was.

JGF: Wow...

[42:37]

MB: I picked up a bottle of a kid. Somebody in a school in uh... where was it?... I'm trying to think, I even wrote the kid, the kid that was... going around the ocean for two years, I picked that up, that was in the... nineteen - 1981.

JGF: Wow!

MB: I picked up a bottle, the school kids, they... they sealed, they – in soda bottles or, uh... any plastic container, they, they sealed up with wax, tape and wax.

JGF: Yeah. Yeah.

MB: And they sent the thing on - I sent it to a kid, it was – a kid in fifth grade, a girl. I can't remember where the heck she was, somewhere down the Cape I think that was, the girl was. I sent her, you know... uh... uh, stuff, you know, uh... one time. I picked that up and when it was two years they released it – ago – that those kids released it.

JGF: That's wild...

MB: So that was probably the... cutest and the most fun...

JGF: Yeah!

MB: ...thing cause I wrote the kid and the kid wrote me a couple of others times.

JGF: She did – that's neat.

MB: That's a long time ago, that's...

JGF: That's exciting, yeah.

MB: Yeah, that was exciting for me. I – I liked it and the kid, the way the kid – how good the kid wrote, I said Jesus, this kid's a – write, got beautiful handwriting, better than mine!

JGF: Yeah.

MB: Cause I went to Catholic school and you gotta write everything down the... the nuns say so you're... you're like this, you write like... you end up writing terrible, because you constantly have to write notes down what they say, if they talk

JGF: Now see that's interesting 'cause in my old days when I did have really nice handwriting...

MB: Yeah...

JGF: Somebody said to me once did you go to Catholic school and I said well for my first two years and I did learn to script cursive there...

MB: Yeah.

JGF: But we, I mean I, cause we practiced it and I didn't stay long enough maybe to get into that phase of having to write everything down cause I was only there through second grade.

MB: Oh yeah, we had to write everything down they said, Jesus. If you didn't... nun crack you on the hand or something, with a ruler.... They were...

JGF: [laughs] There's the oral histories we should be doing, huh?

MB: Yeah, the old – they couldn't do that now, they'd be arrested.

JGF: I – I...

MB: Kid today...

JGF: I can't – I look back on it and I...

MB: Kid today could swear at a teacher or something and, and get a detention. Jeez, I – you wouldn't even think of doing that anyway, but I'm just saying...

JGF: Yeah, it's gone...

MB: Everything is gone different, changed...

JGF: The pendulum's swung too far the other way on..

MB: Yeah, it has, it has, yeah...

[44:50]

JGF: You – what would you say, um, as you look back on your time – well, the regulations are obviously big changes – what – what about technology?

MB: Oh, technology has come a long way...

JGF: Uh huh.

MB: You got, uh... well there are... you have – do have... better safety...

JGF: Mm hmm

MB: Cause you're, you know, with the boat tracks and plus the EPIRB and... electronics has gotten better as... you know. Actually you can call home now where before you couldn't and- and- and tell 'em don't worry we're alright and...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: You couldn't really do that before... in some of the weather. Uh... there's a difference there. And in gearwise, uh... uh... hasn't really... a lot lot hasn't really changed.... As far as the basics, but... gear sizes has changed, bigger, so the smallest stuff get away...

JGF: You mean like...

MB: There are sophisticated more... more gear, uh... and you got uh... better uh... you got plotters now, years ago you didn't have a plotter, plot a tow to stay on your tow where you got it, you know, and you go over it again you get it again.

JGF: Oh, okay is that so that...

MB: ...to move and to...

JGF: ...when you want to go back next time, or just so that you save where it...

MB: As you're fishing now, say there was a little spot you saw...

JGF: Oh, okay.

MB: Now you can see –in a machine that shows it...

JGF: Yeah.

MB: The spot of fish so you wanna try that again, go over it again and... you get... a few more are there and, you know, you do...

JGF: That's true...

MB: It has improved things.

JGF: You have to keep moving...

MB: Technology.

JGF: ...so then you're constantly having to what, turn around and go back over the spot that you...

MB: Yeah, so that you can see 'em now where before you couldn't see 'em years ago 'cause you didn't have the technology, the machines you do today.

JGF: Huh.

MB: They're, you know, everything is better, the engines are better. The new engines now on the boats... the modern boats like the boat I'm on now has a brand new engine put in it, it's less smog, less this... it – it – it – you can put – laptop plug into it and find out if it skipped a heartbeat, what date, what time of the day, could be...

JGF: Oh wow.

MB: I mean we've gotten the technology and when they come down here and some of these boats, these real old engines that chug-a-lug-a-lug and it's polluting a lot they're gonna have to change so a lotta guys gonna be into trouble.

JGF: Oh, so is that like...

[47:21]

MB: So there's the next step of the next... thing now that our last president put in, will be coming in effect the eight – eight – yeah, eighth year, 2008

JGF: Huh.

MB: So they'll be some restrictions on these boats, on the engines of these boats, which we'll all have to... do things that are costly to the boat owner.

JGF: What is it...

MB: Which will affect... the poor guy... the working guy.

JGF: Right... yeah...

MB: Somehow... [laughs]

JGF: Man, they're getting like – when I heard how much these boats cost these days I just couldn't...

MB: It's unreal what a – what a license of a boat goes for today, then that it did just five years ago.

JGF: What's the difference? How much is it?

MB: Well, I'm gonna say... over doubled.

JGF: Yeah?

MB: And tripled and something's, you know?

JGF: Wow...

MB: Scallop business...every license that was not being used from here to Tubuktu (sic) or scallop license that wasn't being used either been sold or... bought, and added onto something before – just before regulations changed...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Or... there's a boat now with that... license from down Virginia or... or down wherever, one dredges, two dredges, you know, everything is being used again.

JGF: Hmm, yeah.

MB: Cause the money's there right now

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Seven-fifty for scallops, how you gonna not make a living.

JGF: Right

MB: You know?

JGF: Wow... huh... interesting

MB: Yup.

[48:53]

JGF: Um, a couple more questions that come to mind... what – what makes a good fisherman in your mind and also I would ask you what makes a good skipper.

MB: Uh... what makes a good man uh... if you – to enjoy your job and to –to, uh, do your best.

JGF: Mm hmm...

MB: With a skipper... he gotta be knowledgeable of uh – to be able to work with people, to... to, uh... no, you know, you should think of the best for – for your men like, you know, safety, know everything about the boat before you taking it, don't just take a boat and go fishing, know how it works, how it pumps out, what it's problems have been, how old's the wire in the rigging...

JGF: Huh... oh...

MB: If something could break, always check everything out before you take the boat out, which a lot of guys don't even go out – oh, the thing fell down – no one noticed it because no one looked.

JGF: Wow...

MB: But, learn... what it is, what you... talk to older people... a younger guy going skippering, you know, being interested in what's all around you, up a loft, all the wiring...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Which they know – know how long wire lasts. If it's bare wire up there and it's steel wire, not stainless steel, you got five years on that wire. How long's that wire been up there? How does it look?

JGF: So you're actually crawl – crawl – climbing right out...

MB: There's a lot to fishing, and there's a lot to being... what there is to be, you just gotta think – think well. [laughs]

JGF: And... but like I'm trying to think of when the change from Eastern rig to Western rig – did you see that change or had that happened?

MB: Ah... all's I... there wasn't any Western rigs when I started fishing, it was all Eastern rigs.

JGF: Oh, okay, it was... and what do you think about that change?

MB: It was a few, uh... yeah, it is better, it went to better... the Eastern rigs were better in bad weather, than...

JGF: Oh, really...

MB: Than a Western rig...

JGF: Huh...

MB: The pilot house being in the house, they were better sea boats 'cause they... some of them drew more water and they shape of 'em, like a big banana in the water versus a... some of 'em are flat, these boats here, not really, uh... made some of 'em, made in Alabama, not for up this kinda water, but they put rolling chocks on 'em and the outrigger, you know... you put steel on the bottom so the... going this way like fins so the help, but...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: ...a boat should be designed for where you're fishing.

JGF: Right.

MB: And what kind of... you know... a weather boat, not be going down – but a lot of guys have bought old boats down South that... they shrimped with, they're shrimping in seven feet of water, so... so the boat don't draw much, right?

JGF: Oh, oh!

MB: Or they're fishing in twenty feet of water and they... and they got a boat that's a flat bottom boat so they bring 'em up here and they sell them, you know, going down to buy a cheap boat, bring it up here.

JGF: Yeah!

MB: So that's how you get those rolling – I call 'em the rolling boats.

JGF: Ah!

MB: Built like a bathtub, round on the bottom, no – nothing to... break the... wave. Make the rough...

JGF: Yeah... oh man.

[52:07]

MB: There's a lot to fishing, there's a lot to boats, there's lots of things, there's a lot to... consider about when you go skipper too.

JGF: Ah... yeah...

MB: Yeah

JGF: You don't – you never minded that it was sort of all on you?

MB: No, I never minded nothing that... I watched my father, who was skipper all his life, come to this country, he was twenty-one when he come...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: He was skipper right off the bat, so he's... he – I learned a lot from him, and... guys like, uh, well you see Woody Bowers, he's still alive, what's he, eighty?

JGF: Yeah...

MB: ...must be in his eighties, he come by uh... I fished with him, I even had him mate with me.

JGF: Ah!

MB: And I was his mate, he was my mate...

JGF: Oh, that's great!

MB: You know it was things like that, you know what I mean, so you learn and you become friends, it's a... a lot of people.

JGF: Huh.

MB: I like meeting new people.

JGF: That's neat.

MB: You know what I mean?

JGF: Yeah.

MB: I do have, uh... like meeting new people.

JGF: Huh... well, neat... well it's – at this point, I just have a couple more questions. One would be, is there anything that I haven't asked that you... felt you were going to come in here and want to talk about?

[53:18]

MB: Ah... the only thing I'd like to say is... where the... where they've made the – the rules and regulations of uh... like we're allowed five thousand of flounder, the summer before where it wasn't...

JGF: Uh huh...

MB: ...we were catching twenty thousand pounds of fish... of flounder, per trip.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Fifteen to twenty thousand. So... like... they've made them so... they just change things so big so fast where it doesn't give a guy a chance... or, you make like we've made up a flat net to go yellowtail and...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: We get the flat net done, we go out, they close the yellowtail, and so it costed twenty thousand dollars to build that net, which now is useless 'cause we can't use it.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: There – where we built if for there... there's too much making decisions but not making 'em... giving the working guy, the boat owner, and the men... that do work for the boat owner and visa versa a chance...

JGF: Right

MB: To – to, uh... try to keep a – a pace going where you can make a living, where you can have a pay, not like go out and one trip you might make some money and the next trip you don't make – to make a steady go at it....

JGF: Right...

MB: ...where you can... you know, you're not getting rich but getting... keep some kind of level thing, you know what I mean? Like, uh...

JGF: Right, yeah... Like maybe we need to cut back on the flounder catch but... let's help you...

MB: Not... extreme...

JGF: ...and let's help you...

MB: Let's put a quota on it...

JGF: ...recoup your investment...

MB: ...per trip, or... you know what I mean?

JGF: Yeah...

MB: ...not just say five thousand

JGF: Right.

MB: And you can't have... only three hundred are caught, and we can't... one species can't... of fish on multiple species license... cannot do it.

JGF: Right.

MB: You can't have a... a quarter, you can't have like Wal Mart and – and just sell all... all food, he has to sell food, clothes, paint, hardware, things, that's why Wal Mart is successful, 'cause he sells everything

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Not like one thing...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: You know what I mean?

JGF: Right... well, and you can't control that so it's sort of silly to... pretend you can.

MB: Why have a multiple species license when it's not made to... catch, you know what I mean?... now...

JGF: But, it...

MB: ...they're not fishermen, the people are making the rules are not... listening to the fishermen 'cause they haven't been fishing, some of 'em haven't even seen an ocean, haven't even been near a ocean in the Northeast... here, or...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: You know what I mean? These ideas they... it's just...

[55:47]

JGF: And, it doesn't sound like it could even be feasible to give a dragger a single species license, cause you can't always control what comes up in your net, can you?

MB: No.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: No, you can't.

JGF: So you'd be throwing it all – all the other stuff back...

MB: So the stuff you're – you're throwing away, you can't – in – certain percentage of it doesn't live.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: More doesn't live than survives.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Some things... in deep water you bring up all die. You gotta throw it away.

JGF: Yeah...

MB: Cause you're...

JGF: Cause of the pressure change thing?

MB: Cause of the – yeah, 'cause of the that and, uh... can't get back down, you know, it, uh, they die, you know?

JGF: Oh, okay... yeah, really.

MB: Yup, the pressure thing, yeah, like...

JGF: That's true...

MB: Same thing with a diver, you bring a diver up too fast and he's gonna...

JGF: I'm a diver so I'm thinking about that sometimes getting...

MB: So that's what it is, pressure, yeah...

JGF: ...getting back down is a real trick.

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Yeah, getting down to begin with is a trick.

MB: Stuff like that....

JGF: So if the fish got...

MB: That's the only thing I'd really like to... see that, and I would like to see... that would be a good thing to do a drug, a... mandatory... test, and each guy have a... certificate, like I say of safety, and uh...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: And the captain's all ready, and, uh... well I got – I did mine on my own too, and like... to know how to give a guy – if a guy has a heart attack, what to do, you know, medical – have the medical plus the... you know, like that should be mandatory for every guy.

[57:14]

JGF: And who did – who would you think should put that rule into place, though? Like...

MB: Who would put that rule into place?

JGF: What agency or whatever?

MB: You'd think you...well, it could be a lot of things, you could, you could do to get it in there, insurance...

JGF: Yup...

MB: You know what I mean?

JGF: That's what the other people thought, the insurance agencies would...

MB: The – the insurance company could say, "look, we'll give you a break if all your men are this"

JGF: Yup

MB: We'll give the boat a... a... a... like a five hundred dollar thing off on every year or we'll give a... you know, you gotta make some reward to – to get – sometimes you got to do things – rewards, to get things done.

JGF: Yeah... yeah...

MB: You know what I mean?

JGF: Yeah...

MB: You gotta – some people you gotta make do things.

JGF: Right.

MB: What's best for 'em

JGF: But others you can do the incentive

MB: Right... some people have to be made to do the – do right things like... what... ninety-nine percent of the people agree on, "Do you think safety is – is – is"... "Oh yeah, I think safety is" - "Are you willing to go to a safety course?"... they're gonna go "Uh..."... they're gonna think about it 'cause that's time.

JGF: Right, and because nobody's saying...

MB: If you're made to go, and everybody has it, then it would be a great thing.

JGF: Yeah, nobody's saying...

MB: I'd like to see that...

JGF: Mm hmm...

MB: You know what I mean?

JGF: Yeah.

MB: That I'd like to see.

JGF: Yeah, it does seem like since all the technology's there for it, it's silly not to take advantage, right?

MB: Yeah.

[58:38]

JGF: Huh... And my only other question – your answer may not in fact be any different, but I always like to... wrap up too with this is, what would you want the average festival visitor to... come away understanding about New Bedford's commercial fishing industry?

MB: Oh... Let me see... what I'd like 'em seem to come away with?

JGF: Yeah, like understanding, what did they learn...?

MB: I like the history to now part of it...

JGF: Mm hmm...

MB: Where you understand what it's been like to... it's no different a hundred years ago than it is today how hard you gotta work and how... things...

JGF: Yup...

MB: You know, changes that are made and...

JGF: Right

MB: ...things like that.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: And eat more fish, so we can - eat more fish.

JGF: [laughs] Okay!

MB: 'Cause it's healthier for your heart, and everything – three times a week, you're supposed to – doctor's say.

JGF: Two times a week is that what...?

MB: Three times, the doctors...

JGF: Oh, three times a week? Yeah...

MB: All your steamers that go out and stuff like that, they eat fish three times, it's mandatory for them now, some of these boats, like the ferry boat... my cousin, some of my family, the Bruces, have been, uh... working the ferry boats to Nantucket and back, you know?

JGF: Yeah...

MB: And he says they have to eat fish, well that's what he told me... twice a week on the boat, they have – they have fish for...

JGF: Oh!

MB: ...their meals

JGF: Yeah?

MB: Has to include fish twice...

JGF: Interesting, huh... I do find it interesting, like even I live in Western Mass, and the local grocery store out there...

MB: Yeah.

JGF: Somebody asked me, you know, mentioned this last year... none of the fish comes from around here, that I can tell.

MB: Oh yeah.

JGF: Even if it's all the white fish, it's like from Chile or...

MB: Yeah, I'd like to see the fishing industry put a better display on... of fishing, get things in place better, yes. The further away you go from here...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: The higher the price goes out there.

JGF: You would think, yeah.

MB: But there's no, uh... real... display of fish, have somebody teach supermarkets how to display fish, just – just that would be a start

JGF: Yeah!

MB: I've been into places, it's sad, you know, I look, I go "Eeeh".

JGF: Huh

MB: They don't have nothing, they don't know how to do nothing, you know?

JGF: Yeah.

MB: They can get it filleted already – there's plenty of filleted houses in New Bedford, there's plenty of...

JGF: Yeah... yeah, I don't know why, but... okay, well, is – unless there's anything else I'll just...

MB: No, that should do it

JGF: Thanks – thank you...

MB: I guess... alright, and thank you too.

JGF: I, um... wouldn't – before you go, I would just like to ask you for those names of some other people that – in case we haven't interviewed them, might be useful to talk to, or help

MB: Oh, uh...

[01:01:06 - break in recording... still same interview?]

JGF: ...kind of a joking culture that's grown up sort of behind the government's back over the way they handle the closed areas and things like that...

MB: Oh... gee, I don't know... if there's a joking thing. I think everybody thinks it's a joking thing.

JGF: Just thinks it's a big joke, right?

MB: Yeah... some of it, but it hurts.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: The joke's starting to... it ain't funny now [laughs]

JGF: Yeah.

MB: When you see the impact over the two years of this rule and...

JGF: It's like, it's so severe it's not even funny.

MB: It – it's – yeah, it's not even fair anymore.

JGF: Right.

MB: It's... come to the point where it's not even fair anymore of what...

JGF: Yeah...

MB: How fast and quick they make a... you know, they can call up and say this is closed, you... the, like the scallopers are out there, there's one guy, he took all the – how much it cost him to go out there with the fuel...

JGF: Right.

MB: Now he made three tows... and they called an emergency, midnight that area's closed, they all gotta come out of there, so I was going out fishing, there must have been a hundred boats coming in when I was going out because they closed – they kicked out of that area.

JGF: What made them do that at the last minute like that?

MB: Making a decision, taking so long to make decisions, and when they do they don't give no time or nothing, they just... they can call up anytime and say there's no fishing here as – as of midnight, so you're out there like I'm saying, how much did it cost the guy in fuel to get there, the grub, the ice he's put aboard, he's gotta come out of there, he has to come home, call in to go somewhere else, and wait days before, meantime the ice melts, the thing melt... he's already – he ain't made enough money yet to pay for what he just did now, and he's got another expense on him before he goes out again.

JGF: Yuck...

MB: So that's what this has come to – sadness.

JGF: It's just so ridiculously rigid.

MB: It just – just – it ain't even fair anymore.

JGF: Right.

MB: It's where I'm getting at is we ain't fair anymore, the things that they do, they don't think of impact, what it does to people's lives.

JGF: Yeah.

MB: You know what I mean?

JGF: So, what do you figure you might do once you retire from fishing?

MB: Ah... I think when I retire from fishing... uh, do the things, like the hobbies I like, I like planting and things and...

JGF: Mm hmm...

MB: I like working in my yard planting things, I'd do a lot of that.

JGF: You have that two hundred and something feet of hedge, take care of that, right?

MB: Hundred something feet of hedge and... perennials from all over the world
[laughs]

JGF: Oh, wow! It must be gorgeous!

MB: Everything's a special plant [laughs] The kind of plant you won't see here.

JGF: Yeah... well that'll keep you busy.

MB: Ah... yeah, that – that and... I'll move... move to Florida, no I won't move to Florida, I can't stand heat... [laughs] It's gotta be nice and cool, I like the seasons changes.

JGF: Yeah, so you'll stick around here?

MB: Yeah, I'll stick around for my grandkids are all here now too.

JGF: Great. Alright, well thank you again.

MB: Alrighty. Yup, well you picked the right guy to talk, I can talk.

JGF: Oh, I know! It was great!

[01:03:59 – end]