

Name of person Interviewed: Donna Goodwin [DG]

Facts about this person:

Age (if known)

Sex Female

Occupation Splicer/Splicing Business 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) New Bedford, 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: Women; Fishing supply business; Splicing; New Bedford; Fairhaven; Sciticut Neck; Hurricane Carol; Industry changes; China;

[0:00] Tape intro; DG's father's family were fishermen, Gloucester and Nova Scotia; Father still in Gloucester, age 97; Father taught her splicing when she was 7, got into it again through New England Ropes, after driving a cab. Worked at New England Ropes about twenty years; 1998, New England Ropes asked her to take over splicing dock lines when business got too much; Daughter's mother-in-law came up with name Splice Girls; Dock line business really busy after took it over, had others who worked for them, took work home; A lull some years;

[03:02] Some workers' kids picking it up now; DG's grandson's picking it up a little; Now China is taking over dock lines industry, Splice Girls business down; Does a lot of, custom splicing, such as motion strength circle belts for New England Patriots, college football teams; What splicing is—making a loop to loop dock lines over boat cleats, e.g.; Double braid; Mooring pennants; Do many kinds of splices; Splicing involves working rope back in—technique varies depending on number of strands/type of splice; They work from finished rope, just created loop part; Works by getting tighter as you pull it; Whip a stitch in it though they never come apart;

[end of file WAV-0022-001]

[Start of file WAV_0022_002]

[00:00] Different types of splices, numbers of strands to rope; High-tech rope now often used on sailing boats instead of wire; Splice Girls is like New England Ropes' cottage industry; Continuous loops for Sea Bags custom totes from sails; Lobstered out of Newport with brother several years, loved the water, used to go down to water with father when a kid; DG's daughter's the same way, used to go down to the water with her father; Does some big ropes for fishing vessels, but not too much; Stopped lobstering because brother didn't care to do it anymore; Boating is biggest piece of her work; Gets contacts from working at West Marine; Decline in dock lines work because of shift to China;

[02:59]

Uses fewer splicers than before because of China competition, former splicers needed to find other work; China's work costs a third as much; New England Ropes provides the ropes, make it there; Ropes mostly nylon; New England Ropes just sold out to [Tuthenburger?]. From Europe, but still staying in Fall River; Americans won't work for cheap, want more, more, more; DG not in it too get rich;

[04:43]

Some types splices harder to learn than others; Types of splices: three stand, double braid, twelve strand, plaited (twelve strands doubled), single braid, high-tech (cord, four splice); Different types have strength in different parts; Daughter loves splicing, too; DG and daughter live in same house, DG has an apartment

- there; Splicing hard on the hands; DG will be 64 January, looks young, thinks it's because she enjoys what she's doing; Enjoys anything to do with the water;
- [06:51] Sizes of dock lines—length, strand diameter; Standard dock line loop is twelve inches, but can vary; Power boats mainly dock lines, mooring pennants; Sailboats have many more lines; Has made sail lines but doesn't know where they go, is a power boat person; Some put shackles on the loop;
- [08:26] Working fast, can take two to five minutes to splice a loop depending on type, but go slower when doing it all day; Has done work for Patriots (got signed footballs from the trainer), New York Jets, famous people;
- [11:10]
Business pretty widespread now, because West Marine is all around country; Likes the challenge if something's new to try splicing; Daughter enjoys it as much as she does; Having different types of jobs helps now that dock line work has slowed; She and daughter have to decide how to allocate work to the splicers;
- [13:23]
Items she makes out of rope scraps from New England Ropes—key chains, “monkey fists”, dog leashes and collars; Made from scraps of climbing ropes, come in many bright colors; “Monkey fists” are mini versions of large throw balls that were used to throw fishing lines; Has not gotten into trying to market these smaller items, already works eighty hours a week; Taken on a lot more custom work to help make up for money loss and to give work to splicers;
- [15:37]
Enjoys the festival; Last year was first year doing the splicing, nervous at first about talking on stage but was with others she knew; Makes a lot of dog collars for R&W Enterprises; People like the eye-catching, bright colors;
- [17:37]
Men's attitudes about her not being able to do splicing jobs they couldn't do; Attitudes have changed as she's proven herself in the work;
- [19:16]
They had an eighteen foot skiff growing up; Didn't think when father taught her splicing she'd ever need to know it; Father taught her net mending; Her father loved fishing, would take her out after coming back from fishing; None of her brothers or sisters took to the industry; Her son is not in the industry; Told her daughter to put her ashes in water when she passes away (no specific spot);
- [21:29]
First part of childhood on Sconticut Neck, Fairhaven; Had own skiff, spent days out fishing all day; 1954, ten years old, She and mother escaped their house and saw it destroyed in Hurricane Carol; Devastated to move to New Bedford; Feels bad/still remembers her response at the time being excitement about no school;
- [23:26]
Loved it down there; Hurricane caught people off guard, had gone out to sea and then came back; Put up the dyke afterwards, no bad hurricanes like that since;
- [25:00]
Loves the water despite the hurricane; Used to go bay scalloping with her father as a kid; 14-year-old grandson starting to get into splicing, doesn't want to be

called a “Splice Girl” if goes into the business; Splice Girls name came from musical group Spice Girls; Used to have a building on Nash Road, and they’d get phone calls from people who thought it was something else asking if they did parties; Had to let building go, now business is out of the house, her apartment;

[27:15]

DG using rope scraps reminds JGF of “String Too Short to Be Saved” book; Daughter gets mad at her for picking the scraps out of trash, people at New England Ropes laugh about it now, they sell her some remnants too; Would be nice to have business through dog shows (JGF will mention to her sister- and brother-in-law who sell supplies at them); Festival splicing contest next day, they’ll be pulling audience members in instead of just the three of them (her, daughter, supervisor at New England Ropes) doing it and having it over in a few minutes; Father showed her how to shuck scallops, quahoags—still knows how but hands may not be up to it; Loved lobstering best, being out on the water, didn’t mind the hauling/deck hand work; Festival is quite nice—first year, two years ago, in West Marine Booth and didn’t get to see it; Last year and this year, has been at splicing booth, been able to see it;

[Tape stopped/people coming in—end of file WAV_0022_002]

[Start of file WAV_0022_003]

Daughter was excited to be going back this year; They make lanyards for tree climbers’ safety belts; A lot of their business is through New England Ropes, they’re their biggest vendor right now; New England Ropes name is changing from New England Ropes, Inc. to New England Ropes Corp.

[End of file WAV_0022_003]

[End of interview]

TRANSCRIPT

NOTE: [...] indicates places where sound too low to make out words

[File WAV-0022-001]

00:00

JGF: This is Janice Fleuriel. It is September 22nd, 2007 at the Working Waterfront Festival in New Bedford. And I'm speaking with Donna Goodwin in the Harbor Master's House about her work in the industry and specifically with splicing and the Splice Girls.

So if you could start, Donna, by just telling me about where and when you were born, and maybe family background with the industry.

DG: I was born in New Bedford, St. Luke's Hospital.

My father was a fisherman. My grandfather, my great grandfather, all from Gloucester. And my great great grandfather was from Nova Scotia. And they were all fishermen. And my stepfather was a fisherman out of New Bedford. In fact my real father's still alive and he's in Gloucester still, in the industry. He's 97. But he, diddles around there.

My father, I guess when I was about seven years old, taught me how to splice three strand. And I just never got back into it. And I went and, drove cab for a while. Then I got hired at New England Ropes. On, Pope's Island. In fact it's West Marine's building. And I've been there about 20 years.

And then... In, I guess it was 1998, New England Ropes had started doing dock lines for West Marine. It was only a little here and there. Then it got really uncontrollable, where they couldn't handle it all. So they called us in the front office, my daughter and I, and asked us, "Would you be interested in taking on the splices?" So we said, "Yeah." So then we tried to figure out a name, so. My daughter's mother-in-law, says, "Girls. Splice. Splice Girls."

JGF: I love it!

DG: So I said, "Yeah, that's pretty cool."

JGF: And when was that?

DG: 1998. And, the dock lines kept picking up. We were up to like, almost ten thousand dock lines a week, braiding, dock lines. It's women that, come and pick it up, independent contractors. They pick it up, once a week, take it home. You know mothers that wanted to stay home with their kids, watch them grow up instead of putting them in day care.

And, it got to like, forty-five splicers at one time.

We had years where it would lull. And then the girls would get a job someplace.

"Oh, please give us more work." And we've had girls, that, I would say the average would be from, four hundred to a thousand dollars a week. They could make sometimes. They could make whatever they wanted. Because they'd just say, "I can do this" and we'd give it to them. There was no limit on what they had to do. They're independent contractors so we don't tell them, "You have to do this. You have to do that." What you want to do, they take it home, bring it back the next week.

It's funny because some of them have been with us from the start, and even their kids are starting to pick it up.

03:02 Like my grandson's picking it up a little now. So It's pretty cool.
But now, China is taking over the dock lines from New England Ropes, so. So we've lost, a lot of the business. We're down to like, two thousand a week now. So we've lost a lot of our splicers.
And that's what I was telling Laura. So I think she thought Splice Girls was just going down, I just meant that I didn't have splicers like I used to.

JGF: But your business is still there.

DG: Yeah. I do a lot of, custom splicing. I do a lot of work for New England Patriots.

JGF: Oh!

DG: I do circle belts, for their training. Motion, strength training. A lot of the college football teams. I do a lot of little different things. It's weird. Yeah.

JGF: That's interesting!
If you could just start me on square zero with this, if you don't mind. Splicing means what?

DG: Putting the rope together, making a loop, which they would call an eye. And you're just going to loop it together, so they can just throw it on the dock, over the cleat, on their boat. Or over the piling.
And the double braid is the same thing. Except we add the basic—when we take it apart and put it back together, work it back in.
And, I do a lot of mooring pennant specialties. Like the mooring balls, the boats out in the harbor you see. We'll put a thimble on it, and then we'll put a chain on it. Sometimes I do a rope-to-chain splice. It's a lot of different splices.

JGF: Yeah. And is it a knot? Or is it working it back in?

DG: Working back in.

JGF: How do you make it stay so...

DG: I should have brought some.

JGF: Well I can go visit your booth again. I did look at it a little bit.
So you...

DG: You basically weave it back in, the three strand.
And, twelve plait is, you kind of weave it back in too.
A hollow braid you weave it back in.
The double braid you actually take it apart, and you work it all back together, because you can't make the loop because the whole rope together won't go back together.

JGF: Oh, all right. So you guys are getting the actual rope--

JGF: --and it's all finished rope.

DG: Yeah. Yeah.

JGF: And you're just creating this looped part.

DG: Yeah.

JGF: Huh! And then what makes it—if there's no knot what makes it, keep it from pulling apart if something--

DG: It works like a Chinese [?]. The more you pull it, it...

JGF: The tighter it goes.

DG: Yeah. And we always whip it a stitch anyways. But it never—they don't come apart.

JGF: And is there different techniques for different kinds of things?

DG: Yes. I do a lot—
[coughing/tape paused/end of file WAV-0022-001]

[Start of file WAV_0022_002]

DG: And there's... We have a twelve, strand. We have a plaited rope. We have three strand. Weiss's[?] High Tech rope. And high tech rope has taken over a lot of the sailing boats, that have the wire. It's taken over the wire. So it's not so hard on the boats. And it's not hard on the hands. So that's taking over a lot. It's very strong. We do a lot of lines for ATVs. The winches. We've done like ten thousand of them. And right now I've got a company... And I get this all from New England Ropes. They give it to us because you know it's too much for them. So they still, keep Splice Girls.

JGF: I see. So you're sort of like their cottage industry.

DG: Yeah.

And I we're doing—I think the company name is Sea Bag. And they actually recycle old sails. They take old sails and they make tote bags. We're making the continuous loops for the tote bags. That's pretty cool. Yeah, because I thought, "That's right in the industry."

JGF: Yeah. So you actually do the splicing but you also coordinate the work of the other girls?

DG: Yeah.

And I lobstered out of Newport with my brother for four years.

JGF: Did you?

DG: Yeah. Boy I loved that. I just love the water. Basically I just... I was brought up on it. I used to come down here with my father when I was a kid. And he'd take out fish. And just—I love it. And my daughter's the same way. Just come down here with her father all the time. So it's...just, we've been in the industry forever.

JGF: But did you ever think about doing more of the actual fishing end of it? Or are you happy doing what you're doing?

DG: I'm happy with what I'm doing. I, do get into some of the big ropes, with the fishing industry, but. They don't... Like last year with the Working Waterfront we sold some, three-inch diameter rope to one of the fishing boats. And I spliced it all for them. But I don't deal with the big ropes too much. I can, because that's what I do at New England Ropes. Big ropes. Houses and that. But no. But it's cool.

JGF: What did you love about the lobstering?

DG: Everything. The water. Just the water itself. I just loved it. And I would have stayed doing it. My brother just, didn't care to do it anymore.

JGF: Oh OK. OK.

DG: It was nice.

JGF: So you're doing this for *all* kinds of industries.

DG: Yeah.

JGF: Fishing is maybe the biggest piece or not...

DG: Yes. Yes. The boating is the biggest. And of course I work at West Marine part time on the bridge. And I get a lot of contacts. It's like people call me all around. Because I give them my cards and it's like. I've really gotten a lot of business.

JGF: Now is that, Michael Yost?

DG: Yorston. He's not the manager anymore. But he was when I started.

JGF: I interviewed him.

DG: Oh he's a sweetheart.
But. I get a lot of contacts from there and it's like... Because since the dock lines have gone to China, it's like, oh... I mean that's a big drop from ten thousand dock lines down to like two.

JGF: Yeah.

[02:59]

DG: So it's quite—it hurts—. It hurts us but we can find other work. I just feel bad because people have been with us. And they see their kids at home and growing up. And now, they have to get a job. Because some of them have been making six, seven hundred dollars a week. So.
You know, you never miss what you never had. But once you had it, it's gone, it stinks.

JGF: And why is that happening? Just because China can afford to do it so much cheaper?

DG: That's what they say.

JGF: Yeah.

DG: Yup. Like a third of the price we do it for. So.

JGF: And is it the same over there where people are just doing it in their houses?

DG: No. They have, I guess, factories. Yeah. And, it's pretty sad.

JGF: And where do the ropes come from? To begin with?

DG: New England Ropes.

JGF: Yeah but do they come from like all over the world?

DG: Nope. New England Ropes makes their own rope.

JGF: Oh they do?

DG: Yeah.
Something made in the USA.

JGF: Wow. Huh. What kind of material?

DG: Nylon. Yeah. Most of them are nylon.
And for the dock lines and everything I guess China is going to make their own rope.

JGF: Wow.

DG: So it's like. Of course New England Ropes just sold out to [Tuthenburger?]. From Europe. But they're still staying in Fall River. Yeah.

JGF: Yeah. It's like everything else.

DG: It's sad. And it's really... The Americans that are doing it. Because we won't work for cheap. You know what I mean? We want more, more, more. So they're doing it—you know, they're doing it for cheap.
That's like when I do splicing for...at West Marine. People come in. And I tell them what the price is they say, "That's it?" And I say, "You know, as long as I make a couple bucks I'm not here to be rich."

[04:43]

JGF: Is it very tricky to learn?

DG: Three strand isn't.

JGF: Yeah?

DG: But the braid, you got to stay at it consistently. And then it catches you after a while. Because there's a little more steps to the braid.

JGF: So. I always think of a braid as having three strands. So what's the difference between three strand and a braid?

DG: The three strand is just three strands. And a double braid is a braid inside of a braid.

JGF: Oh...

DG: And then the twelve strand is twelve strands. And then we have a plaited rope that is twelve strands doubled.

JGF: Wow!

DG: And then we have a single braid. We have the, high-tech which would be cord of four-splice. And you have to splice—not like a double braid you'd be splicing a core into itself because all the strength is in the core. And the double braid the strength is in the cover and the core. So.

It's quite a lot of different splices. And I enjoy it. That's--. And my daughter's just as bad. She just loves it. She enjoys it. It makes it easy. You know—how many times people go to work, "Geez...". You know. We enjoy doing it.

JGF: That's great. Now do you just do it on your own at home? Or do you get together like with your daughter and you can chat while you do it?

DG: Well we live in the same house. My apartment is—you open the door and it's right there.

JGF: Oh, OK.

DG: Yeah. We're right there. It's pretty cool. Yeah.

JGF: Is it very hard on your hands or no?

DG: Oh yeah! My hands have taken a beating.

JGF: Have they?

DG: Oh yeah. I'm going to be sixty-four in January and my hands are really getting...

JGF: You're going to be sixty-four?

DG: Yeah.

JGF: Man! You could have told me you were going to be forty-four I'd have believed you. Boy do you wear it well! [laughs] Wow! Wow!

DG: [laughs] I'm going to tell you something. People say, "Oh you look good for your age." I enjoy doing what I'm doing. And I think that makes a big difference. If you're miserable at your job... You shouldn't be miserable at your job. And I enjoy doing it. I enjoy working at New England Ropes. I enjoy working at West—I just enjoy it. Anything to do with the water. Weird.

JGF: No I think a lot of people feel that way.

DG: If you're happy you're happy, you know? If you're miserable it really takes you down. So.

[06:51]

JGF: So. You talked about dock ropes. And then those—

DG: Dock lines.

JGF: Are they what ties the boats to the docks?
DG: Yeah.
JGF: How long are they?
DG: You can have them... Depends on the size of the boat. You can make them up to a hundred feet. As long as you want.
JGF: I see.
DG: But usually the average is fifteen to thirty-five footers. And each is like, three-eighths up to maybe three-quarters.
But for the bigger boats they do both. [?]
JGF: Three-eighths to three-quarters means each strand?
DG: The diameter.
JGF: I see.
DG: Yeah. They, they can go as big as you want.
JGF: And of course the loops vary depending...?
DG: Well most—Your standard dock line's twelve inch loop. Yeah.
JGF: That means diameter?
DG: Yeah. The loop. Inside. Yeah.
JGF: So there's that. And what other kinds of—would boats have other ropes?
DG: Anchor lines. And then they have the mooring pennants. Which would go from the boat to the mooring—
JGF: The red rubber ball?
DG: Yeah. That's it. That's it. You got it.
And then now, that's your power boats. You're going to the sailboats and you're really getting....
JGF: Oh! All kinds of sail lines, right?
DG: Yes. Yes. You get, halyards, lanyards, sheets, [?] sheets. I can splice anything on a sailboat but I don't know where they go. Because I'm a power boat person. I don't know where they go. You know I've seen them and I do them and I bring them [?]. West Marine.
JGF: So if you had to do like a halyard it would have a different size loop and all?
DG: Yeah well usually they'll ask for a little loop. They'll put a shackle on it or I'll put the shackle on it for them.
I enjoy it.
[08:26]
JGF: So how long does it actually take, like...say to make a dock line with a twelve inch loop?
DG: Three strand?
JGF: Yeah.
DG: You don't want to know. About two minutes.
JGF: I was thinking it might not be a long time, but I didn't know...
DG: I would say two minutes. But to do it consistently all day... By the end of the day it'd probably take you twenty minutes because you're like...
JGF: [laughs] Tired?
DG: And, the braid would take... It takes me about five minutes. It takes my daughter like two.
JGF: Wow.

DG: To do one fast. But to do it consistently. You know what I mean? You slow down and you can't...

JGF: Yeah. Yeah.

DG: But it's cool.

JGF: So you've made the things for the Patriots.

DG: Oh yeah. New England Patriots. New York Jets. A lot of the football teams.

JGF: And those were—what did you say they were?

DG: Circle belts. For motion strength training. Yeah. They put it around and I think it's the “sleds” they call or, the parachutes that they pull.

JGF: Ah! So it's a continuous belt.

DG: Continuous loop with a pulley on it. And then just hook it up to the...

JGF: Yeah.

And what would be the advantage of people using that as opposed to leather or something?

DG: I don't know... Whoever did it the first time, he didn't—Because it was falling apart. And he has asked... His name is Mike—I can never pronounce his name—for the Patriots, he's the motion strength trainer. He said if we could do something better. Well my God, I sent them one. And he sent me two autographed footballs.

JGF: Wow!

DG: With Ty Law, Brady, Vinatieri. Oh my God! I was like, psyched! I got 'em in cases at home. You know I say, “Look at my footballs. Look at my footballs.”

JGF: That's great.

DG: Because that's my team! So that's pretty cool.

And every team I do for I always ask for T shirts. One for me and one for my grandson. So. That's pretty cool.

JGF: Oh that's great.

So the football teams. And I think you mentioned some other... What other kinds of industries have you done?

DG: Well the handbag thing.

JGF: Oh right, right.

DG: Did something for Steven Tyler once.

JGF: And he's...

DG: Aerosmith.

JGF: OK. Wow!

DG: I made a loop swing for him, to go into his pool.

JGF: Huh! How did he find you guys?

DG: Well, somebody gave it to me. From R&W, another rope company. And they said, “You know who this is for?” I said, “Oh my God that's my favorite rock star” [laughs]. Yeah.

Who else have I done? Some famous... Do you know country at all? Alan Jackson, the country singer, I've done his dock lines.

JGF: Wow!

DG: Walter Cronkite. I've done dock lines for him.

JGF: Wow!

DG: I know. It's amazing. Yeah.

JGF: That's neat.

[11:10]

DG: But I've made for, bigger boats too. But it's usually mostly the marine industry right now.

JGF: So it sounds like you're sort of, nationally known among your industry.

DG: Well it's gotten pretty wide, now. Because West Marine of course is all around the country. They—this one sends here..., and now they're actually sending rope from another state to me, I'm saying, "Oh geez..." . Which is pretty cool. It's like a challenge if it's something new.

JGF: Yeah...

DG: I'll say, "I can do that. I'll try it." And my daughter's taking right over me so that's good. And she loves it too. And that's what you need, you know, someone to like it. So. It's good.

JGF: So it sounds like...unlike maybe some industries, when the fishing industry has its tough times and even when it does your industry does OK?

DG: Yeah. It's still going pretty steady with different stuff. Usually when dock lines and that slow down I usually start getting work from the football teams. But it does hurt with the China stuff. I mean that hurts—it hurts us and it hurts my splicers. You know, they put—almost ten years some of the girls have been with us.

JGF: So, before China came on the scene, like how many do you have working for you now and how many then?

DG: We had like, thirty-eight—we had up to forty-two at one time. Thirty-eight and now we're down to like ten or eleven. And it's hard to pick and choose because they've all been with you.

JGF: I was just going to ask you that.

DG: You know, it's... Like there's some, my daughter and I we had to sit together, some we had to think about. You know like some just bought a house, some this is their job, some it's just part-time and their husbands make good money. So we try to figure the best way to do it that's not really going to hurt anybody.

JGF: So have you found that you've been, giving less work to try to keep as many people?

DG: Yeah. And when we're like... [?] we'll give you like three hundred pieces this week and next week a hundred and fifty. Vice a versa to the other one, just to keep two going. See if they can find something. But it's... Yeah. It's hard.

JGF: Yeah I bet it is.

DG: Yeah.

[13:23]

JGF: But, my wheels are spinning. Tell me about some of the things that I saw at your booth. Like you had, some of the cool little things like key chains.

DG: [laughs] I made—because I can't throw rope away. When I'm at New England Ropes and they have pieces in the garbage, I take it out and I make key chains out of them.

JGF: They're gorgeous, though!

DG: I make little monkey fists. I make dog leashes. Dog collars.

It's like [chuckles]. My daughter says, "Ma, will you please stop picking in the garbage." I said, "But they're cute. They're beautiful colors."

JGF: They are!

DG: Because at New England Ropes they have climbing ropes. And they have every color.

JGF: Is that where the colors come from?

DG: Yeah.

JGF: Because it seems like in the marine industry it's usually white.

DG: No. They're climbing ropes and they have like twenty different colors. They catch your eye!

JGF: Yeah!

What is a monkey fist...for?

DG: It's' that little...I don't know. People like them for key chains.

JGF: OK.

DG: So.

What they're actually for, years ago—and I'm going to say they *might* still do it. You make a big one.

JGF: Yeah.

DG: With something heavy in it. And then they tie a string to it. And that's what they used to tie to the end of the line, years ago, to throw the line. And they pull a line to hook it on the shore. They call them "throw balls." That's what they used to call them.

I've made big ones.

JGF: So this is just a small...

But it looked like a cat toy to me.

DG: I know. Well I use it for that too.

JGF: Have you ever... Or maybe you are. In order to keep more work going, have you gotten at all into trying to sell some of these things that are more fun?

DG: No. Everyone says that, "Well you should go to these fairs and everything." No. No. I don't really. I work like eighty hours a week.

JGF: You still do, even though the business has...

DG: Yeah.

Because we've taken on a lot more of the custom. We give it to our splicers. To make up for the money we're losing. Because we've lost a lot of money too. So it's kind of hard to, you know, adjust everything.

But, it's been so far so good.

JGF: Well that's true. And if your splicers are really looking for, work at home, too, then there still has to be somebody that's willing to go out and do all that selling, and that's not maybe anybody's thing.

DG: Yeah. I know.

JGF: You guys need to hire someone [chuckles] to...

DG: I know. That's—I keep telling my daughter, we're like splicing here today to keep up orders for...

But everybody wants to see the splicing so it's pretty cool.

[15:37]

JGF: Yeah, that's cool. So the visitors can watch. Have you been in the Festival before?

DG: Last year.

JGF: You were. Yeah.

DG: And last year I thought I was coming here for West Marine and when I come to the gate they said, “Oh, Splice Girls.” And I said, “Oh oh. What have I done?” So I was like—so I called my daughter, said “You better get down here.” [laughs] So it was pretty cool. She’s enjoying it, I’m enjoying it. And I was nervous at first but I’m enjoying it. Like, we had to get up and talk and I said, “Oh, geez!” I said, “I didn’t know about that. I knew about the one-on-one” she said. But you know Rosie, the one that does the bags? The sea scallop bags? Well, we know her. That’s Mike Yorston’s girlfriend. So we know her anyways. So she’s pretty cool. And I know Barbara Merry. And, the lady, Amanda, the lobster woman? I met her yesterday. She’s a sweetheart, oh my God!

JGF: I interviewed her last year. She’s wonderful. Has she told you her Tom Cod poem yet?

DG: No.

JGF: Tell her to tell you the Tom Cod poem. It’s very lovely.

DG: Really? She’s such a nice person. And I feel so bad because I gave her a dog leash last year and I says, “Oh, where’s the dog?” “He died.”

JGF: Oh...
Have you ever—and again I guess because you’re not doing your own marketing. But I would think with some of the pet chains...

DG: I know.

JGF: That if you girls, wanted to do like, collars. Because those collars are just...

DG: Gorgeous.

JGF: They are!

DG: And I do make a lot of collars. For R&W Enterprises.

JGF: Right.

DG: And I only charge them like four bucks. And I think they sell them for like ten. It’s just... I know. But if you go on E-bay or on the Internet and you bring up dog collars, there’s so many people... So it’s, you know. I do them because I love the bright colors. I have them in green, orange, yellow. Oh my God! Solid red. Solid orange. Some of the colors are like—it catches my eye and I say, “You know people like that. Because it’s the bright.”

JGF: They do! They’re so pretty! I walked by your booth. I was like, “Wow! They’re so pretty.” They’d make great belts, too...

DG: Oh yeah.

JGF: [laughs]

DG: Oh please don’t get me into that now [laughs].

[17:37]

JGF: What would you say... I do like to always ask people, what would you want the average festival visitor who comes here this weekend to understand about the fishing industry. But I’d say because of the theme this year, also about women’s role in it?

DG: What would I want...? I don’t know.

JGF: What’s important in your mind for them to know or appreciate?

DG: That women can really keep up their own.

You know it's funny because, since I've been working at New England Ropes, we've... We've had men come in, and, because there's ropes they can't splice so they bring them in. And they say, "She's not going to do it if I can't." They don't respect you. You can do it and they're amazed when they see a woman doing it. They're like in awe, like, "Oh I can't believe she did that." And then they say, "Tell him how old you are Donna." And I say "No. I ain't going to do that." But it's... they... I don't know that they don't think we're capable of it. But they just... A lot of them—Now, though, I'll tell you right now there's a lot of people now that just, "Go to Donna. Anything you want you go to Donna." But they, they just—They can't believe that a woman could do, like an eight inch rope or a ten inch rope. And I mean, I could do it right out there if I had to. And they were just like... Now they respect me. At first they didn't. You know what I mean?

JGF: So you had to prove yourself.

DG: Yeah. I think they're getting better.

JGF: Does that bother you though? To have to...?

DG: No. No. Because I used to be cocky. I knew I could do it. So I'd say—not *cocky* to them but I'd say, "I can do that." I know I can do it, see.

[19:16]

JGF: Is there anything else that you would have wanted me to ask that I didn't think to ask about your work or your own experience in the industry?

DG: No. I just—I enjoy it. Anything to do with the water usually as a rule. It's been in my blood, you know, forever.

I mean my father when he used to come from fishing... I mean, we had a little eighteen-foot skiff and that was it. I couldn't wait to go out.

That's when he taught me how to splice the three strand. I said, "I ain't ever going to have to know that, dad." He taught me how to mend nets. It would probably come back to me. But I've never been into that again. Oh yeah, he used to teach me all that stuff. It's cool.

And you love that smell when they come in from fishing. They have that smell about them. Pretty cool.

JGF: Like the fresh, ocean water smell?

DG: Yeah.

JGF: So he had an eighteen foot skiff like an old wooden boat?

DG: Yeah.

Yeah we used to come out fishing every time he came home.

JGF: So was he in it for the business or just for fun?

DG: No. Just for fun. I used to say, "Dad, people must think you're crazy. You go fishing all the time you come in and go fishing." He says, "I love it, Donna. That's all there is to it. I love it." I said, "I do too." I still love to go fishing.

JGF: Did any of your brothers or sisters get into it?

DG: None of my brothers. Isn't that funny? They all joined the service.

JGF: They did?

DG: Yeah. And my sister, no. It was weird. Even my son he had nothing to do with the fishing.

JGF: Huh! What does he do?

DG: Right now he's... Did he get his degree for, selling houses in real estate. No, he's not into the...

JGF: Do you regret that he didn't, or...?

DG: No. Because you know it's—he just never did from the start. He deejayed from the time he was fifteen until about forty. Because I said, “How long is that going to last?” It lasted. He makes good money! You know I laugh. But he makes good money.

No. I'm the only one I think in the family. Yeah.

JGF: Huh. It's like you got all the passion for it.

DG: Oh and I do. Yeah.

I told my daughter when I pass away, that's where my ashes go. Yeah.

JGF: Oh... Do you have a specific spot, like off a certain place in the harbor or anything?

DG: No.

JGF: Or just, as long as they're in the water?

[21:29]

DG: Yeah. Yeah.

Because I--. Well, in fifty-four, I used to live down in Sconticut Neck. Hurricane Carol, I was ten years old. We lost our house in the hurricane. So I used to have my own little skiff when I used to go out... In the morning, I used to pack a lunch. I was ten years old. Go out in my boat and row. I'd be out there all day fishing. I used to be so *black*, from the sun. And then when we lost our house in the hurricane, I was like devastated. Because we had to move to New Bedford. I was like devastated.

JGF: Oh... That's how you got up here.

DG: Yeah. She never went back to Fair Haven again. And I said, “Oh...” I'll never forget that. Like I said, I was ten years old. We walked out of the house, because we used to live on Bayview Avenue down Sconticut Neck. We were walking up the hill, my mother and I. I said “Ma we got to get out of this house. It's bad.” And I had to swim out. That's how high the water was. And, we got halfway up the hill. And we turned around, this wave, I swear to God, came over the telephone pole, went over the house, and went...the house was gone.

JGF: Oh... And where were you guys at this point?

DG: Up the hill.

JGF: Watching this whole thing happen.

DG: Yeah.

There was... My mother...she was devastated. Because, I'm ten years old and I'm saying, “No school, no school!” I told her afterwards, God forgive me, she's passed away. “You know, Ma, I was terrible back then! I think about it now! But I was thinking, ‘No school. No school.’ And you just lost everything.”

JGF: [laughs]

DG: [laughs]

JGF: [?] some of us could hold on to that as adults though, you know?

DG: That was too funny. I said “Gee, Ma, that was bad.”

Yeah. We never went back there.

[Discussing name/spelling of Sconticut Neck]

[23:26]

DG: Remember that--. How long have you been around here?

JGF: I don't even live... I grew up in Brockton and I live in western Mass.

DG: Oh all right. Because I was going to say the ten pins bowling alley was right there on the corner for years and years and years.

JGF: Well I'll be able to find it on the map.

DG: Oh yeah. Scoticut Neck. Because it's right at the point of the water there. Yeah.

JGF: So, you had friends in Fairhaven and all that.

DG: Yeah.

JGF: And then you sort of had a whole new life in New Bedford.

DG: Yeah. I had to move to New Bedford.

JGF: But you still had the water, right?

DG: Yeah. But it was I said, "Oh!" Because I loved it down there. Oh my God, that was best...

JGF: So you didn't have much warning about that hurricane?

DG: No it went out to sea, at night. And then it came back like two-thirty in the morning at high tide. And it just, it caught everybody off guard. Because they were in bed.

JGF: Oh...

DG: I think two people, or one person passed away in that.

JGF: Wow!

DG: It was pretty bad.

JGF: So it was two-thirty in the morning when you were watching your house get...

DG: Yeah.

And they... They put the dyke up afterwards. Remember the dyke? We haven't had a bad hurricane since then.

JGF: Wow.

DG: That saying that... Don't count your chickens before they hatch.

JGF: Well Gloria... Was that bad?

DG: No.

JGF: Not compared to that one that you're thinking of.

DG: Of course when you're a kid you think it's... You lose your house so that's like... But I still remember this to that day. "Yes, no school!"

JGF: [laughs]

DG: I was like a kid, right?

JGF: Where was the rest of your family at that point?

DG: My father was fishing. I was the only one home. My sister was in New York. My brothers were in New Jersey visiting. I was the only one home.

And I'm the baby [chuckles]. The baby of seven.

[25:00]

JGF: So your father survived that one OK?

DG: Yeah.

JGF: It's so...

So you love the water despite...?

DG: Yeah. That didn't bother me at all.

I used to go bay scalloping when I was a kid with my father. Anything to do with the water.

JGF: Yeah. It clearly kept you young, that's for sure!

DG: That's good!
I said that picture they got of me holding the rope looks like I went under two [?]
And my daughter loves it just as much.

JGF: That's neat. So she'll stick around for the long term?

DG: Yes.

JGF: That's great.

DG: Even my youngest grandson is fourteen, he's like getting into it now. He knows how to do one splice.
He said, "Well what are we going to do when I get into the business Grammy? I don't want to be a Splice Girl."

JGF: He's going to market it to the dog chains and to the...

DG: Maybe. That's so funny, "I'm not going to be a Splice Girl!"

JGF: Yeah [laughs]. What are you going to call it? Splice Guys and Girls.

DG: I know. Splice Girls and Family.

JGF: Right.

DG: There you go.
Everybody is amazed about the name.

JGF: That's a wonderful name. Had the Spice Girls already come on the scene?

DG: Yes.

JGF: That's why you did it. I figured...

DG: And we had a building on Nash Road. That, Splice Girls was there at first. We used to get the kinkiest phone calls.

JGF: Oh [laughs]

DG: Because they'd say, "Do you do parties?"

JGF: [laughs]

DG: I thought, "What?" I said, "What is this?" I said, "We're not... We splice. We..."
"Oh, I'm sorry!"

JGF: What did, they thought you...?

DG: I don't know! It was so funny.

JGF: Oh my God!

DG: I said "Oh my God," we used to get the weirdest phone calls.

JGF: Oh wow!

DG: Yeah. Yeah we had a building on Nash Road. We had to let that go. And we do the business right out of our house.

JGF: Mm hm.

DG: So. It's a lot cheaper. Easier.

JGF: So is your house taken over by ropes and stuff?

DG: My apartment is the splicing department. If you walked in there you'd see more rope than you've seen in your life.
All different kinds. I got dog leashes there. I got collars there. I got, mega braids there. It's like, "Oh my God!" Everybody walks in and they laugh. I said, "I know." Because we're not allowed to do rope on her side of the house. So we just mess up one side.

JGF: Wow that's probably a good rule, huh? [laughs]

DG: Yeah.

[27:15]

JGF: But that thing you said about, you know, saving the scraps. I don't know if you ever heard of the book that this guy wrote, about growing up on a farm in Vermont I think. And he based the title on—they went up into his grandparents' attic one time and they found this box. And it was all tied up with a little piece of string and it was labeled "String Too Short to Be Saved."

DG: No sir!

JGF: And they had saved it in this box and tied it all up with string. And it sounds like what you're doing.

DG: Oh it's terrible. My daughter gets so mad at me!

JGF: But people will buy and use this stuff!

DG: And everybody laughs at me now when I walk into New England Ropes because I get there about 3:30 in the morning right? And Paul will watch—this kid that works there. I'm walking he says, "Going shopping?" I says, "Yeah." [?] I pull this up, I pull that up. I mean they're this big.

JGF: Oh, I think that's brilliant.

DG: Something like this I can make a collar or a dog leash out of.

JGF: And there are artists that are making recycled art.

DG: Yeah.

JGF: And they're making all kinds of money.

DG: And they let me buy remnants there too. So I'll buy a box sometimes. But it's pretty cool. Yeah. I'm a fanatic when it comes to it [laughs].

JGF: But I assume you don't want... My brother-in-law who, sells dog supplies at dog shows, to get in touch with you about dog collars because you don't want that business?

DG: Oh yeah, that would be nice.

JGF: All right. I'll get your information afterwards in case he's interested. I'll take a picture of your booth. I did actually, already.

DG: Did you?

And like I said when I came here I think Laura misunderstood me that Splice Girls was done. I just meant...

JGF: Right. You weren't having a lot of...

DG: We don't have a lot of splicers to get a splicing contest. In fact, I haven't gotten anybody so what we're going to do tomorrow. Me, my daughter and my supervisor at New England Ropes, she's going to be there. That's who did it last year. We're not going to do it because it was so fast. We're going to pick people from the audience. And we're going to spend twenty minutes with them.

JGF: Oh that's going to be really fun.

DG: We're going to spend twenty minutes with them and we're going to say, "OK. See who..."

JGF: What time is that?

DG: It's one o'clock.

JGF: Oh good! I'm not interviewing at one. I can come see it!

DG: It will be cool, just to... I'll say, "Do you know how..." As long as they don't know how to splice. We'll see what we can do with them in about twenty minutes and then say "Go ahead."

JGF: I don't know how. Do I get to?

DG: Yeah!

JGF: Maybe I'll do it.

DG: Yeah because we'll show you and then you just... Whoever does it, doesn't have to be perfect. Whoever does it the fastest and looks right, they can win the prize.

JGF: Oh that's so fun!

DG: Yeah. And I think that will be cool.

JGF: Yes, that'll be really awesome.

DG: Just bring people out of the audience.

JGF: That'll be really cool.

DG: Because the way we did it last year and I feel like, bad. Because it only took us like three minutes.

JGF: Yeah.

DG: You know. And we did two and I said, OK.

JGF: Now what?

DG: Yeah. So I showed them a double braid. But yeah I think bringing the people out of the audience. So.

JGF: That's going to be a big hit.

DG: Yeah.

JGF: That's great.

DG: Chris[?] said "Ma, that's a good idea." I said, "Yeah. I think so."

JGF: But you know, unlike the scalloping, which, the shucking you really can't bring people out of the audience and having them slicing their thumbs off.

DG: I can shuck.

JGF: Yeah?

DG: I can shuck scallops. I can do... My father showed me all that. We used to shuck scallops. Because we used to go bay scalloping. I don't know about now. My hands are trash. But I used to do them.
But. Yeah... Quahoags I know how to open them.

JGF: And they're all different a little bit right?

DG: Yeah. Yeah. I did all of that. And I love it. It's just... Like I say the best job I've ever had in my life was lobstering. I loved it so much. It was the coolest.

JGF: Just because you were out on the boat, right?

DG: Yeah. The water. Just the water.

JGF: Hauling in traps and all that was cool?

DG: Yeah. Didn't bother me at all.

JGF: Yeah?

DG: No. And I was the deck hand. It didn't bother me at all. So.

JGF: That's great.

DG: It is.

JGF: Look at you—you crack me up [laughs]. Thanks, well thanks so much. I don't have any other questions unless there's anything more that you want to...

DG: Nope.

JGF: All right. Great.

DG: Nope.

JGF: OK. Well thank you.

DG: Except that this fair is nice. It's really... I enjoy it. The first year I came I was with—not last year the year before, I was with West Marine so I was stuck in the booth. So I really didn't get to go around and see what was going on. So.

[Tape stopped/people coming in—end of file WAV_0022_002]

[Start of file WAV_0022_003]

JGF: OK. So you were working for West Marine I think you said. We're just sorry we lost your train of thought.

DG: Oh yeah. That doesn't take much.

JGF: [laughs]

DG: That, that is one thing. Oh, geez.

JGF: You were saying you liked this festival—oh, last year...

DG: Yes I was working... Last year I worked my table. But the year before I worked at West Marine. So I really didn't get to, do too much.

Last year it was like, I was getting like, excited. Then this year. My daughter, last night. Six o'clock. "Ma, I got the truck all loaded." I said, "Oh my God, are you excited or what?" She says, "I am!"

JGF: That's great.

DG: So it's nice. Like I said she enjoys it. And it's nice. You don't have to say, "C'mon kids, you got to get this done," you know? She just enjoys it.

We make... We do a lot of lanyards for tree climbers, safety belts. We do a lot of that stuff. And that's through New England Ropes.

You know a lot of our stuff is through New England Ropes, because we're like their biggest vendor right now.

JGF: Wow.

DG: But. We get a lot of...

JGF: And where are they?

DG: Now they're in Fall River. Industrial Park.

And it's still going to stay New England Ropes. Instead of New England Ropes, Inc. it's going to be New England Ropes Corp.

JGF: Oh OK.

Well thank you very much. I have to get a release form from you now and take your picture.

[End of file WAV_0022_003]

[End of interview]