

Name of person Interviewed: Alan Cass [AC]

Facts about this person:

Age (if known) 60

Sex Male

Occupation Fisherman (retired)

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

Home port New Bedford

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

Residence (Town where lives)

Ethnic background (if known) English / Irish / Portuguese

Interviewer: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel [JGF]

Sound tech: Chelsea Jenney [CJ]; Olivia Paiva also present

Transcriber: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbormaster House

Date and time of interview: Saturday, Sept. 27, 2008

INDEX (minutes:seconds) / KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS: English; Irish; Portuguese; New Bedford; Scalloping; Alaska; Anchorage; Seward; Aleutians; Starry Flounder; Salmon; Fishermen's strikes; Fishing vessels; Scallopers; Bad weather; Shacking; Mate; Skippering; Federal observer work; Marine reports; Monk fish; Regulations; Fishermen's union; Norwegian; Shore engineer work; Boat delivery work; Galveston; Bequi; Haiti; Changes in technology New Bedford fleet; Mosquito fleet; Draggers; Trash fish; Wooden vessels; Canadians; Magnuson Act; Georges Bank; Steel vessels; Oil rig opportunities; Scallop cutting; Injuries on board; Drugs on boats; Fines for catch overages; Drugs on boats; Council process; Offshore Mariners; Teamsters; New Bedford's Fisherman's Union; Seafarers; Shares system

[Start of Interview]

[00:00]

Family background; Getting into fishing (scalloping); Military service / Marine Corps; Ice company work; Early scalloping trips and vessels; New Bedford an eclectic port compared to others seen in service around the world

[04:59]

Fishing in Alaska early 1970s; Description of Seward; Aleutians; Alaskan earthquake damage; Description of Kodiak;

[10:08]

Coming back to New Bedford; Fisherman's strike; Fishing vessels / scallopers; Bad weather experience; Coursework; Applying for job with New England Air; Deciding to stay in fishing; Mate work; Skippering; Fishing vessels;

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Fishing vessels; Buying a boat; Divorce / losing his boat; Logging in Vermont; Machine work; State house work; Federal observer work; U Mass economics degree; Marine research reports; Monk fish; Getting back into fishing; Regulations; Fewer crews needed because of days at sea; Fishermen's strikes; Strike negotiations; Changes in fishermen's benefits / supports;

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Fishermen's union; Learning boat skills from father-in-law / Norwegian fishermen; Shore engineer work; Boat delivery work / Galveston / Bequi / Haiti; Haiti boat delivery experience;

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Haiti boat delivery experience (cont'd.);

[30:15]

Haiti boat delivery experience (cont'd.); Haiti traditional fishing vessels / practices; Changes in technology New Bedford fleet; Mosquito fleet; Draggers; Trash fish; Wooden vessels; Canadians; Magnuson Act; Georges Bank; Steel vessels; Oil rig opportunities;

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Won't miss the work; Good at scallop cutting; Captain's job involves many things; Tending injuries on board; Drugs on boats; Fines for catch overages; Brother became a head prosecutor for NOAA;

[40:19]

Drugs on boats; Young fishermen getting into drugs later; Council process; Offshore
Mariners; Fishermen's strike; Union breaking up; Teamsters; New Bedford's
Fisherman's Union; Seafarers;

[45:10]

Fisherman's union; Shares system; Possibility of vessels transitioning to oil work;
Fishermen's connection with the water;

[End of interview]

TRANSCRIPT

00:00

JGF: OK. This is Janice Fleuriel. Today is Saturday, September 27th, 2008. We're at the Working Waterfront Festival in the Harbormaster's House. And I'm talking to Alan Cass, doing an oral history interview.

And also present is Chelsea Jenney, who's our tech assistant from Dartmouth High School. And also listening in right now is another of our tech assistants, Olivia Paiva [pronounced Pie-va].

[Talking to Chelsea and Alan about sound check.]

AC: Hi, I'm Alan Cass.

CJ: Yeah. That's clear.

JGF: OK. Thank you very much.

So what we usually do Alan is start by asking people to tell us a little bit about your whole personal and family background. Where you grew up, your family's ethnic background and things like that.

AC: OK. Family ethnic background is English, Irish, and a tad of Portuguese.

I grew up in the City of New Bedford. Graduated from New Bedford High School. Right after high school I went fishing. I fished for, two and a half months. And then I went in the service. Entered the Marine Corps in August of 1966. And I served in Vietnam in 1969. And, I got out of the service in August of '70. Went to work for an ice company for two months. And then went back fishing.

JGF: Oh OK. Interesting.

AC: So I've been fishing technically since—steady, since August of '70 and started in '66.

JGF: OK. And did you happen to say when you were born?

AC: I was born January 2nd, 1948.

JGF: OK. Great.

AC: Saint Luke's Hospital.

JGF: Saint Luke's [talking to Chelsea]. Wasn't somebody else born there?

CJ: Yup. I was.

JGF: [laughs] We were doing test interviews earlier so.

So you went directly into fishing right out of high school.

AC: Right.

JGF: Was your family involved in fishing already?

AC: No. I was actually going out with this girl whose father was involved in fishing. That's how I got into it.

JGF: OK. And what kind of fishing was that at first?

AC: That was scalloping.

JGF: Scalloping.

AC: Yup. On the Jane and Ursula. Fishing Vessel Jane and Ursula out of Fairhaven.

JGF: OK. And what was your job at that point.

AC: I was a shacker.

JGF: A shacker. Which...

AC: Which means a trainee.

We getting somewhere around thirty-nine and forty-one cents a pound for scallops.

JGF: Huh. [Laughs]

AC: I made fifty dollars my first trip. Seventy-five dollars my second trip. A hundred and fifty my third. I was up to half share by my third trip.

JGF: OK. And how many days was a trip?

AC: The trip's average—we had a union then?

JGF: Mm hm.

AC: The actual fishing time was eight days. Home for five. It usually took a day to get wherever we were going. And a day to get back. So, ten and five.

JGF: Wow.

And did you feel like—after that, well it doesn't sound like maybe you were sold on it completely, or maybe...

AC: Well, I had already joined the service.

JGF: OK.

AC: On a delay program. In May of '66. So, I was already scheduled to go in the service anyway.

JGF: I see. OK.

AC: It was either that or get drafted. I would rather join and go where I wanted to go than, somewhere they sent me.

So then I went in the service. I was fortunate to travel the world with the service. So I got a chance to see a lot of different areas of the world. And actually, being from a fishing port, I usually checked out the fishing areas. Around the world, which was interesting.

JGF: That must have been fascinating.

AC: It was. It was.

JGF: How did you feel like, Fairhaven, New Bedford compared to some of the other places? Were they more technologically advanced? Or not?

AC: Well, no. Not really.

I found—What I learned while I was in the service about New Bedford was, it's probably the best place in the world to live. You cannot find a more unique place than this place right here.

JGF: Huh! In what ways would you say?

AC: Everything. People. The way the cultures mix. We have a fairly eclectic...

JGF: Yes.

AC: culture in New Bedford. And they come from all over the world. And they have a tendency to stay here.

It's probably the most interesting place because of the—this, forever changes. And a lot of the old world places that I traveled to, nothing changes.

JGF: Oh, interesting.

AC: It just stays the same. What is, is.

JGF: And not culturally very diverse?

AC: No.

There's hardly any—If you're in the Azores, you're dealing with the Portuguese. If you're in Spain, you're dealing with the Spanish. You don't get this mix of the cultures. Turkey. I was—fortunate as I said, to around the world except for China and Russia, so. It was interesting.

JGF: Yeah. I bet. That's fascinating.

[04:59]

AC: In 1972, while fishing, they were—I had a feeling they were going to have a strike here. And I really didn't want to, *stop* my fishing. So I went to Alaska. And I was up in Alaska for six months. And I did a little bit of crabbing. And I did a little scalloping.

JGF: What part?

AC: Out of Seward.

That was an interesting trip. I hitch hiked from Anchorage to Seward and at that time, Anchorage was only four streets.

JGF: [laughs] Wow.

AC: And it was about, a two hundred and forty mile hike to Seward. And I hitch hiked.

JGF: Wow.

AC: And I got these off-the-wall rides ...

JGF: [laughs]

AC: In the middle of nowhere with your hand out. And it's like one car every twenty minutes or half an hour. I finally got one ride to like halfway there. To this little town called Portage. And I figured at that point if I did not get a ride to Seward from there, I was going to turn around and go back. And I was standing outside—there was a gas station and a restaurant there. I had something to eat. I stood outside the entrance to the gas station. And this guy picked me up. And asked me how far I was going. I said, "Seward." And he said, "Well, so am I. I'm going to visit my brother there." So I said, "Great." So I got a ride to Seward with the archbishop of the Virgin Islands who was going to see his brother who lived in Seward [chuckles].

JGF: Oh my [laughs]

AC: It was really interesting, you know? So.

JGF: That's interesting.

AC: We covered a lot of politics and religion on the road to Seward.

JGF: Boy, I bet you did.

AC: It was—And I found Seward very interesting. There was just as many bars as there are churches.

JGF: Uh huh [laughs].

AC: I had a little trouble adjusting to... I'm a person that wakes up the minute the light's up. I'm an early morning riser. When the sun comes up, I'm up.

JGF: What time of year was this?

AC: And this was in May. Latter part of May.

And, in fact, when I was hitchhiking it was Memorial Day.

JGF: Yeah. So you didn't get much sleep?

AC: I couldn't get any sleep. I mean, I went in I figured I'd have a few cocktails so it would get me tired enough to get to sleep. And I'd go to the hotel, and it never got dark. I said, "This is crazy." So I... I was kind of sleep deprived while I was there. When I was on the boat it wasn't bad because it was a closed cabin. You didn't really pay attention to it. But it was an interesting trip.

JGF: Yeah. Wow. We just got to go there in June. But, we took the train from Anchorage. It was a lot different. [laughs]

AC: Right. Everything's changed.

JGF: Yeah, really. There's a lot more than four roads, that's for sure.

AC: I went back up in '88, '89. With this fella who wanted to buy some fish from there. We went out of, just north of the Aleutians, this little port. Just to go out and try to catch some starry flounder, which he was interested in. It wasn't going to work out because of the—when salmon season starts, everybody drops everything to go salmon fishing. So, it just didn't work out.

JGF: Oh, OK.

AC: So we came back. But I saw there was such a dramatic change in that amount of time. I got up there, eight years after the earthquake they'd had. And there was still a lot of remnants of the earthquake sitting around. So it was interesting. There was still cracks in the buildings, cracks in the streets. You know, they more or less just stuck plaster in it. Now, it was all wiped out. I mean, C Street was the biggest street they had up there. It was like, a little pit.

And Seward was just one little strip. [laughs] That's all it was.

It was interesting. They wanted to watch TV they had to send somebody up to brush the snow off the antenna. Otherwise they didn't have any TV.

JGF: [laughs] Huh.

AC: But it was interesting.

But it was a fishing town.

And when I came in, they knew I was coming. How, I don't know. But everybody knew—Everybody knew everybody. So since I was the new guy in town everybody found out. I got a call at the Western Union office. I was sitting in a restaurant three blocks away. And they came up and said, "You've got a call at the Western Union office." I went, "How the hell did you know I was here?" "Well, everybody knew where you were." So that was interesting.

JGF: Were you the only new guy in town or something?

AC: At the time, I was the only, you know, northeasterner. It was interesting. They knew exactly where I was and I what I was doing.

JGF: [laughs] I found out about that when I moved to my small town out in Shelburne Falls, because my husband had been there for a while.

AC: And we had pulled into Kodiak a few times which was interesting. That's just a big rock. [chuckles]

JGF: Yes it is.

AC: Big rock and four bars. That's it. And an army base. But that was interesting.

JGF: We got out there. I thought the harbor was so fascinating with the mountains right behind it.

AC: Yeah. But I didn't like the weather either.

JGF: The weather [laughs]

AC: You didn't see much sun. If you got sun, you were lucky. And I like the sun. It was cloudy the whole time we were fishing. I said, "I can't believe this." If it wasn't cloudy, it was snotty. And when it was snotty, most of these guys, they don't go in anywhere. They just hide behind an island until it's over.

JGF: [laughs]

AC: They'll anchor up on the other side of an island and when the wind comes round they'll shift to the other side of the island until it's over and then you go back out fishing again. And you're only, what—a couple hours from the fishing grounds. I mean, the whole coastline of Alaska I don't think it goes out more than seven miles

before it drops to a thousand fathoms. So everything's done within a three mile, five mile limit. It's interesting.

JGF: Huh. That's neat.

[10:08]

AC: And I came back to New Bedford.

JGF: You came back. So you didn't figure that Alaska was the place to stay? Or did the issue with the strike in New Bedford sort of die down at that point?

AC: Well, it had died down.

The fleet was going to get back going again. I think I was home a month before they finally got it going again.

So, I went back out.

I started—When I came out of the service I went back on the Jane and Ursula after the ice company work. And I was on the Jane off and on right through '75. I had been on the Huntress, the Hunter.

I started out on—Actually I started out on the Hunter, went to the Jane right after the service.

And then...

JGF: And those were scallopers both?

AC: Yes. They were all scallopers.

In fact, the first trip on the Hunter after coming out of the service was really interesting.

JGF: Yeah?

AC: We were fishing on Georges Banks. And we'd had some miserable weather. And about five o'clock in the morning the wind came out of the northwest. So we were laying to because it was really sloppy. And we had *just* stopped fishing. So we bagged up, we were putting the bags down the hole. I was supposed to be on the ladder. The other guy that was in the fish hole was on the ladder going down and I was getting ready to go in the fish hole. And this *huge* humongous wave starts coming straight for the side of the boat. I heard it coming.

JGF: Wow.

AC: I yelled for the guy in the hole to hold on to the ladder. He grabbed the ladder and just—you know, just hugged it. I held onto the hatch combing. When that wave hit it knocked me off the hatch combing. It dragged me across the deck. I grabbed the main wire, for the drag, on the starboard side. And went over the side with the wire.

JGF: [gasps]

AC: And the drag slid. So when the drag slid it tightened the wire up and brought me back aboard. [laughs] Which was nice.

JGF: Oh my God. You didn't get pinned by it or anything?

AC: No. I was just on the wire. I was just riding the wire back and forth.

And... So I stood up, went running for the box. And the water on the deck swept my feet out from underneath me and wedged me underneath the winch.

JGF: Oh my gosh!

AC: One of the Norwegians on there grabbed me by the shoulders. They were looking for me, wondering where I was. But I'm—I'm getting water washed over me. And he grabbed me by the shoulders and yanked me out of there. That's after the boat settled down.

JGF: Wow!

AC: So. It was interesting.

JGF: Wow.

AC: It was November. I mean, you got to expect nasty weather.

But I stayed at it. I figured I'd give it five years. But, after five years I tried to take some courses. While I was fishing, at [?BCC]. And, they kind of worked out my schedule. But, there wasn't enough money in shore work. Tried to get a job with New England Air, Air New England or whatever it was. New England Air. Because I'd worked on aircraft in the service.

JGF: Oh, OK.

AC: And... It was funny, the guy—The guy says, “Oh yeah, we need an electrician down here.” You know? He says, “I'll put you under this guy. And you work for them.” And he says, “Can you work for us right now?” I says, “No I've got to give the boat I'm on at least two weeks notice.” At that time I was on the Geraldine, another scalloper.

And... So I went out that trip. And the guy says, “Well, if we really, really need you can I send a helicopter for you?” I says, “No.” I said, “I've got to give the guy two weeks.”

So at any rate [chuckles]. I went out fishing. I came back in, Air New England went bankrupt. So that kind of told me to stay fishing. You know?

JGF: Yeah, right [laughs].

AC: That was kind of an interesting thing. The fact that *he* didn't know about—the maintenance manager didn't know, it must have come as quite a shock to them. I ended up staying fishing.

JGF: Yeah. Wow.

AC: And... By 1978, I went on the—let's see, I was a mate... I was a mate on this little scalloper, it was a one dredge boat. And then I took the boat, skipper. And then I ended up going to work for Donald Calnan on the Ella Marie.

And I was skipper of the—First I went mate with his skipper. And then we were starting the—That skipper was starting the lister one day. And the crank came round. Broke his arm. So they needed somebody to take the boat. I ended up taking the boat.

JGF: Wow.

AC: So I ended up taking the Ella Marie. And I took that for a while. And I took the Louise after that. That was another scalloper.

And... Then I got out of that and I went to... I went mate on the Huntress. I was mate on the Huntress for... '79, 80, '81, '82.

JGF: Uh huh.

[15:10]

AC: And then I ended up skippering the Hunter. As captain. For '83, '84, and '85.

JGF: Wow. OK.

AC: And I skippered the Eagle for '86 into '87. I bought my own boat in January or February of '87. Lost that in a divorce in '88. [chuckles]

JGF: Oh geez [laughs].

AC: Let's see... And then I went back... I did a few other things, went up logging in Vermont.

I did a few things. I worked for a company doing fixing dish machines and laundry machines. And servicing products to them.

I did that for a little while. Then I worked for the state house for a year and a half.

After the state house I became a federal observer.

JGF: Oh, wow.

AC: And while I was an observer... Well this—Wait a minute I've got to back up.

After that I went to U Mass. I was fishing summers, and going to U Mass. I graduated from U Mass with an economics degree. I was doing cooperative marine education research reports with one of the heads of the economics department. I did four or five of them. I did one of my own for the monk fish industry in New Bedford. Then when I left there I went to work at the state house for a year and a half.

Then I became an observer. And while I was observing, making two hundred dollars a day, with what they were doing out fishing, I said, "This is stupid. I'm coming out here anyway I might as well go back fishing." So I went back fishing steady. Up until this past year.

JGF: Wow.

AC: Up until 2007.

JGF: Yeah.

AC: December.

JGF: Are you done now?

AC: Well, the regulations more or less done me.

JGF: They did.

AC: Yeah.

Four years ago, there was one skipper per boat. Two years ago, two and a half to three years ago, there was one skipper for two boats. Now, it's one skipper for three boats. They've technically knocked two thirds of the fleet right out of business, as far as man goes. And it's a savings for the owner. If he owns two or three boats, what's the sense of having two or three crews? Less unemployment. Steady gang.

JGF: I see.

AC: So there's all kinds of benefits having one crew taking three boats. With the number of days, keeps them busy all year.

JGF: So. One owner has three boats, and all those boats get different days at sea...

AC: Right.

JGF: ... so when one comes in another can go out.

AC: When they finish off those days, they just jump on the next boat.

JGF: Wow!

AC: And now with the cut down in more days at sea, it's one skipper for three boats. So you have one captain and crew manning three boats, what happened to the other two crews? And captains? Gone.

And there's a lot of young fellas out there.

JGF: Right. Right.

Well I have to say, I was pretty impressed.

AC: At my age they said, "That's it. You're done."

JGF: When you mentioned your birth date, I'm like... You know, I hear a lot of people saying by that age, people are...

AC: So technically I've had forty-two years of fishing-related stuff. I did start a—I helped start, during the strike of '78... Well, actually the strike before that, '75. I was on the new strike committee. We had an old strike committee, they weren't doing anything as far as settling the strike. I went on a new strike committee with another group of fellas, and we managed to settle it out in less than four days.

JGF: Can you talk a little bit about what the negotiations around that might have been?

AC: Well it's funny because... When it finally got negotiated—there were issues of how much money was going to go in the pension, percentages. How much money percentage-wise was going to go here, there, and everywhere. Plus the boat owners wanted another percent.

JGF: Right.

AC: Or a percent and a half. It went from thirty-five to thirty-six percent. Which really wasn't a big deal considering the extra added costs the boat owners were absorbing at that time.

So we settled out at thirty-six percent. I think the industry promotion got [?] an extra half percent. The pension fund got an extra half percent. And the... our health and welfare part got an extra percent. So that helped.

JGF: Wow.

AC: So, all that was going on. Because we had lost—during that period of time we had lost marine hospitals. As being able to go there for medical. So now the welfare was taking over—the welfare portion of the... Well the fishermen's union was taking over all the healthcare costs. Well, it had to come from somewhere. So that was a big contender, who was going to pay for that. You know?

It ended up we worked it out in four days. There was only a couple of issues that we really had to tie down.

[19:55]

AC: And it was funny because I was... I was signing for the union on one side of the table and my father-in-law was signing for the boat owners on the other side of the table.

JGF: Huh [laughs]

AC: [laughs] It was kind of neat. Why they picked me to do the signing... It must have been a unique thing for them.

JGF: Yeah. Were you having Sunday dinners at his house during the weekends too?

AC: Yeah. Yeah. And my father-in-law was a—well, leading Norwegian fisherman entrepreneur [?]. And so, some of the... He was always—He was an interesting, kind and interesting man.

JGF: Well that's cool.

AC: He could be forceful when he wanted to be.

In fact when he taught me how to dock a boat, it was blowing a gale, northwest. And there was no room at Kelly's where we normally docked. So he wanted me to go to Fairhaven Marine. So there was one slot open and I don't think there was a foot and a half between the bow and the stern. For getting this boat in there. And this was on the Hunter. So I brought the boat over there and I jockeyed it into this position. The wind helped me bring the boat in. And I'm just going back and forth, with the wheel at the right point. And she's just staying there, and she's kind of like

walking into the dock. You know, walking into this other boat. I was third boat out. And he's standing there on the other boat with his fingers on the rail, saying, "Don't hurt my fingers."

JGF: [laughs]

AC: I was saying, "Oh, man. This is nice."

So, I managed to the boat in without bruising his fingers.

JGF: [laughs]

AC: That was interesting because there was only like a foot.

JGF: You passed that test.

AC: Yeah, that was funny.

CJ: Yeah, I don't like landing, in my boats that I sail. Usually it's difficult.

JGF: [laughs]

AC: Yeah it can be.

I learned a lot of navigation stuff from him and boat handling from him.

JGF: Yeah?

AC: So it helped. Because I was shore engineer for him in '76. I hurt my back, so I was out for about four or five months. But I was doing shore engineer work for him, and taking care of the three boats he had at the time, so.

He taught me a lot.

JGF: Yeah? Interesting.

Now, where you on boats with him when he taught you the navigation? Or would you sort of pick it up?

AC: When I first went fishing in '66, he was captain of the vessel. And the first trip, and the second trip, and the third trip, his mate went captain and his son went mate. His older son. Well he only had a son and a daughter, so. It was interesting.

JGF: Yeah?

AC: I've... Plus I did a little learning on my own. I took—I have my captain's license. Under two hundred. I took that in '89. So I've been using that off and on. I deliver boats now. That, I do do.

JGF: You deliver boats?

AC: Boat delivery comes up. It doesn't matter where it is. I've taken boats from here to Galveston. I've taken boats from here to Bequi in the East Caribbean. I delivered one boat to Haiti. Which nobody expected me to come back with.

JGF: [laughs]

AC: That was a fun trip. It was myself, my father-in-law, my future father-in-law. And... This Haitian laborer.

We were bathing out of fifty-five gallon drums full of water. There were holes in the side of the boat. I don't know where he got this thing or he came up with it. He came down from Canada, it was at [?] Marine. They basically, gave him the boat, you know, for a pittance. They gave him an engine just to get it out of there.

JGF: [laughs]

AC: And it was an old 871 GM. The compass wasn't screwed into the [?]. There was no radar. And the radio only worked one mile.

JGF: Only worked...?

AC: One mile.

JGF: Oh, my God.

AC: And I took that out of there and when fourteen hundred and sixty-two miles, right into Port of Paix Harbor. Stuck there for a week. No phone, no anything. My wife was going hysterical. She ended up calling the embassy. They sent a guy up looking for us. I had the business guys whom we brought the boat down, they had a guy keeping after us. And then the labor party, who I befriended on the boat, this young guy, he made sure—They had somebody looking out for us. So that nothing would happen to us.

It was a riot. It was unbelievable.

So when I finally got back, the guy that initiated the deal of the trip, [?], “Wow, you made it!”

I said, “What the hell? You’re going to send me on a trip you didn’t expect me to come back from?”

JGF: [laughs]

AC: [?] crazy? I said, “Yeah. Thanks.”

JGF: Now you just delivered the boat to Haiti? How did you get back then? You left the boat there?

AC: Flew.

Yeah we flew out of—That was a hell of a ride. We took a bus from Port of Paix to Port-au-Prince. And it was nothing more than a school bus. And the way they sat people on the bus, it was two people per seat. Now for adults, there’s not much room on a kid’s school bus. So you had to sit upright like this.

Well then, there’s two people on the seat. And then you had a Haitian sitting half on this knee. And the guy on the other, another Haitian sitting half on his knee. And then one guy sitting in the middle of them. So you were technically seven across.

All the way down this bus. There were two guys riding on top, to handle the—It was loaded with baggage. Two guys on the back of the bus, hanging on to a ladder. One guy was the foreman in the front with the driver.

[25:09]

AC: And every time they made a stop—It was not an express bus. They made stops [laughs] like every fifteen, twenty miles.

JGF: [laughs]

AC: It would stop. The guys on the back of the bus would run around. The guys on the top of the bus—how they knew I don’t know. They would grab baggage and throw it off, to the two guys to catch on the bottom. The people would get off the bus and the bus would take off.

JGF: Wow.

AC: And then these two guys that caught their baggage, would have to run after the bus to hop on the back again. And this, all the way. A hundred and sixty miles to Port-au-Prince.

JGF: Wow.

AC: We got a flat tire in Saint Marc. And I noticed that there was a lot of—There’s a lot of money on the ground. I was saying, “What’s with this?” Every place we went, there’s valuable stuff. Like up in Port of Paix, there were Spanish cannons. I mean some of these are worth—bronze cannons, I don’t know if they were worth ten, twelve thousand dollars a piece.

JGF: Wow.

AC: Just laying around! Not a lot of them, but, you know, enough scattered. And in Port of Paix, there was change all over the ground. So I picked some up. Because it was kind on interesting. And I'm looking at the dates on this stuff. And the guy from the embassy happened to come over to me. He says, "Hey, put that down."

I said, "Why?"

He says, "It's not good if they see you doing that."

I said, "Why is that?"

He said, "Bad voodoo."

JGF: Wow!

AC: I said, "How is that?"

"Well the guy that lost it, it was bad luck for him." So therefore it's bad voodoo, and if you pick it up, you're going to gain that bad voodoo. So therefore, drop it."

JGF: Oh. Yeah.

AC: "And nobody will look at you funny."

So I says, "Okay." I dropped all the change on the ground.

JGF: Wow.

AC: Waited for the tire to be changed. And off we went.

And then, my... My father-in-law had a Z Card. He'd been in the merchant marine. He had a Z Card. I had a passport. They weren't going to let him out, because they didn't recognize the Z Card.

JGF: Oh.

AC: So finally after a little, this that and the other thing, we managed to get him a ticket on the plane. So we both flew out together to Miami. Kissed the ground when we got there.

JGF: Yeah [laughs]

AC: The people poorer than dirt. It's unbelievable.

JGF: Yeah. Wow.

AC: And I—I learned a little bit about the economics. Because they trade with the U.S.—Any companies in Haiti that trade with the U.S. can't trade with Cuba. Cuba was their main trading partner. It actually helped their economy out more than anything else. So technically—and the UN had come in and said, making cement was not good for your health. So they shut down the cement industry, which was one of the main industries they had. And then they had... They had some kind of medical plant, medicinal plant. And they were working with that. And that was a real high-priced medicine, whatever it was. So they did have that for shipping it out. But I noticed they brought a lot of garbage in. When I took the boat down, the owner of the boat had loaded up the hole with wood, tires, bicycle parts, empty water bottles. I had two pens full of empty water bottles. All kinds of junk, basically, that would throw away normally, he was loading this boat up with. We had five vehicles, on the boat. They put on deck. And these, you know, they couldn't pass inspection here.

JGF: Right.

AC: So they drove all them down there and they were tied with ropes. I had to check them every day. Because the Haitian had tied them, and you know, they used the rope by hand and everything else. I had to keep going down there, and I made a

few, you know, what they call the rope vice, so I could keep taking the tension up to keep these things floating all over the boat on the way down.

JGF: Oh. Yup. Yup.

AC: We got there... We anchored in the harbor, and I was saying, "How the hell are we going to get these vehicles to shore?" They brought this guy out on this dory, with a torch. He goes up to the front of one of the vehicles. This happened to be a truck, in the lead. And he measures it with his hands, and goes over the rail and measures the rail. Cut the rail out. Just cut it out. I'm going, "Wow! This is cool."

JGF: [laughs]

AC: Then they had another dory come alongside with two boards on it. Put the boards on the boat. And then they had twenty-five Haitians come aboard. And this one guy that's like, supervisor. He—The supervisor gets in the cab, rolls down the windows. And these twenty-five Haitians get around this truck, go "A-lay, A lay," pick the damn thing up and move it.

JGF: Oh, my God.

AC: And centered it on this hole. Then they start pushing it!
So I said, "What happens if this thing goes in the water?"
He says, "That's why I have this windows," he says.
I said, "OK."

JGF: Oh geez [laughs].

AC: And they roll this thing on these boards. And the truck rolls down the boards until the point where the boards just tip off the hull. He applies the brake. They tip off enough. The guy on the boat pushes away at the same time. The boards come down flat on the dory. Here's this truck laying across two boards, sideways across the dory. A guy sculls it ashore. One guy sculls it ashore. The other guy stays in the cab. They get to this little ramp at the dock, turn the boat so the boards are there, push the damn thing ashore. And that's how they offloaded five vehicles. I was like in shock. I said, "Holy, moly."

JGF: Wow. Wow.

AC: No... No hydraulics. No mechanics. No nothing. Just, sheer brute force [laughs].

JGF: That's interesting. And a lot of—

AC: And guts.

JGF: And a lot of coordinated teamwork. Right?

AC: Yeah, like. Well, they've been doing it forever. Every boat I saw in there was loaded up with plywood around it with junk. And they just offloaded these things and fly back, you know, drive the boat back to Miami, load the damn thing up with more junk.

JGF: Interesting. Huh!

[30:15]

AC: And they made do with everything.

JGF: Yup.

AC: There were people selling sticks. I mean, that's an interesting economy. You know? Especially on an island.

The vessels they used for fishing. I swear I could have been on the Nile River.

There was all these sailing...

JGF: Yup.

AC: Basically sailing dories that you would see on the Nile River. The same type.
JGF: Wow.
AC: They had made—they were all handmade. Sailing, doing fishing.
JGF: Huh. Wow.
AC: It was amazing. I was like, “Wow!” And they caught fish.
JGF: So was their fishing gear—was it just hand lines? Or...?
AC: Some were hand lines. Some were small nets that they’d made themselves. They used throw nets.
JGF: Right.
AC: And, they weren’t that big.
Some of the seine nets were a little bit bigger. They would actually set it. And then they’d have twenty or thirty guys on board, just haul the damn thing in.
JGF: Wow.
AC: But.
I was like, “Wow, this is like being back in 1600.” [laughs] You know?
JGF: Right. Times that we heard about but never seen.
AC: Yeah.
Yeah, there are still places in the world that do exactly that. They still fish exactly like they did, two, three hundred years ago. No power. Just... I mean, some of the advanced economies used power, but even to that, there’s a limit. You know, so, it’s interesting.
JGF: Wow.
Speaking of that, and technology, you must have seen a lot of changes, I would think in technology over your time.
AC: Oh yeah. Big time. Big time changes. From...
Well, when I first started we still had the mosquito fleet. Which was draggers—little draggers, forty to sixty feet long. They were mostly—when I got out of the service they were mostly doing trash fish. Which was for dog food, cat food.
But these little boats would go all the way out the eastern side of Georges, fishing.
JGF: Wow.
AC: Back then. That was ’66. So nothing had really changed, during the ‘40s, ‘50s and ‘60s. There was a few new boats that came out in the mid-60s. When the flurry of scallops showed up down south.
JGF: These were wooden, then?
AC: Yes. They were all wood.
And, it was really funny. Because, I remember fishing with the Canadians, which was interesting enough. And I’ve taken pictures since I was seven years old. So I have pictures of the Canadian fleet, fishing with the Canadian fleet. Which is kind of unique, you know, down off...see a Canadian boat, all the way down to Virginia, fishing with you. Interesting.
Right up until the ‘70s when the Magnuson Act got passed, we were fishing with the Canadians in Georges all over the place. We picked up a raft one time. There was a storm. There was one boat lost. We picked up their raft and brought it in.
They came down and picked it up.
JGF: Huh.

AC: But it was interesting. You know? Just... You know, the Canadian scallopers, most of the boats were wood. They didn't get into the steel until the mid- to late-70s. that's when the steel boats started to be built.

JGF: Around here?

AC: Right. The Huntress was one. She came out in '78. The [?Maryann?]. The Chivas Regal. What I call the whiskey boats because they're all named after bottles of booze. So there was quite a few.

And I don't know if they saw that as something—an opportunity for the future, because, that's when the regulations really started coming in. There were a lot of restrictions being placed that we weren't used to, we had to adjust to.

There was talk of oil. In fact, in nine—I've got pictures of test rigs out on Georges Banks and down off, New York and New Jersey. Especially now, with having regulations, technically, all these vessels here if you cut off the—if you cut off the booms, and take the net drums off, you've got a supply boat for oil.

JGF: Oh! Huh!

AC: So is there a salvation in that? And is that a good one?

JGF: Right. Well, yeah... But they're interchangeable sort of.

AC: Will it come about? Who knows? I've actually did a report—an economic report, for my class at school, talking just about that.

JGF: Interesting.

AC: Will it come?

JGF: Did you come down on one side of the other about whether it would be a good thing or not?

AC: No. I just... It was more or less watching what was happening with the regulations. And part of the explanation is that the government works on a twenty-year plan. We as fishermen work on a one year, year-to-year plan, based on what's there and what's not. So the government's already way ahead of us as far as their planning goes. If they have another agenda and we're not part of it, then they will make that happen.

Now, is that possible? Is that a conspiracy? Who the hell knows?

JGF: Right.

AC: However, change is inevitable.

JGF: Right.

AC: How you adjust to it is another thing.

JGF: Right.

AC: I wish I hadn't been put into retirement at sixty, but...

JGF: Yeah. Huh. Interesting.

AC: Now I'm in the process of losing a house because of it.

JGF: Oh, are you?

AC: Yeah. But.

JGF: Wow.

AC: That's another story.

[35:25]

JGF: Yeah. Do you think you'll miss it? The work?

AC: No.

JGF: No? [laughs]

AC: No. I don't miss—I really don't miss going off shore scalloping. It's all young guys. It's a very competitive business. I've never really had a—they more or less had to, try to come up to my standard. I've always been good at cutting. I have a natural rhythm at cutting. And they just sit there and go, [makes face of surprise?]. So there aren't too many. There are a few that—There's a group that can, all, more or less hang together as far as cutting goes.

JGF: Yeah. And you're one of those people?

AC: But most of them won't even get close.

JGF: Uh huh [laughs]. So have you ever been in the contest here?

AC: No. I didn't want to... I didn't want to...

JGF: Show up the young guys? [laughs]

CJ: My two friends are [?].

JGF: Oh.

AC: Well actually, I could do it now. I could do it now and not feel bad about it, because it wouldn't mean anything. But before, no. As a captain, and a crew, I wouldn't want to cause that...

JGF: Oh, that's right.

AC: I wouldn't want to cause that kind of...

JGF: Because that's not really the captain's job.

AC: Not really. It's the crew's. Even though now, everybody's doing it. The last, six years... You become captain, cook, engineer, everything. Doctor, lawyer, mother, father, priest. I mean, I've set bones out there. I've splinted stuff. I've... I've sutured stuff. Yeah, just to keep the trip going. My brother was with me on a trip. I actually fixed—he had a broken, he broke his knuckle. So I used a spoon and taped these two together until they finished the trip. You know [laughs], I wasn't about to bring him home for a broken finger. [laughs]

JGF: [laughs]

AC: For something he did himself, you know. It wasn't something caused by the boat. He did it himself. He punched the wall because he was ticked off.

JGF: Oh, gee [laughs]

AC: Broke his finger, so I set it. And when he finally got to the hospital, the doctor asked him, "Well, who set this thing?"

"My brother did."

"Well he did a damn good job. It's all set now."

JGF: That's great!

AC: "And he can move it, so."

If it hadn't come out that way I would have felt bad. But it came out all right.

So I said, I've done sutures, I've done just about everything?

JGF: What did you use for sutures?

AC: Well, sutures. You can use cat gut, you can use anything.

JGF: Yeah. Regular old needle?

AC: Cat gut's the best because it's real thin. Sometimes you can use the twine, the cloth... From a scallop bag?

JGF: Yeah? Oh, like the fibers?

AC: The canvas fiber. That's really strong. And that works pretty good. It's just a matter of putting a knot in it.

Now I'm not talking about any major surgery. I'm talking about like two or three stitches.

JGF: Right.

AC: Just to stop the bleeding.

JGF: Huh! I don't know if anyone's ever talked about that aspect before.

AC: Well, you do everything. I mean, if you have to, you have to.

JGF: Right. Right.

AC: I took care of my gangs. Well I wasn't going to have something minor send me back to the dock. It was too much of a loss for everybody.

JGF: Right.

AC: If it was major you had to take them in.

One night—I was probably—I don't know if I was the only guy, I probably was.

The only guy, I caught a couple of guys doing drugs on the boat, and I took the boat home.

JGF: OK.

AC: Stopped the trip right in the middle of it. Took it home. I didn't allow it on the boat.

I had a few guys come up, "Gee, uh, you got a job on there?"

I said, "You're a junkie. Why would I want to give you a job?"

JGF: Right.

AC: I mean everybody knows how I feel about it. "Well I'll try to clean up."

I said, "Go clean up and come back."

JGF: Right.

AC: [laughs] "And we'll see how well you're doing."

JGF: That's a sort of fascinating one to me. Because, you know, there seems to be two perspectives on how bad the drug problem is. Do you have a perspective on that?

AC: Well it's not... It wasn't bad. Then it got bad because of the strike, when the union went. One of the things that broke the union was the fact that, a lot of the druggies who went on these boats, they sent them out to break the union.

JGF: Oh, no kidding.

AC: So therefore, they hired anybody just to get the boats out.

JGF: Oh, OK.

AC: Well, some of these guys worked out. So they stayed on the boat. The ones who were clean on the boat, whatever they did ashore was their business.

JGF: Yeah.

AC: You know?

But it still—it still filtered over into the fleet, as far as the problems. And I just wouldn't—I was dead set against it. I... If I caught or suspected anybody, they were gone. I just wouldn't put up with it. I got to the point where I even asked the Coast Guard to check the boats on the way out.

JGF: Yup.

AC: They'd do that. Then, I guess they weren't that interested in it.

JGF: Huh.

AC: It wasn't a perspective they enjoyed. Even if they had the presence down there. If you were an ounce over on the meat count. And I got a ten thousand dollar fine for one tenth of an ounce over on a count meat. Thirty-three meats per pound. I was 33.01. I had taken my youngest brother scalloping while I was going to school, put

him through law school. He ended up becoming one of the head prosecutors for NOAA [laughs].

[40:19]

JGF: [brief interruption – speaking to next interviewees who stopped in]

AC: So... I don't see as much as a problem now as it used to be. And there was a flurry because of that strike. And then it took a while to weed them out. And they did. They weeded themselves out. I mean there aren't too many—There aren't too many addicts that live to fifty, never mind forty. So a lot of that was by attrition. It was a shame. I mean I had... I had a crew that was drug-free on the Ella Marie in 1978. There are only four of them left. All the other ones died by overdose somewhere between '84 and '89.

JGF: Wow. Wow.

AC: It was amazing. I couldn't believe it. And these were good guys.

JGF: Yeah.

AC: You know? They just got—you know, the money. They were *young*. The money was good. Work hard, play hard. That's what it came down to. You know?

JGF: Yeah. Huh.

AC: So. We all have our crosses to bear.

JGF: Yeah.

AC: But basically, that's, you know, that's what the fishing has been. I've been involved with the council process from the start of it. I was on one of the first scallop subcommittees. And then while I was in school, they put me on the herring committee. I had no idea what was going on with herring. I turned around and told them I didn't really want it, but they kept me on there anyway. I never went to a meeting for it. Occasionally I would go when I was secretary, treasurer. During that strike we started Offshore Mariners. [Marty ?] and I. It was actually—I had the, I developed the idea off shore, then talking about it. Then, I went down to Florida for a week. And Marty was up here when the strike really got nasty. So they had a meeting—called for a meeting when I came back. My oldest brother's an attorney. He's the one that did all the paperwork for us when we formed Offshore Mariners.

JGF: Hmm.

AC: And that helped. You know, it got all the boats out. The ones that were independent anyway. Got all them out. We made it a point to get as many boats out that were independent, as we could. That were separate, never had a union contract. A lot of the other ones followed suit. And it kind of broke the union up. Which wasn't a bad thing. I couldn't stand Seafarers.

JGF: Interesting.

AC: I couldn't stand Teamsters. I wanted to keep the New Bedford Fisherman's Union. The fact that there were seven of us that voted to keep the union, and there was another, two hundred that voted against it.

JGF: Oh, you're kidding.

AC: And when [? Val Cruz], teamsters lost the fishermen to the Seafarers. [? Val Cruz] came up to me, she says, "I hold you personally responsible for this" [laughs]. I said, "Hey, I told you, we're not dealing this way. We should have stayed what we were." But the guy that was head of the New Bedford fisherman's union was

retiring, there was nobody to really take his place. So that's what more or less happened. The teamsters got in there. And they were making—they would make deals that weren't really to the best benefit of the men.

JGF: Yeah. Interesting.

AC: I fought it every step of the way.

JGF: Wow.

AC: I was going to be a trustee. Put in to be a trustee, then I figured they'd screw me while I was out fishing. They'd have meetings and my name'd be on there. I said "Ah..." [laughs]. So I said, "No, that's a good idea." He tried to talk me out of it. "Ah, you're a photographer we could have had all your pictures in there." I says, "Heh, I wouldn't sell them to you." I really didn't care for their type of politics.

JGF: Right. Huh. And now there's no union, at all. Right?

AC: No. Well, you still have somewhat of Seafarers. But I think it's maybe like four or five boats. If that stops this year, which is a possibility, simply because the draggers don't have any days. And those draggers are in it. If that stops, basically that's done. Then they'll have to figure out something with the pension fund. Because that's—I don't know how many millions is in there, but. They'd have to break it up among the people that were vested.

JGF: Yeah.

AC: I have—I managed, I was one of the last—there was like two or three of us that were the last guys vested with the union. And that had our union dues paid up. For over a ten-year period. So what happens then is maybe, there's six hundred, six hundred guys, that are pensioned. Most of those, five hundred of them, that are retired already, or have been retired for quite a while. So there's a law of attrition there from guys passing away. You know? So the numbers will drop down to a few. When they do anything, who knows?

JGF: Yeah. Right.

AC: No idea.

[45:10]

AC: But it's an interesting thing to watch.

JGF: Yeah. I imagine.

AC: If I had my druthers I'd bring the fisherman's union.

JGF: Right.

AC: Of course it would scare the living hell out of these boat owners, but.

JGF: Yeah, right.

AC: They're better off having me doing something else.

JGF: Right. [laughs]

AC: Than getting involved in that. Because I think I could still drum up enough strength to organize these guys. But be fair about it. Right now there's nothing fair about it. Fifty, fifty-five percent going to the boat. And forty-five going to the gang. It's just—even though the scallopers are making big money, even on that. But all the related costs are going directly to the fishermen. There's no sharing. And some of these guys are right greedy. Not all of them, but a few. Are right greedy. Even charging insurance off to the guys. Which is—that's always been a boat expense. It's kind of ridiculous. The draggers have always had split shares. You know, they settle some of the bills out off of the top. Scallopers never did. So it's an

interesting... With fuel and everything else, it's going to be an interesting scenario watching what happens in a few years.

JGF: Yeah. And if there's an abundance of crew, because of....

AC: Right.

JGF: Then they can, sort of set more strict...

AC: Right. And if there is a transition... If there becomes a transition from fishing to oil, they're going to see union. Because the oil industry already has it. In place. Either that, or these guys are going to be out of jobs, looking at oil boats go with new people that they've never seen before. It's going to be interesting.

JGF: Yeah. Well, we'll have to have you back to fill us in in a couple of years.

AC: Yeah, we'll see what happens. As long as I'm still kicking. [laughs]

JGF: Yeah. [laughs]

Well I have other questions but I think unfortunately I need to wrap it up.

AC: Alright.

JGF: I guess what I'd just like to ask—I like to sort of end this with everybody is, what would you want festival visitors to understand about the New Bedford commercial fishing industry?

AC: That we're small, family fishing businesses. For the most part. I think that most New Bedford fishermen—There's something about the water. There's something about fishing out of here, and the water, that will never—that will never leave their body. That will never leave their—I mean I, I *love* the water. The water gives me strength. And it will always be that way. And I think that's what you find here. Even with all the diversity and adversity, regulations, everything else, I think it'll still maintain.

JGF: Super.

AC: Hopefully.

JGF: Thank you very much.

AC: You're welcome.

[End of interview]