

Name of person Interviewed: Margaret Curole [MC] [NOTE: pronounced Cor-ole]

Facts about this person:

Age (if known)

Sex Female

Occupation Shrimp fisherman (retired); Commercial fishing advocate

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

Home port Galliano, Louisiana

and Hail Port (port fished from, which can be the same) Galliano,
Louisiana

Residence (Town where lives) Galliano, Louisiana

Ethnic background (if known) Cajun

Interviewer: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel [JGF]

Sound technician: Jeff Sherman [JSh]

Transcriber: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel

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INDEX (minutes:seconds) / KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS: Galliano, Louisiana; Shrimping; Marsh fishing; Marsh trapping camp life; Shrimp net technology; Shrimp skimmer rig; Offshore fisheries; Inshore fisheries; Louisiana oil industry; Shrimp seasons; Weather and moon effects shrimp stocks; Victor's Canal; Latiffe skiff; Nicknames; Commercial fishing advocacy; United Nations; World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers; Commercial Fishermen of America; Fishing community sustainability; Regulations; Magnuson Stevenson Act; Cajun;

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[End of interview]

TRANSCRIPT

[00:00]

JGF: OK. This is Janice Fleuriel. Today is Sunday, September 28th, 2008. We're at the Working Waterfront Festival in New Bedford. I'm in the Harbormaster's House. And I'll be interviewing Margaret Curole.

[checking on last name pronunciation]

Who's up here from Louisiana, joining us for the festival this year.

OK. Great. [sound check]

So, what we usually like to do Margaret is just start by having people give us a little bit about their own personal background, and their family's background, and where they live and how they got into the industry.

MC: My name is Margaret [?Bryan?] Curole. My father was a [?boss] for Gulf Oil Company, who was transferred to South Louisiana in the fifties. And, so I didn't come to fishing because of, you know, a heritage thing, but because I fell in love and married a fisherman. And the day before our daughter was born, he quit his job and started to build his first boat.

JGF: Wow... [Laughs]

MC: [Laughs] And..., we raised our daughter for the first three years she was born, in a trapping camp in the marshes of Louisiana.

JGF: No kidding!

MC: Yeah. She grew up with no TV. Did no Barney or anything else. And, I credit that with her being as level-headed as she is today. [Laughs]

JGF: Oh, that's excellent!

MC: And we're shrimp fisherman, like most people where we live. We live in a little town called Galliano. It's in Lafourche Parish. We're about, maybe thirty miles from the Gulf of Mexico, in South Louisiana. And if you look at Louisiana like a boot, we're right on the ball of the foot. Right at the water.

JGF: Wow... Interesting. So I know it says [laughs] in your bio that you had quite an adjustment to make from the life you had growing up, compared to marrying a fisherman.

MC: Yes.

JGF: I'm curious, too, how did you meet your husband.

MC: At a wedding.

JGF: At a wedding! OK.

MC: I met him at a wedding and started dating his brother actually. [Laughs]

JGF: Don't we all sort of have stories like that. [Laughs]

MC: Yeah... And, you know, we met, and got married, and had a daughter, and... And started shrimping for a living. He always... His family is—as far back as we trace is five generations—but we know it goes further back than that. But that's as far as we can trace because nobody had any records where we live, because nobody could read or write.

JGF: Oh... interesting.

MC: And..., my husband's grandmother doesn't speak English to this day. She only speaks French.

And... So coming from a background like I had, where my parents had worked and lived all over the world. My dad was a college-education Texan that wore a Stetson

hat and cowboy boots. It was quite an adjustment to make! It was a little difficult at first. [Laughs] But..., once we got into the swing of things, and I saw how healthy the lifestyle was, and how good it was for my daughter, that I just totally embraced it. And we did it for almost twenty years.

JGF: Wow... And you said you were living in what kind of a setting?

MC: A trapping camp.

JGF: A trapping camp.

MC: Yeah, in the marsh.

JGF: In the marsh.

MC: It would take us a little over an hour, in our shrimp boat, to get to where we lived.

JGF: Wow...

MC: And that was before cell phones. Before any of that.

JGF: Wow...

MC: So, we were very much, the three of us living by ourself. And, you could hear somebody coming for an hour before they got there.

JGF: Wow... Huh.

MC: So. And our little girl, we never—I never even made her wear clothes. You know, I mean, she was this little nature baby. Everybody knew the pretty little blonde naked baby on Victor's Canal. She'd come out running, waving at the boats. And they were—you know, she grew up, and instead of having a dog or a cat, she had a pet raccoon.

JGF: [Laughs] I love it.

MC: [Laughs]

JGF: That's wonderful.

MC: Yeah. So... And it was so good, because it was so honest. And..., you know, we never—Because it was kind of a dangerous situation—there was water all around, there was animals and critters and everything else. So we never treated her like a baby. Or, like a child. We always treated her just as another little person. And we taught her how to respect nature. We taught her what she could get from it and what it could do to her. And..., like I said, she's probably more level-headed than I am.

JGF: Wow... And....

MC: Definitely had a better... [laughs]. Definitely had a better scope on life.

JGF: Uh huh. That's interesting.

Now at the same time she was learning were you learning?

MC: Oh gosh, yes!

[04:50]

JGF: Yeah... It sounds like you had more of a, maybe, suburban childhood growing up.

MC: Yes... I mean, like—you know, I grew up in a family where I was an only child as well. And she... Like she, you know, had all these experiences where, you know—what was important to my mom and dad was—my dad would bring me comic books. And he taught me to read when I was like three. And he'd bring me an Archie comic book and a Classics Illustrated. And I had the Classics Illustrated before I could get the Archie or the Caspar.

JGF: I loved Archie! [Laughs]

MC: [Laughs] Oh, I did too. But, I had to read. So, by the time I was in second or third grade I had read all of..., you know, Dickens and Shakespeare and all that in comic book form, but at least I was familiar with it.

And then, I met my husband, who never had even heard a nursery rhyme before. A few French tales, but, not the same way. We really didn't have a lot to say when it came to..., you know, outside interests. We were so completely opposite. And..., the idea that I was going to have to live without a dishwasher, and, electricity. I had to learn how to carry water from a cistern. And, wash my dishes, and... You know, so it was... It was, you know, a little stressful for the first couple of years until I realized that I really liked it!

JGF: That's interesting.

MC: And it was a lot of fun. And it was, you know, not for everybody but, for us it really worked.

JGF: Now why would someone with a shrimp boat... Was it just personal choice to live like an hour away from the actual fishing waters?

MC: No that *is* where you fished, is up in the marsh.

JGF: Oh... I see.

MC: You see, Louisiana has two active shrimp fisheries. There's an offshore shrimp fishery. And there's an inshore shrimp fishery. And the inshore shrimp, is where you get the volume. And the..., at that time the bread and butter shrimp, the small shrimp, but you'd catch so much of it that you could really make a decent living out of it.

So instead of... It was easier for us to live there because all we did was we walked out our door, got on our boat, and there the nets in the water. And then when it's time to dock, we threw the rope, tied the boat up, walked inside and went to bed.

JGF: Wow...

MC: You know. So it made it a lot easier for us. You know?

JGF: And so then you would actually travel to sell the shrimp?

MC: Right.

JGF: Yeah. And where would you sell it?

MC: We'd sell it mostly in a place called Golden Meadow, which was a town [?] that was closest to the trapping camp. And, the trapping camp was my husband's grandparent's camp. They shrimped for a living. And in the wintertime they trapped furs.

JGF: Yeah...

MC: And they got too old to trap anymore. And they still had the camp. And, my husband always would use it, like either in the wintertime to duck hunt out of, and stuff like that.

JGF: I'm sorry. To what?

MC: To duck hunt.

JGF: Oh OK. Yeah.

MC: And we had two square miles of leased land. Where we could duck hunt, and rabbit hunt. And we would shrimp in the canals in the front. And we rarely bought any food. You know, except the extra things you needed.

JGF: Did you, like have a garden for vegetables? Or was it more of a protein diet?

MC: It was mostly protein and the vegetables you had to bring in because there was no land.

JGF: Right.

MC: The little bit of land was really marshy and stuff.

JGF: Yeah.

MC: Like, whenever the tide would come up the camp was completely surrounded by water.

JGF: Wow. Wow. Huh.
So these are, I guess you'd call tidal marshes, maybe then.

MC: Yes. Very much a tidal marsh.

JGF: And you talked about the canal had a name. What was the name?

MC: Victor. [pronounced Veek-tore]

JGF: Like Victor?

MC: Victor.

JGF: Yeah. OK.

MC: It was Victor's Canal and Victor was my husband's grandfather. The canal was named after him.

JGF: Huh. Was it a manmade or natural canal?

MC: It was... It was a manmade canal that was dug back in the..., probably between the..., forties and the fifties. For the oil field.

JGF: Oh... OK.

MC: So they could bring the oil barges in and out.

JGF: Wow... OK. So there's an oil field further up, kind of thing?

MC: There's oil rigs everywhere. You know, like, you'll be just driving along, riding along in a boat, and there's an oil well in the middle of it. Because it's—where we live is very, very oil rich.

JGF: I see. I see. So your boat has to go around the rigs kind of thing?

MC: Well, sometime—most of the time they're off the canal.

JGF: I see. Yeah.

MC: And like there'll be a walkway to them or something like that. Or they'll use the air boats to get in and out.

JGF: So how deep is the canal? Does it vary?

MC: It varies. If... A lot—like now it's not used for an oil field no more. Those oil rigs have already shut down. And so it silts up. So..., in the middle it might have been about ten, fifteen feet deep. During the wintertime, when the tides would be really, really low, you could almost walk across the canals.

JGF: Wow. Wow. Huh.
So was shrimping—the fishing sort of seasonal then? Based on the depths?

MC: Yes.

[10:00]

JGF: Yeah?

MC: Well, shrimp is based on two different seasons. In south Louisiana, there's a brown shrimp season that runs from say, May until about July. And there's a white shrimp season that runs from August until about the end of November.

JGF: OK.

MC: And, the May shrimp season completely has to do with the moon.

JGF: Oh...

MC: And three days before, the day of, and three days after, the moon, is when you catch shrimp.

JGF: The new moon?

MC: The new moon or the dark moon. But when it's in the middle phases you really don't catch any. That's when you can take a few days off.

And then the August shrimp season is completely dependent on the weather. And it's to do with when the north wind starts to blow the water. And every time there's a really strong wind, that causes wind tides. The shrimp come up to the top, they feel that, and the largest crop you have will leave for that blow. And then the next blow will be the next smallest size, which becomes your largest size. And it continues until the shrimp is too small to catch.

JGF: Wow... And is it too small to catch based on regulations, or just not worth catching?

MC: Well, it's not worth catching. It's eyeballs and hair.

JGF: Oh. [Laughs]

MC: You know, they're tiny, they're over a hundred to the pound. It's beyond the Oregon Pinks, or, you know, little Maine shrimp. It's way, way smaller. And..., my daughter we tease her all the time that she's definitely a fisherman's daughter, because before she said "Mom" or "Dad" she said "moon."

JGF: Wow...

MC: [Laughs]

JGF: You know and that's so fascinating, because I feel like sort of up here in New England—not completely but—the whole connection between, you know, weather and that kind of thing, is not really..., it doesn't play a role with all the technology anymore and all that. And this is still so integrated. That's really fascinating.

MC: Oh yeah... And to this day—she's twenty years old, she's a professional chef, and living in New Orleans. And when the moon comes out during the daytime, and she's around her daddy, she'll look up and she'll say, "Look. The moon, Daddy."

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

MC: You know? I get teared up thinking about it.

JGF: I don't blame you. I just think that's really wonderful. That's interesting.

MC: [Laughs]

JGF: It reminds me a little bit about—and I think it was a southern, a song about the south. One of my favorite folk singers, Brooks Williams wrote this song called "Jubilee." Have you ever heard of Jubilee?

JGF: Maybe it was Alabama or somewhere, but there's a time of year when certain things come together right, and there's just scads and scads of fish in this one spot, and everybody will go out. It sounds in a way, similar to that.

MC: It is kind of similar. And my husband has a phrase, that during the May season—because the August season is not quite as dramatic. You know, it's kind of [?meandrous]. But the May season, when it starts, it's *on*. And the shrimp start to run, and... When the moon comes up, and—you can have a net in the water during the daytime, and not catch a shrimp. Or catch a pound or two.

JGF: Are they, like in the sand or something?

MC: They bury in the mud. And all they do is they just leave their little..., their little feelers out. And... But something happens when the tidal flow starts to change with the moon. And the moon comes up. It's like, my husband says the shrimp all come out to dance by the light of the moon. Because they come to the *top*. And in a matter of an hour, from the time the sun goes down to the time the sun [?moon] comes up—you know, the difference, the shrimp will all come out and you can catch, two hundred, three hundred pound in the first drag.

JGF: Wow.... Wow...

MC: And, where the drag before you caught five.

JGF: That's interesting. And it's not because they're coming out to feed on things on the surface of the water or anything?

MC: I think it's because—it's got to do with their..., the way they migrate. And when they feel the tidal flows, that that's the only way a shrimp really travels is through the tidal flows.

JGF: I see. Yeah...

MC: So..., and since the tide runs so hard when the moon is out—either dark or full—that's when they have to get up and they have to move. So it's like nature just tells them, "We got to go." You know, and—and they take off.

JGF: Wow... That's fascinating.

What was the boat like and the gear like for catching them?

MC: When we first started out, we..., there was nets called butterflies. Which were big square, fixed wing trawls on opposite sides. You used those at night. And you used V trawls during the daytime. And..., that—you know, that was what—was for a while. And..., I guess about maybe fifteen years ago, my husband and a couple other guys—but mainly my husband, started developing what's called a skimmer rig. And he took the bottom pipe off of the big fixed square net, and moved it into a triangle and put a slide along the bottom. Because, to make it a lot more effective, where you can use your tickle chains and your trawls—kind of modified the trawls to, to pull in the water. Because the big square rigs were really heavy. And..., if you got into a muddy situation, they were big and square and they would just plow you into the mud.

[15:09]

JGF: Oh.... Right. Yeah.

MC: So he said there's got to be a better way. And he was one of the pioneers of the gear type.

JGF: Wow....

MC: Wish he'd have patented it.

JGF: I was just going to ask you that.

MC: Yeah.

JGF: No? Huh?

MC: But, he didn't. And now it's the principal gear type for inland fishing.

JGF: So is there a whole company that makes me now?

MC: No, everybody makes their own.

JGF: Oh, everybody makes their own.

MC: Yeah. The government has set, you know, like standard sizes and stuff. But, everybody pretty much, you know, welds their own. And, it's to the point now, you know, I could drive down the bayou and tell you which ones are going to break.

JGF: Oh... Because they're not made well?

MC: Because they're not made right. [Laughs]
So, a lot of them will come and say, you know—my husband's nickname is Godzilla.

JGF: [Laughs]

MC: "Godzilla, will you make me..." you know, or "Will you show me where the braces need to be" or whatever.
And he got his nickname Godzilla because we had—we first started off with a boat called Quick Silver and it was an outboard motor boat. And..., we would go fishing and go shrimping with it. And, the bigger boats would get right up behind us and it always felt like this big monster was coming up behind us. So..., when he decided to build his first Lafitte skiff, he said, "I'm going to call it Godzilla. Because I want to be the monster." And..., then we've had other boats since then. But, he called it Godzilla and where we're from, it just kind of tends to be that the name of your boat becomes your nickname. And, nobody where we're from goes by their name. Everybody has a nickname.
And... Funny story happened. The Godzilla was, about to... It broke loose and it was about to drift out to sea in Grand Isle. And... But finally somebody tracked us down. And I'm like, "Why didn't you all call this when you saw this happening?" Because Godzilla wasn't listed in the phone book.

JGF: Oh [Laughs]! No, that's right.

MC: So, you know, people don't know each other's names. You can know somebody for *years*, and not know their real name.

JGF: Oh, that's so interesting. Huh.
And you called it a *Lafitte skiff*?

MC: A Lafitte skiff.

JGF: How do you spell that?

MC: L-a-f-i-t-t-e.

JGF: And it's all lowercase?

MC: Yeah.

JGF: OK.

MC: They... They usually run from about twenty-five feet to about just under forty. And it—that's a Lafitte skiff.

JGF: And is it wooden or other...?

MC: Now they're usually fiberglass. Back then, the very, very beginning maybe they were wood, but... Really not many people have wood anymore.

JGF: Yeah.

MC: It's just—it's too hard to upkeep in salt waters.

JGF: So did your husband build the boat himself? Or...?

MC: Yeah.

JGF: Wow. So he knows how to work with fiberglass and all that stuff?

MC: He fiberglasses. He welds. He does it all. We built four boats together.

JGF: Really! Wow...

MC: Yeah.

JGF: What were the others? Did they have names?

MC: The next one after Godzilla was the Caitlin Elizabeth, named after our daughter. That was a little bit bigger Lafitte skiff.

JGF: And how do you spell her first name?

MC: C-a-i-t-l-i-n.

JGF: OK. Thank you.

MC: And..., so we had the Quick Silver. Then we had the Godzilla. Then The Caitlin Elizabeth. And then our last boat was the Heavy Metal.

JGF: [Laughs]

MC: And... I mean, my husband is a headbanger. But [laughs]. It really wasn't because of that. It was because it was made with such heavy iron and it was such a big, heavy duty boat with a ten foot bow. And..., that it was kind of a play on words.

JGF: OK. Oh, that's cool. Huh.

MC: But it also did have a, you know, stereo system that you could hear coming for a mile, but. [Laughs]

JGF: Wow, I was going to say. How did he survive in your house in the marsh? He didn't have electricity for...?

MC: That one we kind of didn't have a radio. *But*, toward the end, he had hooked up a car battery with a solar panel. And, a little bitty old cassette player he pulled out of an old pickup truck. And..., we—you know, as long as the sun shined we could have music.

JGF: Wow...! That's cool!

MC: [Laughs]

JGF: I just... I'm imagining this marsh and I realize I'm imagining tons of trees every—was it very woodsy or no? Was it very open?

MC: There was no trees.

JGF: Oh, OK.

MC: It's a very, very low flat...

JGF: Or right, if it's a tidal marsh.

MC: It's a very, very low, flat marsh.

JGF: OK.

MC: Yeah. The biggest thing is maybe a mangrove. We call it a [Cajun pronunciation]. That'll maybe get about three feet high. It's about the highest thing you'll find.

JGF: I see. Interesting. Huh.
And how wide was the canal? When you talked about trawls I realized...

MC: I guess, probably..., maybe about twenty-five feet across.

JGF: OK.

MC: You know, and then—Then it would silt in sometimes. But I guess about twenty-five feet across.

JGF: And how subject were you all to, like—of course we all hear about Katrina and things like that—but weather in general. Was it pretty severe?

[19:59]

MC: Oh... yeah. The weather came across the marsh. You could see it coming. And you just went inside, and hope nothing blew away [laughs]. Make sure you put a few extra ropes on, and if it got really, really bad, a lot of time we'd get in the boat.

JGF: Yup.

MC: Because, you know, a boat is the safer place to be in the water—*inshore*, than a building sometimes. Like, for Hurricane Katrina, I happened to be in Beijing, China, when Katrina hit, doing a research project. And my husband at the time was driving a tug boat. But, our big iron trawl boat? Twelve people broke into the boat to get into it for Hurricane Katrina because they were too scared to stay in their houses.

JGF: Wow... And that, that kept them...

MC: It kept them safe. Yeah.

JGF: Wow... Huh.

MC: The wisdom is the water can rise and the boat'll rise with it.

JGF: Yeah. But who cares? Yeah. At least...

MC: But... You'll be safe. Where a tornado will hit the..., you know, hit a house and blow it up and you'll be...

JGF: And how would they keep—Would they have to bail or pump, though, to keep all that rain out of the boat?

MC: No. There was, like—That boat we had so much automatic bilge pumps and stuff like that it wasn't any issue.

JGF: Oh, OK. So they would just be working, like, full time or [laughs].

MC: Well, we—No, we had—That boat was big enough that there was four bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen.

JGF: Oh, I see.

MC: It was a big boat. And it was—it was easy living on that one.

JGF: Yeah... Wow... Oh, that's interesting.

MC: With a four-ton central air conditioner. Never got hot [laughs] in that boat.

JGF: Oh, that's awesome.

MC: Yeah...

JGF: Oh, that's really impressive.

So... You shrimped for twenty years you said?

MC: Yes.

JGF: What was... Why the decision to stop?

MC: Well..., when the imports started coming in in around 2001, the price of shrimp went from..., the smallest shrimp being a dollar, and fuel being eight cents—you could always make a living that way, the balance stayed that way, and everything went up from that dollar, to where the jumbos would sometimes be as much as four, four and a quarter. And..., well..., in 2001, the price dropped to—some of the shrimp went down to, maybe, thirty-five cents a pound. *Then* went down to a quarter a pound in a couple of years. Then, diesel started going over a dollar, then going to two dollars. And then it got to be where the shrimp—no matter if you took your biggest trip, by the biggest shrimp, by the biggest catch you ever had—you still couldn't pay your diesel and everything else. So.

JGF: Oh, my goodness.

MC: It just... Especially if you had a bigger boat, it became a losing proposition.

JGF: Wow....

MC: And at the same time that happened, oil production jumped dramatically. And..., like a lot of the guys had Coast Guard licenses?

JGF: Yup.

MC: And a lot of them messed up and let them go. And... But my husband never did. He—I said, “Because what happens if the boat sinks? Or something happens and you can’t trawl anymore?” You can always go back to that. So he would always renew.

And..., when it started getting really, really desperate for captains and stuff, they came on the boat and said, “I’ll make you an offer you can’t refuse,” and they did.

JGF: Wow. Wow.

MC: You know, and I mean... And that’s the dilemma right now in fisheries. Especially in South Louisiana. If you have a license or whatever—even if you don’t have a license. I mean, a little guy that’s eighteen years old just graduate from high school can go get a job deckhanding on a boat, *green*, and make two hundred and fifty dollars a day. You’re not going to make that fishing.

JGF: Right... Right. So they’re all working for the oil companies?

MC: They’re all working for oil companies.

JGF: Wow...

MC: And they’re getting paid insurance, 401 Ks, matching funds, disability insurance. And you *never* have that when you’re a fisherman. [Laughs]

JGF: Yeah... So did you—do you still live in the marsh? Or do you live somewhere else then now?

MC: No. We live in our house. We always had a house.

JGF: You always had your house? OK.

MC: We just..., you know, we just chose not to live in it.

JGF: That’s cool. Yeah.

MC: Because... You know, and... I had made an effort and my husband and I voted and agreed that we didn’t want to raise our child in front of a TV set.

JGF: Yes. Yes.

MC: And, so it made life easier. And we like being together, and...

JGF: That’s so awesome.

MC: Yeah. So.

JGF: Great. Huh. Wow.

So... Was it around the time when you stopped shrimping that you started your advocacy? Maybe you can talk about how that started.

MC: Well... The last year or so, that we *really* did it full-time, which was, 2004... I went to a meeting *against* my will. I *did not* want to go to another meeting. I felt like, you know, like most wives, “Oh, God! Not another meeting.” And..., I went to the meeting. And..., something told me I had to say something. You know? And I just... It like almost exploded out of me.

JGF: What was this meeting exactly?

MC: It was a meeting in Biloxi, Mississippi about, how..., there was maybe a possibility of an anti-dumping lawsuit, and, just, you know, just people trying to get together, saying, “What are we going to do?”

[25:05]

JGF: Right.

MC: And... A lot of the fishermen were ready to give up. And I said, “I don’t know about you all, but, I’m not going down without a fight.” You know? “You’re not

going to kick me into a corner.” I mean, if I go down fighting, then I went down *trying*. You know? And you’re not going to do that to me. And I don’t know why, because like, the day *before*, I was ready to throw it all in. But.

I just—I looked around the room and I saw all those men, and I said, I can’t not say something.

And... Like within two or three weeks after, I went to that meeting, somebody called me and said would I go and give a talk on the effects of NAFTA and CAFTA and stuff at the WTO in Mexico.

JGF: The W—Oh, World Trade Organization.

MC: The World Trade Organization.

JGF: Yeah. Wow...

MC: So I went from being a fisherman’s wife, with a theater background in college, who hadn’t worked outside of the home in..., many, many, *many* years, to giving a speech at the World Trade Organization.

JGF: Oh, my goodness!

MC: And..., from then it’s never stopped. It’s never stopped and..., I ended up becoming the North American Coordinator for the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers.

JGF: Wow...

MC: And..., I represent the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

JGF: Oh, my goodness.

MC: And..., I’ve been in seventeen countries in the last three years.

JGF: Wow...

MC: And..., when I leave here I’m on my way to Thailand. [Laughs]

JGF: Wow... Wow...

MC: It’s been a wild ride. Let me tell you.

And, and... I really think it was something that was preordained or whatever, if you want to believe in that. I do. I believe that everybody has a purpose. And..., I had been struggling. Because I was forty-one years old. And I had been struggling with, what am I going to do with my life? I’m an intelligent woman, and I feel like I’m not utilizing the gifts God gave me. And..., I started speaking. And..., you know, finally I heard my mama’s voice, “About that time that college education did something.” [Laughs]

JGF: [Laughs]

MC: You know? And I mean, you know, my college background was in theater and arts. But it made me not be afraid to talk.

JGF: Well I was wondering. That, you know, with a theater background, getting up in front of people and presenting...

MC: That’s never been a [laughs] problem.

JGF: That’s excellent.

MC: Not exactly the shy and retiring type.

JGF: [Laughs] That’s neat.

So now your work now... Is it to raise awareness? What would you say—and are you also going around the world just looking at how other fishing industries are faring? Or...?

MC: Well..., I wear a bunch of different hats. But, like, my work with Commercial Fishermen of America is awareness, and more like, almost like, political aspects here in the United States. Working about regulations, fairness, blah blah blah. And then..., with the World Forum, what we do is, we help write policies, attend United Nations meetings, attend conferences, to ensure the rights of fishing communities around the world.

JGF: That's amazing.

MC: And then..., through that, it's led me into the world of food sovereignty issues, which ensures everybody's right to clean food. And only after they've been fed can the leftovers be used for export.

JGF: Yeah.

MC: And..., that's taken me into sustainability issues. And that's what's taken me into China and Africa, and..., things like that, to where I can help people find ways to have access to quality food.

JGF: Oh... That's amazing.

And Commercial Fishermen of America is fairly new I read?

MC: Yes.

JGF: I mean... For five years, I've been hearing people say, that fishermen need to come together more to speak for themselves. And it sounds like this could well be the outlet that's everybody been hoping for. Can you talk a little more about that?

MC: Sure.

Well, at Fish Expo in Rhode Island, and even before that—I want to say 2003, 2004—a few of us got together, you know, pretty much some leaders in the industry got together and said, “We need to do this.” And we started collected business cards. And it kind of didn't go anywhere. But the idea and our commitment was always there. We just didn't know *how* we were going to do it. And then we managed to get a little bit of funding to explore the option. And we invited fishermen's groups, representatives from around the country. And we ended up electing a board of directors. Got a little bit more funding. And..., that was around the time that Katrina hit. And when Katrina hit, it was a perfect example of why you need a central organization. Because..., you know, government people, the Red Cross—a lot of different people said, “How do we get in touch with the fishermen? We want to do something for them.” Well, guess what? Our office was under water. Half of our fishermen were missing. Nobody could find a way. But if this group would have been in place, they could have said, “OK. We can help you. We can lead you to the right people.” And then..., it was—you know, like, that was the idea behind it. That there's so many issues that every fishermen, no matter what gear type, have in common.

[30:38]

JGF: Yup.

MC: And..., we've *all* felt like it. We got to quit working at cross purposes and worrying about, what the crabbers were doing the shrimpers and doing to the fish guys and doing to the—you know? And, there was those common goals.

And..., we put it together. And for almost two years, we went around to the different expos and trade shows. And asked fishermen what their biggest concerns were.

And the outcome of it was—the one we felt like was the most important—was the lack of health care.

[Interruption/person coming in with a question]

And..., they [interruption/door problem]

But..., that seemed to be one of the biggest issues. And, we now have a bill pending in Congress that was put forth by Senators Kennedy, Frank, and Kerry, and signed on with Gilchrist and a lot of other ones. Mary Landrieu from Louisiana. To provide startup money for each state to develop their own healthcare program for fishing families along the line of the Massachusetts health partnership.

JGF: Wow...

MC: We don't—We don't expect it to do anything until after the election.

JGF: Well, right.

MC: But we feel like it will go through.

JGF: That's exciting.

MC: So we're calling it a success even though it's not all the way through yet. But just *getting it there* is the biggest step.

JGF: That's really neat.

MC: And then..., the second thing was, just to educate people who are not fishermen about who fishermen are.

JGF: Right...

MC: And..., so..., though our Web site, and everything else... It's still in development. It's not a *total* finished product yet. But. We're going to be able to say to, you know, the housewife in Nebraska. Go to Commercial Fishermen of America's Web site, and then say you want to go the fish market today. You can click on the gear type or the fish you want, and say, "How is it harvested?" "Is it sustainable?" "What is in season?" "What is the best time to buy it?" "What do you look for when you buy it?" And..., you know, and just that kind of thing. So.

JGF: Yeah...

MC: And it'll give an outreach to people who are *not* fishing. Because we tend to always just preach to the choir I call it.

JGF: Yup.

MC: You know?

JGF: Yup.

MC: We love to talk to other fishermen. Because you see them nod in the crowd.

JGF: That's right. [Laughs]

MC: You like that, captive audience. But then... You know... The people buying the seafood are all over the United States.

JGF: And so will this also include any aspects of..., like trying to buy locally harvested when possible?

MC: Yes.

JGF: Yeah. Which it feels like now is probably a good time to get in on that thinking, because it seems to be more and more prevalent.

MC: We... Jeremy Brown, who's one of the board members, he's the vice-president of the CFA, he lives in Bellingham, Washington. And he and I met—completely unrelated to fishing—like, as far as political [?]. But we met in Italy, working for slow food. And..., the slow food movement—which is, you know, the opposite of

the fast food movement—the slow food movement, we were there representing fishermen and different gear types. And..., to talk about our fish. So..., it was just a natural leap to, “Let’s use the connections we’ve got.” And then it—now it’s a cool topic. Everybody wants to go green. And everybody wants to go local. So.

JGF: Yeah... Now you have I think—you’re in a great position too with your *global* perspective, too. It seems like, you know, I see and hear about so much fish from say Chile or wherever. What happens to the market there? Would the other side of your work be to make sure that people in Chile are able to buy their own fish? Or...?

MC: That’s a—that’s *very* important for our work. Like..., the thing I mean of course, because shrimp is near and dear to *my* heart. I... Like, one of the things I stress is that, especially in these international trade agreements, on every side, people are affected. Most of the time adversely. Like... Say you use Thailand for an example, or India. They don’t have a choice. The government says, “You can’t fish your grounds anymore because we’re going to make it a shrimp farm. And you have to work in that shrimp farm.

[35:13]

JGF: Oh...

MC: So not only have they lost their heritage, and their livelihoods, and their basis for food. They have to completely rethink their community ways of doing things. It puts everything into a tailspin. Then you’ve got health issues that arise, because of the unhealthiness of these aquaculture ponds. And..., they’ve lost the access to their traditional waterways. And... And, so there’s—you know we think about, “Oh, God, I’m being put out of business because of the imports.” But, they’re being put out of their traditional business, and almost being forced into some modified slave labor. Because the government’s saying you have to give up your way of life and do what *we* want you to do.

JGF: Wow... Interesting.

MC: So I would try to make sure that that doesn’t happen.

JGF: Yeah... So, now when you go to Thailand, just as an example of that work. Who will you meet with? Will you meet with like local fishermen as well as high officials? Or...?

MC: Well, this trip to Thailand I’ll be mostly doing United Nations conference work, with FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. It’s a sustainable fisheries conference. So I’ll be putting on the severe black business suit, and wearing my hair in a bun, you know.

JGF: Yeah... [Laughs]

MC: And being the politician.

JGF: I see.

MC: But, say like, when I went to Africa, I sat in the Sahara desert. Lived in a grass hut, and, learned about what these people did. Fishermen, and farmers, and hunter gatherers from around the world. And..., helped formulate documents that go to make policy.

JGF: Wow...

MC: So you kind of—you know, it depends on where I go as to what I do.

JGF: Yeah...

MC: So it's, it's been interesting.

JGF: Yeah...

And how do you like... Well, as a folklorist, and culture and all that... How do you—do you have somebody on the other end, or in the UN, that's sort of helping you make your way into the communities?

MC: You get invited usually, into these communities, by either the group that's sponsoring the conference or whatever. My parents had lived all over the world. My dad—my mother and dad lived in Saudi Arabia for many, many years. Before they got transferred to South Louisiana. They were from Texas originally.

And... So..., coming from the background of them having lived—I was a *little* more adventurous than maybe somebody from South Louisiana. And, I've always been fascinated with other cultures. And I've always been willing to throw myself into things and..., And, so it made it easy for me?

And..., because I'm like ridiculously curious about everything. And I always like to learn stuff. So that's..., you know, done me well when I was..., hungry in Africa, or getting sold for cows, or, whatever.

JGF: Wow....

MC: I've had a few experiences...

JGF: Did you say getting sold for *cows*?

MC: Oh... yeah. [Laughter] That's a funny story. We were—Jeremy Brown and I, we were walking down the street in Bamako, Mali.

JGF: Uh huh....

MC: And..., some men approached him in front of a mosque. And I was wearing a head scarf and everything. You could see my hands and my feet. But, obviously that was enough, that made them realize I was a white woman. And, white women are very prized in Africa. And..., he was offered twenty cows for me.

JGF: [Laughs]

MC: And, he said, no, that I was such a good wife—now this is not my husband, it's just somebody I'm traveling with, but he figured he couldn't explain that. So he told them, "No," he says, "she's such a good wife, I think I'll go for twenty-five cows and a camel." And the camel was the deal breaker. They were willing to do the twenty-five cows but not the camel.

JGF: [Gasps] See, that's so brilliant.

MC: You know?

JGF: That he would know how to, break the deal in another culture's terms.

MC: Yeah... And it was like—it was..., it was... It's funny now and it's a really cool story that I'll be getting mileage out of for years to come. But, at the time I wasn't really happy. [Laughs]

JGF: No kidding. I bet.

MC: I kind of started walking a little bit faster to get away. Because, I said...you know, it's one step further to what are they going to do? Knock him over the head and take me? You know?

JGF: That's right. Oh, my goodness. Wow...

MC: Then my husband of course, made the joke, of course, when we all got home. "I always wanted to be a cattleman, Jeremy. Where's my cows?" [Laughter]

JGF: So this is fascinating on another level in that, you know, we've talked to lots of fishermen's wives, and heard their stories about what it's like to have their husband leave for days at a time and be out at sea... So how does your husband deal with *you* being gone for however long at a time?

MC: I try really hard, because he's a tugboat captain now. So he works twenty-eight days away from home and fourteen days home. So it's still...

JGF: Oh, almost like a merchant marine.

MC: No..., it's still the same kind of thing. You know, like, he's gone, I'm gone. And I try to make sure that I take conferences or trips whenever he's not going to be home. Or..., like this trip to Thailand, he's coming with me.

[40:08]

JGF: Yeah....

MC: Now, he's going to surf in Phuket while I go work in Bangkok, but. He'll come with me, and... But he *never* wants to come, or he always seems to have something else to do when I go to Africa, [laughter], or China, or something like that.

JGF: Because he doesn't really want cows? [Laughs]

MC: No... And he doesn't want to be hungry, and be dirty, and... But like where I'm from too, is, you've got to understand that, it's still a very misogynistic society where I'm from.

JGF: Yeah...

MC: And, women traditionally don't travel like I do. Let *alone* travel alone. And..., when I first started doing it, you know, my husband's friends would ask me, or him, you know, "You *let* your wife do all that?" And he's like, "Do you think I could stop her? Do you think I could *let* my wife do anything?" But. Then again it goes back to the fact that I was raised differently, from the traditionally Cajun women. You know? So it-it, that has made me be able to do what I do. And because he likes to get to go on the trips I think [laughs]... He's been... And because he sees how much it means to me. And, he... He had a really hard time with giving up fishing.

JGF: Yeah... I was going to say as a former fisherman I would think he would understand what you're doing on a personal level, too.

MC: Yeah. And that's why it makes it easier.

JGF: Right.

MC: If I would have just started doing this as a whim, it might not have been the same thing. But. Now..., he's, like—he doesn't like to admit it all the time but I think he's a little proud of me.

JGF: Oh... that's cool.

MC: And, he makes the joke, he says, you know, all of, like—our married life, she was Godzilla's old lady. And now all of a sudden I'm Margaret Curole's husband.

JGF: [Laughs]

MC: And so *I* like it. Because it's—you know, I get to shine a little instead.

JGF: Yeah...

I—I... Jeff here is a film student, OK? So, one day, you're going to make a movie about this life [laughs] because..., I mean, it feels so providential. It's like, you know, you had this childhood with this extremely global background and like, you said, you're willing to jump into anything and you're insatiably curious. Which

would probably *allow you* to spend twenty years in a marsh, you know, shrimping on a boat with hardly any electricity or amenities. And now you're doing, all over the world.

MC: Right.

JGF: It's just so fascinating.

MC: It's been a wild ride. And I... You know, and if you would have told me, growing up, that I'd have been *doing* these kind of things, I would have never believed it. You know, it wouldn't happen, but, I'm looking forward to next year to my thirty year class reunion. Because it's going to be *so fun* when I have to fill out what have you don't for the last [?] years? [Laughter]

JGF: Oh, my God! Exactly! That's just the kind of thing—you're probably the only person who's like glad to have the chance to do that.

MC: Yeah...

JGF: So those two people who had that wedding, do they know what an amazing they started? [Laughs]

MC: I don't even think they're still married. [Laughter] But they started something. You know?

JGF: Yeah. That's fascinating.

So it was one speech, and then one phone call. And since then has it just been you getting invited to do all these things? You really haven't had to market yourself?

MC: I've never asked to do anything. And I have... For—I mean, it's almost to the point that the day I come home from one thing I'm being asked to do something else. If I wanted to, I could never go home, if I didn't want to. But... And this is how I... This is how I rationalized it all. And, when I first started doing the international work—my parents are both gone. And..., my... well, my mother-in-law, and Kevin's grandmother and all, got really upset with me. Because I started traveling like that.

JGF: Yeah...

MC: They didn't understand it. And I mean, there's people who live where I live that have never been past New Orleans. You know? And when I say "provincial," if you look at my first grade picture, there's little boys that aren't wearing shoes. And I mean I'm not *that* old. But... So I called my uncle, my mother's brother. And he was always the—the person that I would gauge things on. And I would run things by him and I'd say, "Am I supposed to do this or not?" And he told me, he said, "Darling," he says, "your mom and dad, we always wanted you and Mark"—which is *his* son that's the same age as me—"to become missionaries. And when you got all about twelve, thirteen years old, we knew that wasn't going to happen." He says, "So don't you think maybe, what you're doing, is being a missionary in some way or form?" And I said, "You know, yup." And he said, "Do you believe that there's a purpose for everybody?" And I said, "Yes I do. I firmly believe that." Because, I mean, how else can you say that life takes you on the turns it does if there's not a purpose for you? And..., I said, "I believe it." And he says, "Well, then if you're given this opportunity, then it's your *duty* to follow through with this. And if you look at it like that," he says, "then explain it to your mother-in-law. And if she doesn't understand, just say, 'I respect your opinion but I've got to do it anyway.'"

And that's the way it was kind of a the beginning. And then now she's kind of warmed up to it. I don't think they're thrilled with it. But.

[45:25]

JGF: Yeah... But. Wow.

MC: But she accepts that it's going to happen anyway.

JGF: Yeah. Wow...

Well I just have one more specific question and a couple wrap-ups so that you can get on to your next thing. But... Oh, did I just lose it? No, I know. One of the things we hear a lot about from people in New Bedford Harbor and other U.S. harbors is how regulations are just, sort of, you know, crippling the industry. What role would you see the Commercial Fishermen of America playing in addressing anything to do with regulation issues?

MC: Well..., because we've taken the stand of not getting involved in any kind of localized or gear type disputes, that kind of....

JGF: Oh....

MC: ...takes us out of that. But what we *have* made a pledge to, is that, the standards and practices set forth in the Magnuson-Stevenson Act, that we expect them to follow through with that. Whether it's the socio-economic aspect. Or, we're doing a lot to change, from, best available science to sound, based science. And we're doing a lot of work to make fishermen's *data*, and fishermen be included more in forming regulations.

JGF: That's ex--- Wow...

MC: Yeah.

JGF: That's great. Because those do seem to be, the issues that I've heard people talk about. Like with Magnuson, the notion that it's not supposed to *harm* the fishing communities. Right? Or the livelihoods? And...

MC: Before, any regulation is made, there's supposed to be, a socio-economic impact. There's supposed to be..., all these things that are supposed to be done. And they *don't* do them. They..., they find somebody to say, "Oh, it won't make a difference, they can move on to something else," or whatever. And... The... We're trying our best to start holding, you know, NMFS, and everybody's feet to the fire, and say, "You're the one that said, this is what it's going to be. Well now, do what you're supposed to be doing."

JGF: Yup. Yup. Wow... That's wonderful. It sounds like that' going to be a huge step in the right direction and be the voice that the fishermen keep saying they've needed.

MC: Yeah.

JGF: That's wonderful. That's great.

Well the only other two questions I like to sort of end every interview with. The first one is, is there I haven't asked that you would have like to share for the record?

MC: No... I think you covered it. [Laughs]

JGF: OK. Great. And we didn't talk about your cooking. But I know they're going to get you over there in the foodways tent for that. So that's wonderful.

Actually I do have one more... You aren't... Are you Cajun by ethnic background?

MC: No.

JGF: Do you consider yourself though Cajun?

MC: Oh, I definitely am. You know. I definitely am. My mother would make the joke that until I went to school I had a Texas accent. And then, two days later I came home and I didn't sound like anybody in my family [laughs].

JGF: Oh that's interesting. [Laughs]

MC: But, you know... You *can't* live where we live. And not get totally immersed into it. You know? I mean my parents never assimilated. But they were in their forties when they moved there. You know? So it was a difference. But I..., I'm adopted.

JGF: Oh... OK.

MC: And..., so, whether..., nature versus nurture has anything to do with anything, or not. You know? I...

JGF: Interesting.

MC: It just... I, I couldn't be anything else.

JGF: Yeah. Oh, that's neat!

So my only other question is—and you may feel like you've answered this as well—but I do like to end with..., what would you like to see festival visitors leave understanding about the industry? Or the kind of work you do in it?

MC: I'd like them to realize that fishermen are people. You know? I mean, they're not just..., these things you see out on the water. I mean—you know, like... I pick on Nebraska because to me Nebraska's middle America. You know? Or if anybody here, whatever... I want them to see that there's a face on that fish. You know? That there's..., there's a *person* behind it. There's a family behind it. There's a community behind it. And that there's a way of life. And a heritage, that goes with every fish they eat.

And..., if you look at fishing communities, they're some of the *last* communities that are really still very ethnic. And still *tied* to heritage. And, I mean, that's what I've been finding around the country. And around the world. Because we're—maybe because we are very resistant to change, and we're very insulated in our own communities, because fishermen stick together.

[50:01]

JGF: Right...

MC: But... Just to realize that, you know, fish don't come in a box. Or they don't come frozen. You know? That's the way *you* buy them. But somebody had to *touch* them. Somebody with a wife. Somebody with children. You know, their children—you're feeding someone's children because you're buying their fish. And I want people to realize that.

JGF: Wow. That's neat.

And do you have anything [to JSh]? He asked a very perceptive question at the end of the last interview, so I just...

JSh: The only thing is, you've been all over the world. And you see fishermen from China, and you're going to Bangkok, and obviously America. Is like a fishermen from New Bedford any different from a fishermen in China? Or is it...?

MC: No... A fisherman is a fisherman. It was the wildest thing and it was the *coolest* thing. When I—the first international trip my husband and I took—besides Mexico, I mean, you know, we'd been to Mexico on a cruise before, but. When we went to Portugal, and it was the general assembly of the World Forum. And it was fishermen from thirty-five different countries there. And..., there was an *intense*

language barrier. But *everyone* of them fishermen had creases at the corner of their eyes. Every one of them would get teary eyed when somebody was singing a song about fishing. Even though they couldn't understand the words, they understood the emotion.

JGF: Oh...

MC: And you would see... Like I would watch my husband try his best to communicate with somebody, and then to do sign language, and then a couple of words here or whatever. And then they'd grab somebody, an interpreter. And say, "Look, I want to tell you about my fish story." And, a cocky fisherman's a cocky fisherman [laughter] no matter where they're from.

JGF: Oh, that's wonderful. Thank you [to JSh], that was brilliant.

Well thank you so much.

MC: Thank you!

[End of interview]