

Name of person Interviewed: Rosemarie Denn [RD]

Facts about this person:

Age (if known)

Sex Female

Occupation Fishing Supply Business Co-owner

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

Home port, and

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

Residence (Town where lives) Chatham, Mass.

Ethnic background (if known) European American

Interviewer: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel [JGF]

Transcriber: Janice Gadaire Fleuriel

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbormaster House

Date and time of interview: Sept. 22, 2007

INDEX / KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS: Woman; Fishing supply business; Cape Cod; Bay scalloping; Quahoging

00:00 JGF: Co-owner of Cape Fisherman's Supply with husband; Born Cambridge, Mass; No fishing industry connection except grandfather from Newfoundland fishing village, talked about boats, taught them names of schooner sails; Used to summer in Rhode Island, quahoging and beach stuff; Husband working with her cousins at Chatham Fish Pier one summer, she came down to be with him; Poor—scalloped, quahoged; Families in Chatham similar to police, fire families in cities in terms of bond, tradition;

3:00 Chatham was close-knit fishing community, early seventies; Husband started fishing, longlining, she hated it, he was gone all the time, she worked 9 to 5 hours; He fished all day, worked baiting lines at night; Husband went back to work at fish pier, ended up getting in on the supply business with a man who started it for his family after he was diagnosed with inoperable cancer; Rosemarie worked at town hall, shucked scallops on weekends, did quahoging;

05:56 Scalloping was bay scalloping in fall, everybody had a boat, whole families got involved, a local phenomenon; Scalloping routine; Day sea scalloping became big; Everyone had a scallop shanty where they shucked them, fun camaraderie, usually six or eight people together, mostly the women;

08:28 Shucking gets old fast, doesn't miss it; Bay scallop shucking process—harder because more rounded; Bay scallop knives; Husband packed fish at the pier, loaded trucks; Fish trucked to Boston mostly, a few local guys; Chatham Seafood Coop would bring fish to auction; When owners husband worked with bought Coop's inventory, started the new business called Cape Fisherman's Supply, in seventy three or seventy four. Rosemarie and husband bought it 15 years ago, he's been there whole time, she's been there about 25 years;

12:24 Chatham still very active fishing, always been small boat, less specialized, same person doing more than one species—lobster, longliner, dragger, gill nets, clamming; probably why tend be more successful than larger in New Bedford and Gloucester, can change what they go for it need to, small boat makes it easier too; Permitting and regulation issues, makes it hard for guys to work way up from stern guy in summers to having first crack at being boat when it got sold, basing them on days at sea history puts newer kids at disadvantage; Permits and boats expensive now; Chatham has turned into very exclusive waterfront real estate; New kids in debt from start and don't know if that permit's fishery will be open next year;

15:28 No younger generation coming up now, maybe Feds want systematic elimination; Youngest boat owners are forty, forty-five; Son is twenty-eight, went fishing up in Alaska, longlining, has fished on and off. Does landscaping, other things, always goes back to fishing; It's the American farmer all over again, takeover of individual family,

businesses, into corporate; Easier for the government to manage five big conglomerates rather than five hundred little guys. Not a lot of future for a young person in fishing, sad, in Chatham it's very generational, but not a lot of positive reinforcement anymore.

18:25 JGF: Chatham boats about thirty-five, thirty-six, feet, mostly fiberglass; A couple steel, a couple of fifty-three footers. Husband doesn't fish anymore, might have missed it twenty years ago, but physically demanding; When he fished in winter, she'd dress him, was all hand-hauling so his fingers just didn't work on the buttons that well. So. Yeah. I mean, now you have haulers and all sorts of good stuff; Boat husband was on had a winch but no radar; First boat he fished was wooden, lot of bilge pump action those days; Took a while to connect with women other fishing families because Chatham very small insular community, she wasn't born there so a "wash ashore;" Connected more when had kids in school;

21:45 Shop has changed a lot, used to be strictly longline hooks and lobster gear; Different types of hooks today and before regulations; Started working at shop when gill nets came in, in basement hanging gill nets; With gill nets, onshore people fixed gear for you vs. baiting/rigging yourself as before; After longlining went out New England, they'd get calls from California about how to do it, their store was last bastion; Got more lobster gear, gear for small draggers after hooks went down; Huge recreational boating in town, think it's cool to buy stuff at fisherman's store; Store is not neat, everything in boxes, sort of like BJ's; Big business recreational anchors, lines, boat fenders; Recreational boaters want real oil skins; Store doesn't do bait;

25:37 Gear baiting "cottage industry" developed; Seventies and eighties, seemed like everyone in town had something to do with the industry; Gill netting issues, if order ahead and then regulations change size of mesh; Nets are made in Korea, husband doing business for 25 years with same Korean man based in Tampa; After regulations, didn't carry so much of stock anymore; Guys Portland, Gloucester almost went out of business, because primarily what they did, left with a warehouse full, can't dispose of it, have to pay thousands of dollars to dispose of it; Explaining situation to friend with large construction business, if same happened in his work;

30:04 Grateful for all the safety issues, but very expensive, especially for small, boats, having an unexpected expense can mean you're done; Fishermen always had to have a wife who worked, in a job with health insurance; Now they have, Fisherman's Partnership, has health insurance; Wife still had to help with all the other stuff, bookkeeping, that sort of stuff; Definitely a parallel to farming; Went with a group of people when they were going to have the quotas to Washington and got all their support not from coastal states but from Iowa and Kansas, could relate to it; Fishing's all politics;

[32:57]

Fisherman have cowboy, mentality. "I just want to be out there fishing. You deal with that;" Political stuff is hard, takes lots of time; Women have become a big political force in the industry, its a very supportive business to be in; Same camaraderie as police, fire

families where jobs involve risking lives every day; Women's roles in Chatham fishing industry, allowed on board when needed people to shuck scallops;

36:40 Women shucking scallops; One older man's view of women being good at piece work, need to know place but be there when needed;

38:24 In seventies women took more aggressive role in industries; Store has a sense of community around it, carries to next generations, always have free coffee and fireball candies for people, people will stop in and put fish in their refrigerator;

41:00 People make connections with each other at the store, summer people come back year after year; Chatham has had some nastiness over big residential houses and problems with barrier beach washing away and whether town should fix it or homeowners can get faster permits to put up riprap or bulkhead; People never used to build houses on shore, knew better;

44:37 Possible reasons that scallops may have disappeared from bay—beach break, nitrogen from lawn care, lots of “McMansions” going up; No apartments for young people to rent, or cottages to rent in winter; Chatham almost like a ghost town in winter now;

47:12 McMansion residents object to supposed smells from lobstering, people with dinghy in yard; When Rosemarie moved to Chatham, loved it just how it was; Today people want to turn it into where they came from, or like Disney's version of Nantucket, not real anymore; Town of Buckland in western Mass. voted to be “farm friendly,” maybe Chatham needs same for fishing; Historical issues are insane, hard for their building to make repairs because in the historic business district;

50:13 Loves that festival's promoting women's role, unsung heroes; Visitors need understand the emotional price that fishermen and their families have to pay, and *just* how *brutal* regulations are; Very good that it promotes New Bedford as a fun place to go; Key that people can go on the boats;

53:18 Last year she got to meet lots of people had always done business with by phone;

[End of interview]

TRANSCRIPT

JGF: This is Janice Fleuriel. It's September 22, 2007 and I'm talking with Rosemarie Denn at the Working Waterfront Festival in New Bedford. We're in the Harbormaster's House and I have down that you are the co-owner of Cape Fishing Supply?

RD: Cape Fisherman's Supply.

JGF: Cape Fisherman's Supply. OK, thanks. And if you could start, Rosemarie, by maybe telling me a little about where and when you were born, or maybe then a little bit about your family background.

RD: I was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A long time ago.

JGF: [laughs]

RD: My father was a teacher. My mom was a housewife. Didn't really have anything to do with the fishing industry except my grandfather came from Newfoundland.

JGF: OK.

RD: And his father was an importer.

[interruption—someone asking if someone had been there]

JGF: Sorry.

RD: And he came from a fishing village up in Newfoundland, and loved boats and just, always, talked about boats. And one of the things that we had to do when we were kids was, he would bring out pictures of schooners and you'd have to learn the names of the sails.

JGF: Oh! Did he live with you?

RD: No. Just visiting.

JGF: When he visited. OK.

RD: And, we used to summer in Rhode Island. And, so it was on the beach quahogging and just, general, hanging around the beach type stuff. And, so that was really my only fishing experience as such. And then I met my husband. And, he came down here to work with my cousins, believe it or not. At Chatham fish pier. One summer. And, so then I ended up coming down to be with him [laughs].

JGF: Yeah. Yeah.

RD: And, so then, we were here in Chatham. And of course, we were poor.

JGF: [laughs]

RD: So you quahogged and you scalloped, and you. You worked at the fish pier so luckily we had free fish for food. But it really, it was, an introduction to, just the generational type—I mean, I never experienced anything like that. Families living in this town. When you live in a city, you may know like, firemen families, police families...

JGF: But other than that it's not...

RD: Right. So, getting to meet all these people and, their father was a fisherman, grandfather was a fisherman, great grandfather was a fisherman.

JGF: And this was in Chatham?

RD: This was in Chatham.

[03:00]

RD: And, very close-knit community. As far as fishing went. That was the early seventies. Fishing was doing pretty well. And, then, my husband started fishing. And I *hated* it.

JGF: [laughs]

RD: Because he was *gone* all the time! He didn't have weekends off. And I was working, regular nine to five Monday through Friday job. And,

JGF: And he was doing the offshore? What kind of fishing?

RD: He was doing the longlining. That was... They used to do like, five thousand hooks a day, something like that.

JGF: You could probably tell me any number and I... [laughs]

RD: Oh, OK. I think it was five thousand hooks a day. Which was, I guess a lot. And then they'd come home and bait it all up themselves.

JGF: Wow.

RD: At night. And then, go out the next—. So, he wasn't around much.

JGF: Yeah. And how often—they'd go for how much of the time?

RD: They were only day fishing. That was pretty much strictly day fishing.

JGF: Long days.

RD: Twelve to sixteen hour days. So then he ended up going back working at the fish pier again. And, he was working at the fish pier and a local fisherman had just been diagnosed with an inoperable cancer. He had decided that he would start this business to give his wife and daughter something to—because he wasn't expected to live too long. And at the time, Chatham Seafood Coop had just gone out of business. So, they had stock. So he bought the stock cheap. Gear, bunch of hooks. Because at that point Chatham was pretty much exclusively longlining. And, he called my husband, said, “Hey, you want to come in help me paint shelves?” Do that kind of stuff, set up stock. And, so he did. And, two months after he opened the business, he went in the hospital and, two years later he was dead. And, so, my husband sort of fell into the job. But he and Bill's wife, Nancy, decided—they sat down and they said they wanted to keep the business going. So the two of them kept the business going. And I was pretty much, like I said more keen on the nine to—I worked at the town hall. Shucked scallops on the weekend. Anything to make money—quahogging. You know, anything to make money.

[05:56]

JGF: Now that was interesting. You said, you did quahogs. And you did scallops because that's what you did if you were poor. I don't think of people doing scalloping if they're poor. I mean, when you said you were doing scalloping—you clearly weren't out on this million dollar boat, right? [laughs]

RD: Oh, no. Bay scalloping, in Chatham. Chatham at that time had a really big bay scallop industry in the fall. And *everybody*, everybody had a boat. I guess it would be like a potato harvest in Maine. Half the kids wouldn't be in school. All the wives went with their husbands because then you could get two licenses. So it meant you could get twenty bushels of scallops. And, you'd go out in the morning at dawn and you'd—you'd be down there, it's like, “Gentleman, start your engines.” You'd go out, and everyone's dragging all over the harbor and crashing into each other.

JGF: [laughs]

RD: It was just this amazing, I guess local sort of phenomenon. Which, now, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, have. We don't have any scallops really anymore. But then, everyone—all the wives, you know, you went back home. You made yourself a big lunch and you shucked scallops until like midnight.

JGF: Wow!

RD: You know. Then you went and sold them. And then you went out the next day. And it was everyone's, sort of, winter—got you through the winter.

JGF: Oh, OK. So this was a winter, seasonal, sort of thing.

RD: Yeah. Right. And then we had—then we ended up having the big, offshore scallop boom, which was, sea scallops but day sea scallops. The guys would just go out. There was so many of them off Chatham. There was a bed, that they had found. And they'd come in and, we would go down the fish pier and pick up 50 bushels of [chuckles] scallops every Friday night. And just start shucking, and shucking. 'Til we—and everyone had a scallop shanty. Which was like a little shed with a drain and tables and sinks and stuff. Not very, regulated back in those days. But, you know. You had your—

JGF: And you're all alive today [laughs].

RD: Yeah. But that was the way everyone made extra money. And it was fun. Usually, you'd end up maybe, six or eight people in your shanty. So it was a very, sort of, camaraderie type of thing. It would be mostly the women. So it was fun.

[08:28]

JGF: So I feel like we missed the boat, that we have this scallop shucking contest happening this weekend and there's not any women like you.

RD: Oh, no no no no.

JGF: You have no interest in that, huh?

RD: No.

JGF: [laughs]

RD: After a while you get so... Actually there's still some women in town, older than me that will still do it on occasion, but... Yeah, it's a...

JGF: You had your fill of it?

RD: Oh, yeah. It gets old real fast. It gets old real fast.

JGF: And the bay scallops. Are they the same whole shucking process?

RD: Sort of. But most people if you talk to... Bay scallops are a lot harder because the shells... Sea scallop shells are very flat. Bay scallops are like this.

JGF: Oh, rounded.

RD: So it's more, you have to... It's a little more time-consuming.

JGF: Is it the same kind of knife?

RD: Different knife. Everyone had their little—they'd have bread knives and butter knives and everyone would cut down and wrap the handle. And they had it all sort of, you know, special knives. Most, they'd use a clam knife. Whereas sea scallop knives are long, sort of curvy blade. And I'll tell you once I started shucking sea scallops, I found it a lot easier. And you get hooked and then you don't want to go back to bay scallops.

JGF: Interesting.

RD: Yeah, it's fun. It *was* fun. When you're twenty, everything's fun.

JGF: [laughs] Wow. So you mentioned your husband worked at the pier, and maybe you said. Was there a specific thing he did at the pier?

RD: Packed fish.

JGF: Oh, OK. Yeah.

RD: Packed fish. Packed fish. Packed fish. Packed fish. Packed fish.

JGF: [laughs] So there were lots of little food processors or sales places?

RD: Actually everything was trucked off to Boston or... And actually they would pack all the fish then they'd load all the trucks, all the tractor trailers. Because everything went to [Fulton?] or to Boston at the fish pier. There were, you know a few local guys. But, it was sort of weird because all the stuff was going out of town.

JGF: Yeah. So was he working for, like a local business?

RD: Yeah. There were—at that point there were two places that worked... Old Harbor and... Actually it was still the Chatham Seafood Coop. But they had—their gear store had gone under, which was why they ended up buying the stuff. But the coop was actually still—I guess you'd call them middlemen. They would bring it into auction.

JGF: So then, he got into the business, and when did it take on the name?

RD: Cape Fisherman's Supply, actually that was its original name. The owner's wife, Nancy Rider[?], that was her—that's what they decided to call it. And it just always stayed that. We ended up... She actually retired...

JGF: So when they bought it from the seafood coop, they changed the name then?

RD: It was almost like they started a whole new business. And they bought all their inventory.

JGF: OK. Thanks. And what year was that?

RD: That was seventy three or seventy four.

JGF: And that stayed in Chatham?

RD: Yeah. It's in Chatham. And it's still going strong. We bought it fifteen years ago. She retired. And so, we've been doing it... He's been doing it the *whole* time. I've been actually there about twenty, twenty-five years.

[12:24]

JGF: So Chatham still has an active fishing...?

RD: Very. Very. We've always been small boat. You know, which... And everyone... You don't get so much of a lobsterman, a longliner, a dragger. You get a person who longlines and lobsters. Very diversified. And gill nets. And goes clamming, you know for steamers or quahogs.

JGF: Right.

RD: And I think that's one of the reasons they tend to be more successful than the larger, you know like New Bedford and Gloucester.

JGF: Right. When you're depending on one thing.

RD: Dependent on one thing. So, if this was down they'd start doing this. If this was down, they'd start doing that. So, they jump around a lot. And having a small boat makes it easy too.

JGF: Yeah. So they have, smaller boats. And this is inshore, day fishing. So, are they not subject then to the same kind of permitting and regulations?

RD: Worse.

JGF: Worse!

RD: Oh, I swear. Actually I don't know *too* much about what the big boats do. But these guys... They have days at sea, and, you know guys who didn't have permit history... It used to be that you had the stern guy who started summers when he was in high school and worked for the guy and then kept it up after he got out of school. You know, if he was interested there would be sort of this guys' promise that when they sold the boat, you'd get first crack, which kept this sort of going on. You can't—. And permits didn't cost anything. Multi-species and stuff, didn't cost anything. Then all of a sudden it was like, if you didn't history on your permit, then you weren't allowed... They based your days at sea, you know how much you could fish on your permit history. So kids, who didn't have a permit, then you have now they get into buying permits and so... I always look at it is now, like my son, will never own a boat. You something that... the

permit that cost nothing could be upwards of fifty, a hundred thousand dollars. Then you got to buy a boat. And Chatham has turned into a very, very exclusive real estate. Waterfront real estate.

JGF: That was the impression I got. I was just down in Eastham for a week this summer.

RD: OK. And so, sort of a median price “shack” in Chatham would cost you half a million. So here you are as a kid, you’re already over half a million dollars in debt. Right off the bat. And you don’t know if your fishery—you’ll be allowed to fish next year.

JGF: Yeah. And you talked about the diversifying. How could somebody afford so many... Because you need a separate permit for each one, right? So, are you concerned about the industry and your own business?

[15:28]

RD: Oh, yeah. I actually... Well they always laugh at me, but. You know you go to all these, fisheries meetings, and you talk to all these people all about fishing stocks and recruitment, recruitment, recruitment. There’s no such thing as recruitment among fishermen. There is no younger generation coming up behind them, which... Hey maybe that’s what the Feds want. You know, systematic elimination. It’s scary stuff, but. What I look at is when the youngest guy in the fleet would be buying boats from twenty-two, twenty-three... Now the youngest boat owners are forty, forty-five. And I mean, physically, fishing... Fifty, a lot of times you’re toast. There’s no one coming up behind. Which is really what I see and it’s sad. It’s really sad.

JGF: And how old is your son?

RD: My son is twenty-eight. [Makes a noise of disbelief.]

JGF: [laughs] They grow so fast!

RD: Yeah. He actually went fishing up in Alaska, longlining. Which damn near killed me! But, he’s fished on and off. And you know he’ll fish for a while and then it’s, “Can’t take this anymore.” Because he’ll be on a boat or whatever. And, “OK, we got to tie up for a month. We can’t fish.” So he keeps, he’ll do landscaping or he’ll do this, or he’ll do that. And then he always goes back to fishing.

JGF: Oh. It’s in his blood a bit.

RD: Yeah, it is. It is. I mean, it’s the American farmer. It’s the American farmer all over again.

JGF: Yeah.

RD: Yeah. I mean, just the takeover of individual family, businesses, into corporate.

JGF: That has come up a lot in these interviews. That it seems like, it's going to be corporations that own the boats.

RD: Oh yeah. You know, I mean, you see with the phone company, you see... And I look at it it's easier for the government to manage five big conglomerates rather than five hundred little guys. So yeah, I think, you don't like to say it out loud. But, yeah, there's not a lot of future for a young person in fishing. Which is sad because like I said in Chatham it's very generational. Everyone did it. And now when you see fathers saying, you know, "I'd kill him if he turned into a fisherman." Or, "I tell him, 'You better go to school. You better get your degree.'" So, there's not a lot of positive reinforcement anymore.

[18:25]

JGF: Now when you say the boats in Chatham are small, what does small mean?

RD: Thirty-five, thirty-six.

JGF: Are they steel?

RD: No, fiberglass. Provincetown and down that area more, they tend to be the older, wooden boats. We got a couple steel. This one steel, small dragger. Got a couple of fifty-three footers. Big boys.

JGF: [laughs]

RD: Yeah. But pretty much everyone's fiberglass.

JGF: Now your husband doesn't fish anymore?

RD: No. No.

JGF: Does he miss it?

RD: I'm going to say if you asked him a few years, like twenty years ago, yeah. But like I said physically once you get up into the, you know, achy joint stuff, you say... I mean, when he was fishing they were fishing, they'd fish in the winter. And that was, he was, twenty-four, twenty-five. Dressing him in the morning—because this was all hand hauling, coiling in tubs. This is like the stuff that—I mean he wasn't out in a dory but this is real, old-time fishing. Which is not that long ago! I mean that's thirty years ago. But he would get up in the morning and I'd dress him. Because, the fingers just didn't work on the buttons that well. So. Yeah. I mean, now you have haulers and all sorts of good stuff.

JGF: I know. There's so many—I looked at the boats, you can't even figure out.

RD: They had a—they were actually one of the more progressive boats as far as hauling. Because they had the winch head and stuff. But, they didn't have radar. They went out, and I mean... Now... I was dumb, I didn't know then.

JGF: Well no one did. Right?

RD: Right right. That's right. But now you know and you just go, "Oh, my God! Oh my God!" And actually his first boat that he fished on was a wooden boat. Yeah. Lot of bilge pump action in those days.

JGF: Yeah. Wow [laughs]. So, you didn't grow up being used to worrying about someone. Did the other women in the community, were they helpful in terms of... How did you get your sort of support on that issue?

RD: Actually, it took a while. Only because, Chatham being, a very small insular community. If you weren't born there, you were a "wash ashore," you know. And it used to be a joke that you had to have at least two generations of living there before you're considered actually, a real Cape Codder.

JGF: Yeah.

RD: But. And also because I wasn't working in the industry as such. I was working at the town hall. And when you do shuck, you know, the shucking and like I said, it's camaraderie because you have people. But then they go off and do other things and you go back to your other job. So. There was more when I had kids in school, because then you really get to—that's when you get to meet everyone.

JGF: Yeah. The connection is through your kids.

RD: Yeah. Definitely. Definitely.

[21:45]

JGF: I was wondering... Of course the whole issue of gear, and what they need for fishing, is always fascinating. Would it be possible to sort of take me on what I'd call a "virtual tour" of your shop? What's in it and what's it used for.

RD: Oh sure. It's changed a lot. Originally it used to be strictly longline hooks and lobster gear.

JGF: And what size hooks are we talking?

RD: Well right now we're regulated. You need a 12 [?aught?] circle hook, which is [gestures].

JGF: Thumb and a finger, kind of?

RD: Yeah. About that big. Back in those days you had the J hooks. Which is, you think of a traditional fishing hook. And [?] cod, haddock. So we had a lot of hooks and then... Then the gill nets came in. Which is actually how, when I quit the town hall I started working down in the basement hanging gill nets. So, that was sort of the new thing, and you'd catch a lot of fish. And you could do it quick. Labor intensive. You had, this offshore, or onshore group of people who would fix your gear for you. As opposed to baiting your gear and rigging your hooks yourself. And then actually, longlining was, it was still a lot of guys in Chatham did it. But then it sort of disappeared from, I'd say, around here the New England area. And then it caught on out in California. People would call us on the telephone. "How do I go longlining?" Because we were like the last bastion of longlining. Which is sort of weird. So, the hooks sort of went down a little bit. Then we got tons of gill nets. Lots more lobster gear. We got a few small draggers so you start getting, not super big size stuff like you guys have here but, dredges, rings, links. Chain. And, we have a big, huge recreational boating in town, who always thought it's really cool to go to like, the fisherman's store and buy stuff.

JGF: [laughs]

RD: It's just, you know it's in boxes. And it's not, really neat. And it's sort of like going to BJ's or something in their mind.

JGF: Yeah [laughs]

RD: So, big business in mushroom mooring anchors, lines. Boat fenders. Of course we all—everyone's sort of like, "Eh, recreational stuff."

JGF: [laughs]

RD: But it's a need in the community. I mean it's something people are like, "Well I want to get this. I want to get this." And then, "I want real fisherman's oil skins." So tons of oil skins. Grundens. [?].

JGF: Yeah.

RD: Back in those days, [? Hansen?] had some black diamond stuff. Tons of boots. Let's see.

JGF: Where would they get bait? Is that from you?

RD: Bait? No. We don't [chuckles]. I said, "No! No! No! I will not, do, bait!"

JGF: [laughs]

RD: I used to... One of my other jobs was shucking sea clams for bait when my husband was longlining. And they don't use really the best of sea clams. And they're not kept under the most fabulous refrigeration.

JGF: [laughs]

[25:37]

RD: Yeah. So that was like my most dirty jobs, my most disgusting job. So, no. I said, “No bait. No bait.” Then, another sort of cottage industry developed. Another former fisherman got this place over in the local industrial park. And started baiting gear. They would actually, because guys didn’t want to bait their own gear anymore. So, they had... Then they started this whole thing of... You know, you had baiters. And they would fix the hook, you know, re-rig, put on new hooks. Re-rig your gear, bait it. And he also had a little sideline for making gill nets, too. So, yeah there was just... It seemed like everybody in town had something to do with the fishing industry. You know, through the seventies and eighties. It’s just, crazy. It’s just crazy.

JGF: So you had a good time? So in a sense it’s like, the traditional part, at least for so far has been holding on. And then with the sort of—not resort, it’s probably the wrong word, so you’re getting that business as well.

RD: Right. And now things... Now gill netters have had issues, you know. Gill netting was sort of hard, only because they kept regulating the size of the mesh. And, in order for us to buy the gill nets—they all come out of, we chose to carry this particular brand which as a high-quality brand. And you have to order it six to nine months ahead of time. Because they would actually make it in Korea. And my husband got to be—he’s been doing business with this same guy now for like twenty-five years.

JGF: In Korea?

RD: He’s actually based out of Tampa but he’s Korean. And he comes back and forth. And just, the loveliest gentleman. And, it got to be... you would order—now, gill net order it would be huge. For a small place like us, it would be like a hundred thousand dollars. And you’d get it. And they’d say, “We’re regulating that size. No more.” So then you start having the, sort of play, stuff, which was... And, hooks. They even did that on hooks and stuff too. Then that got to be a little weird. Because we didn’t carry so much of the stock anymore.

JGF: Yeah.

RD: I mean we do to some degree.

JGF: But it’s more like order more of it?

RD: Yeah. So yeah, regulations have... I mean, we’re small. I mean I know guys in Portland, Gloucester and stuff who almost went out of business. Because that’s primarily what they did. And all of a sudden they’re left with a warehouse full of... What are you going to do with it? And then you can’t dispose of it.

JGF: Yeah.

RD: You know, you got to pay thousands of dollars to dispose of it. So. That, that sort of... That was sort of the nineties. Just God knows what's going to happen tomorrow. And you'd have a council meeting and you know, a newsletter or something. "Oh, what are they going to say next?" And you know in the meantime guys would come in like, "I can only fish twenty days." And I mean I always—I have a friend who's got a giant construction business. And I said, "I'm going to ask you to related to this because you're someone who has—you have to maintain large pieces of equipment. You have to pay big insurance, liability and stuff." And he does, you know, driveways and roads and foundations and cesspools, you know septic tanks. All this sort of stuff. And big dump trucks and all this. And I said, "Well how would you like it if you have to pay, all the safety stuff and insurance? You have to maintain those vehicles, and the state or the feds come in say like, 'OK, you can only put in three driveways this year. And you can do ten septic tanks. And you can put in eight foundations.'"

JGF: And you can't do any of them right here because this area's closed [laughs].

RD: Right. "We'll tell you where you can do them," you know. "But in the meantime you still have to maintain all that equipment, keep up with all your payments to all this stuff." I said, "Would you go under?" He just looked at me, he said, "I never thought about it that way."

[30:04]

But. You know and then there was then... The one thing I'm grateful, is all the safety issues. I mean that's great. That they're doing that now. It's very expensive. Very expensive. And especially for small, boats. Oh and then you have the year that, you know your engine blows up. Your wife gets laid off from work. Or you know, you have a baby so she can't work. The weather, you know the harbor's frozen in for three months. You know...

JGF: It is just like farming, then. Yeah.

RD: Yeah. All of a sudden you're done.

JGF: So did it used to be... The parallel of farming, you mentioned about wives getting laid off from work. Was it... I mean at sort of least in the myth, a farm could take care of itself and people didn't have to work off the farm. And then more and more it had to be that women had to go out and get jobs.

RD: Right.

JF: And... Did fishing sort of have that, too?

RD: Oh, yeah. Yeah. You always had to have a wife who worked, in a job. That she got paid health insurance. That was a big thing, you know. Your wife had to get a job that paid health insurance. Of course now they have, Fisherman's Partnership, has health insurance. Which is great, and a savior. But yeah. That used to be the deal you had to have a wife who had a real job. And then she still had to help with all the other stuff. You know, do all your bookkeeping, you know that sort of stuff. Multi-tasking [laughs]. But yeah, definitely a parallel in that. Definitely. And you know what's interesting? I went with a group of people when they were going to have the quotas. And we went to Washington and talked to the senators and congressman and representatives, about the quotas. And we thought we were going to get tons of support from the states that had sea—you know, Florida, Connecticut, you know, Louisiana. All the support we got was from Iowa and Kansas. And, all because they could relate to it from the farming. And they were our most—they just, "Yup. We know exactly what you're talking about." Blah blah blah. It was just—it was weird. It was weird. So yeah. Because they'd already, they'd been through it. They're just, you know, little—they're like, twenty-five years, thirty years ahead of us in that. So that was really a big shock. That was really a big shock, to find out that... You know it's, fishing's all politics anyways. But [laughs].

[32:57]

JGF: Yeah. And I wonder if it ever wasn't. But certainly now it's huge.

RD: Well, you know I think it always was. But the weird thing is, not that they weren't interested. But it's just, "Hey, do what you have to do. But just let me do my job." You know, fishermen are sort of like—they've got that cowboy, mentality. "I just want to be out there fishing. You deal with that."

JGF: Yeah. And they can't do that anymore, can they, so much?

RD: Oh, you got to spend so much time. You got to be there. You got to attend every meeting. Which, when you know, a meeting costs you a day of fishing and you only have twenty days, you know that sort of, that sort of stuff. And everybody's harping, "You got to participate!" You know. But, that's hard. That's hard.

JGF: Yeah. And then the impression I've gotten from past interviews is, that's another way in which the women have stepped in and that,

RD: Right.

JGF: ...their men are out fishing and they're the voice for them on shore.

RD: They've definitely become a big political force I think in the fishing industry. Which is good, you know. I mean it's... Fishing is once again one of those few industries where the whole family, it's a family business. Which I think, that makes it very emotional too, but. You know, it's just... It's very supportive. It's very supportive. It's a nice business to be in.

JGF: Huh. That's neat.

RD: It really is.

JGF: So, growing up you probably never imagined...

RD: No! What is it... You know, teachers, and... Like I said, it would be like the camaraderie of firemen, policemen, that sort of stuff. And then you look at it and you say, "Well, yeah, these are guys who are going out and risking their lives every day." So then there's that other, you know. "My father the electrician doesn't go out and..."

JF: Right.

RD: You know. Well, he might get a shock, but. You know. And, "My father the plumber," or the real estate agent stuff doesn't have that sort of...

JGF: Yeah. Like my dad was a school teacher. And I mean, you knew that in the worst possible world he might have a car accident to or from work. But that would pretty much be it.

RD: Right. And you didn't worry about him. You didn't worry about him. Yeah. My father was a school teacher. Everyone in my family was school teachers. And, they're school teachers. It's great. You have the summers off. So. Yeah, but I think that, sort of, makes it that sort of tightly knit group.

JGF: Right. And this sort of brings me back to, a little you had talked about... You know, the whole thing about being what'd you call them, "Washed ashores?" I like that!

RD: Oh, yes. You wash ashore... You know, on the Cape you're a "wash ashore" [laughs].

JGF: Did you... I mean, we think of women in the fishing industry and maybe they have to almost prove themselves just because they're women. But then you almost maybe had to prove yourself as a "wash ashore" too. Did you feel any of that?

RD: Oh yeah. Very male-oriented. Well, you know, once again. It's sort of the seventies. Women had always—in Chatham, from what I learned, had always been somewhat a part of it. And there wasn't that, much of a stigma attached to doing, but there still was... You know, women didn't go on fishing boats. They said, "OK, you want to do the grunt work. But you don't go, on a fishing boat." You know. And there were some older guys with superstitions, like, "You don't have a woman on the boat." But then, the sea scallop boom and the age sort of changed it. Because they needed people on board to shuck scallops.

JGF: Oh, OK.

[36:40]

RD: And so, in those days we didn't have the big foreign labor market like we have now. So women... You know and it was like, "Oh God, we got to have a..." But, women are, dexterous. And they were usually pretty fast. And they're clean. And neat. And you know they would pick up. And, so yeah. Women.

JGF: Interesting.

RD: And I have a good quote for you. Tiggy Paluso[?] who's doing the book over here, he's local, local character. Just saw him the other day, still driving, oh my God. I was making gill nets in the basement. And he came down with his nephew, picking up boots or something. And, the other girl that works at the store. The two of us, we had [two runs]. We were making it, Tiggy's standing there. And he looks at his nephew and he said, "These girls are making nets. This is what you let women do. You let them do stuff like this because women are good at piece work."

JGF: [laughs]

RD: And Debbie and I just looked at each other. She's like, "Don't jump over at him. Don't stab him with your needle." I'm like, "Yeah, OK, Tiggy. OK." That's sort of what women were—women are good at piecework and you're allowed to do those, little things.

JGF: Right. And they're *letting* you do it.

RD: They're *letting* us.

JGF: That's very nice of them [laughs].

RD: Yeah. So. But you know it's... It was still, it was like this weird dichotomy. You know. "Women you better know your place." But, "Geez you better be there when you need a hand."

JGF: Right. Sort of like the Rosie the Riveter thing.

RD: Exactly. Exactly.

[38:24]

RD: But I think you know, seventies were taking a much more aggressive role in different industries that they didn't before that. Yeah, it was interesting.

JGF: I was wondering if your store... I can't really picture it but, does it have a sense of—is there a community sense to the people that come in there? And is it more so that way when the “summer complaints” go away?

RD: Oh yeah. It's sort of weird, because we have people, and I think maybe this is also very small townish. But people go away and come back, like twenty years later, “Hi! Remember me?” It's very, it's very... I enjoy my work so much that—and so much fun stuff happens, and it's very social. And it's not like being in WalMart or that kind of thing. If you're out for a week or you're sick, it's like, “Oh, what did I miss? What did I miss?” And you bring your dogs in. And your kids. And several of your wives, you know. You get to meet all the new wives and the girlfriends. Now the kids are bringing their wives, and the kids and stuff. Yeah it's great. It's great. It's a real—as I said, once again, it's real, sort of emotional. It's not like working at a job.

JGF: It's more integrated somehow. That's not a good word for it, but.

RD: Yeah, but it is.

JGF: Like intertwined with the...

RD: Right. I mean. We got a coffee machine that goes, all the time. And guys'll come in and say, “Ah, I just came to get a cup of coffee.” “OK! Fine!” “You guys have the best coffee.” Just, weird little things like that.

JGF: Do you just give it away or is that a selling thing?

RD: I just give it away. That and we have fireballs.

JGF: Those jawbreakers?

RD: Yeah. And everyone... That's... If we run out, it's like, “Ahh, you ran out of fireballs.” You know, or, “I'm going to just take a few for the road” and stuff. Just little weird stuff like that. And, our other joke is our refrigerator fishes better than any boat anywhere. Because, at any point during the day you open the refrigerator and someone's gone and stuffed, a couple pounds of scallops, or a tuna steak. Or brought in some mussels.

[41:00]

JGF: Just for you guys to have?

RD: Yes. There are some really good perks. Really good perks. Really good perks.

JGF: So it feels a little bit like Cheers, you know, where everybody knows your name.

RD: You know, sort of you know like, TV land and stuff. But yeah, that's the way it is. That's the way it is. Guys go in there and I mean... The other two guys were in talking and this guy ends up, he's buying metal... He's a metal, he does buying of metal scrap on the side. And this guy had a tank in his basement he's trying to get rid of and blah, blah, blah, and the next thing they're chatting away out in the parking lot.

JGF: That's great.

RD: That kind of stuff. A lot of networking. A lot of networking.

JGF: Yeah. And you get summer people that come back every year happy to see you?

RD: Oh, God! And you know, "Oh, it must be summer 'cause here come you know..." the Woodwards. Or here come the Smiths. Oh yeah. There's people that, twenty years, that come back. People from Arizona. California. Just, amazing. Amazing.

JGF: Where is your shop? Is there like one section of town that tends to be the docks? Where the fishing boats are? And is that where you are?

RD: No. Because Chatham is set up, that, residential big houses. We've been going through a bit of nastiness.

JGF: I was going to ask you about, because I've read about, issues with dredging the bay and all that.

RD: Oh yeah. Dredging, well, we had a—we have a projected barrier beach that's similar to like, North Carolina. And, it's broken through there's a new opening in it. And, there's some home owners who are on the shore side across from the break who feel that because they don't have this protective barrier beach the town should pay two billion dollars to fill up the hole. So that their property would not be at risk. Because, seventy-eight, we had big break in front of the fish pier. And, I'm going to say through state and town, and oh my God, and licensing and historical businesses, blah, blah, blah, there were some houses lost from erosion, because they didn't have emergency permitting in place to do, install riprap or something like that. So I think people are historically saying, "We're going to lose our house." Which I say, "Hey, fine. You know, you have a million dollar property. If you want to put up something there, have some sort of emergency conservation measures." Because, definitely, that was—we all felt that, because we have a very strong conservation, "Oh no. You can't put rocks on the beach." So everything sort of got twisted on that. But I don't want to pay a lot of money to protect someone's house. Back in the days no one built on the shore because they knew better.

JGF: I'm sort of with you on that. I'm like, "Well enjoy your risk. I hope it works out for you."

RD: Right! And if you want to spend the money to put up a riprap or some sort of bulkhead or something. Yes, you should be able to get—rush through conservation emergency permits, things like that so you can get cracking on your house. But.

JGF: But not on my tax dollars.

RD: Yeah! But, I don't want to pay. I don't want to pay.

[44:37]

JGF: I forget what it was. I looked at a local paper, and I don't know, it was just something I could tell was definitely an issue. And you mentioned that the scallops are gone from the bay. Why is that? Does that have anything to do with what's going on with everything, or? Do they not know?

RD: Well they think it might have been the break. Because what's happened is the eel grass is gone. And the scallops lived in the eel grass. Nitrogen loading, algae growth. The first break changed a lot of tidal currents. And, places started not having this constant stream of fresh ocean water. And then you look at those fertilized lawns right down to the water, and I just go, "Ugh." They haven't really proved that...or, did they get a virus? They haven't really proved that it's the nitrogen, that sort of stuff. But sometimes, you know, if you're not a scientist and they don't like to have, what do they call it, "anecdotal information." But geez, when you watch something happen right in front of you, you go, "Gee...". You know, so. Yeah, we think that probably played a big part. And there was some built—I mean, there were some houses on the water, but now it's just, "Oh, my God. Every day you just go by and this cute little, you know cottage the size of this building. Gone! And another McMansion put up. And they live in it for two weeks a year! And there's no housing in Chatham! You know, if you're a young person, there's no apartments.

JGF: I would imagine the kids that grow up there have hard time staying there.

RD: Oh yeah. Definitely. Definitely housing is a big issue. So now we're losing all the...these cottages, which you could get for a winter rental. You know, cheap winter rental and then you'd go back and live with your parents or, you know something, and have something to do for the summer. Or, you'd have people, a lot of people...a builder bought a retirement house, they're not going to live there, so they would rent it. So, all those are gone now. Because now they got the giant things. That's the only sad part about Chatham. Chatham used to be a great town. But. It's just turning—it's almost like a ghost town sometimes, you know? In the wintertime. So that's sad. That's a sad part.

JGF: It is!

[47:12]

RD: And then you know, as these McMansions go up, it's like, "Oh! There's this, nasty man, with these nasty traps! And, oh!" You know, which is stupid because, lobstermen power wash all their stuff before they put it away for the winter. You know, it's not nasty smelling stuff. But. "Oh, and then he has a *dinghy*, in his yard." You know, "Oh, my God!"

JGF: So first they move there for the atmosphere and then it's a little too much, right?

RD: I've always said that. You know, I moved to Chatham. I *loved* it. I want, you know like, don't change a thing! Don't change a thing! And then it just seemed like people from, New York, Connecticut [whispers]...

JGF: [laughs]

RD: ...said, "I want to move here because I love it." And then they want to turn it into New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, whatever. And that's what it is now. Or, actually Chatham has, we call it the Nantucket Disney wish. You want to be *just* like Nantucket.

JGF: Oh. Interesting.

RD: But it ends up being more like Disney World. Like Disney World's version of Nantucket.

JGF: Right.

RD: It's just not real anymore.

JGF: Yeah. That's interesting. It's like the town—I live out in western Mass. At the last town meeting they voted it to be a "farm friendly community." Which was just sort of—as someone explained it to me which made great sense, it's just a statement, almost like to newcomers: If you move here, expect to sometimes get behind a tractor going thirty miles an hour or that there'll be smells coming from the farm down the road.

RD: Right. Boy, that's interesting!

JGF: So maybe you need to become a fishing-friendly...

RD: Yeah. Because we've got a whole bunch of people, and, this insane historical business. We have a cement block building. It used to be actually like a, repair, old harbor express. They used to repair tractor trailers in there. So we have this huge garage. Then they ended up building like a level, which is actually our store. But, it's a cement block. Except we're just off Main Street. So we're in the historic business district. So we have to go before the board if we want to, like, we had to get a new roof. You know. We have to go before them and they have to decide whether it's appropriate or not. It's like, "Oh God! Please!" Oh yeah. And they decide the color or your paint. And your windows.

JGF: Oh God. [laughs]

RD: Yeah.

JGF: Oh, I believe in tradition, but you got to have...

[RD asking JGF where she lives; JGF saying where lives, grew up. Western Mass. beautiful but JGF misses being near ocean now.]

[50:13]

JGF: Just one more question. I like to end with this for everybody. What would you want the average Festival visitor to understand about the fishing industry, but I'd also add in given this year's theme, about women's role in it.

RD: I love the fact that you're promoting women's role. That's just great because I always feel like we're sort of the unsung heroes.

JGF: The support network [laughs].

RD: Right! That I think is great. I think... Boy... I just want to say maybe the emotional...how do you do this? I want to say the emotional price that fishermen have to pay to do—that they and their families have to pay to do what they want to do. And I know people think about the regulations and stuff. I just don't think they realize *just* how *brutal* they are. That's the real good thing for a festival, huh?

JGF: Oh believe me, that comes up all the time! Oh, yeah.

RD: I think having the festival's wonderful. I was telling everyone, they're going, "You're going to New Bedford for fun?" Because people think of it... You know, you come down here to have your prop done or your engine fixed. You know, this is work. This is not fun.

JGF: Oh, OK.

RD: So... I think it's very good for New Bedford that it promotes New Bedford as being, you know it's a fun place to go. And for us, big boats! You know. Like, we're little boats. This is like, "Whoa, big!" It's like going to New York City, in a weird sort of way. But I think, being able to get on a scallop boat. Being able to touch, feel, see, that's so key. That's so key. We used to do a maritime festival in Chatham. And, actually Kiersten and Reidar came down. And he was in the net mending contest one year and stuff. And, I think that's what made it so, why—ours of course was a lot smaller, but it was the touchy feely, you know, "How do they do it?" "What do they use?" "Why is this guy different from this?" And that sort of stuff. And I think for kids, especially, it's sort of the big trucks for little kids and stuff, but, it's definitely being able to... For me, last

year to go walk on a scallop boat. I've never been on—I've been on little boats. So I think the hands-on stuff is just great. I think that's really, really key. Really key.

JGF: It is, it's fun. Last year I tried, mending a net [laughs].

[53:18]

RD: Yeah, well see last year I wasn't exhibiting so I got to have more fun on the other stuff. Which is really weird because those were all the people we do business with. Our suppliers.

JGF: Oh! Like the Bendiksens are your suppliers and all that?

RD: Yup. And Beckmans and IMP. I get to see all these guys that I talk to on the telephone every day. Some of them, like John Riordan from IMP. I talk to him on the telephone for I don't know, ten years! I never met him. Finally got to meet him. And it was weird because we went over to—I forget whose booth it was. And I just said, "Hi. You don't know who I am." And he went, "Keep talking."

JGF: [laughs]

RD: And it was just great to see all these guys that we do business with. My husband drives the truck a lot. He gets to see them all but I'm in the office now. So, I just get to hear these voices on the phone.

JGF: Oh, that is neat. I think that's one of the things that makes this festival so special is how, it brings the community together among itself as well as outsiders to get an appreciation of it. So. Well, I hate to stop! I have to get you to do a release form. But I will stop this. Thank you so much.

[End of interview]