

Name of person interviewed: John Isaksen [JI]

Facts about this person:

Age 69 at time of interview

Sex Male

Occupation Retired Fisherman, Ship Repair Shop Owner, Boat Owner

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

Home port, New Bedford, MA

and Hail Port New Bedford, MA

Residence (Town where lives) unknown

Ethnic background (if known) Norwegian

Interviewer: Janice Fleuriel [JF]

Transcriber: CJ Dennehy  
Erin Heacock

Place interview took place: New Bedford Harbormaster House

Date and time of interview: Sept. 24, 2005

## INDEX/KEYWORDS

### KEYWORDS:

Norway; New Bedford; Massachusetts; Brooklyn; Teamwork; Union; Strike; Engine; Repair; Scallop; Nets; GPS; Computerization; Dragger; Scalloper; Perfect Storm; World War II

### INDEX:

[Start of Audio]

- [00:04] Born in Brooklyn; Story of traveling to Norway prior to WWII with mother to care for grandfather; Fishing and farming culture in Norway; Returned to Brooklyn following the war; Father fished off Brooklyn in the winter time and George's Bank in the summertime; Discussion of the Norwegian community in Brooklyn;
- [06:31] Moved to New Bedford in 1945; Story of repeating second grade in New Bedford and Dartmouth; Attended vocational high school;
- [09:55] Father scalloped in New Bedford until he retired; Discussion of age differences on the fishing boats; Also discussion of differences between the number of people on a fishing boat at a time; First two boats were wooden; Mention of the strike in 1982/83; Current boat is steel jointly owned by John and an unnamed person;
- [14:17] Story about the name of his boat *Hustler* and what his wife thinks about the name; Discussion of the names of prior boats and who they were bought from; Tells what qualities a good person to work for has;
- [18:09] Discusses conflicts between scientists and fishermen; Tells a story of how a scallop shell the same size but found in two different locations and can have different size meats; Discusses the help of UMass-Dartmouth to communicate with Woods Hole; Story of how the scientists were wrong about how many scallops are out there;
- [22:57] Speaks about retiring from going out on boats – called him “Grandpa”; Story of wife's adjustment to his retirement; Says he would “do it all over again”;
- [26:24] Scalloped and dragged during his career; Discussion of the different type of boats and placement of nets and/or dredges; Tells how you would use the boat's movement to aid in hauling the nets; Says he “never was a twine man” and stuck to engine repair; Discusses teamwork;
- [29:34] Discusses the strike and tensions on boats as well as the union; “Every boat owner had their own idea”; Discussion on unions now; Comments on the contributions to pension, less days at sea and a smaller catch means less money contributed to the pensions;
- [34:03] Speaks about engine repair and his business, “John and Bob's engine parts”; Discusses sizes of engines, what boat needs what size engine, and what the engine powers;
- [36:20] Tangent on the amenities on boats now vs. then; Story of how men would “cat wash” before returning to shore; Comment on body piercing

- [38:18] Discusses technological changes; Believes most significant is GPS; Boats don't have buoys anymore because of the technology; Discussion of bad weather and how technology has helped to improve communications
- [42:25] Story of being called as a witness in a court case; Mentions the "queer sea" similar to the storm in *The Perfect Storm*; Comments on how the lawyers wanted the witness to say one thing when it actually couldn't have happened;
- [45:53] Discusses the boat he jointly owns; Comments on choosing a new captain and the input a boat owner can give a captain when choosing the crew; Tells story of learning that he can track the boat he owns through GPS
- [48:40] Audio stops for a moment as interviewee's wife approaches
- [49:00] Returns to conversation on fish finders; Technology lets a boat captain find fish easily; Notes that when he was fishing you found fish "from past experience, your father or one you skippered with, certain times of the year you fish in certain areas"; Tells a story about scientists from Woods Hole fishing in an area where there are no fish and used that information to close an area even though if they moved slightly they would have found tons of fish; Tells a story of pulling the nets up the roads from the waterfront to check the nets;
- [52:45] Comments on technology updates to weather reporting; Notes that when he fished during the storm were good weather reports and after the storm ended were bad weather reports; Tells a story of being adrift off of Nantucket and taking four days to return to New Bedford;
- [54:35] Discusses the engine repair shop he owns; Notes he doesn't go to boats anymore, rather the parts come to him; Engines are too heavy to move from boats; Notes that engines are in small, cramped spaces even on yachts; Engines have manuals now but everything is computerized to fine tune the engines; Comments on whether he feels the government regulations are better
- [59:30] Story about taking relatives aboard his boat; Story about visiting the Social Security office; Comments on the differences between the waterfront and the rest of New Bedford; Indicates when the catches are good, captains can be picky about who they hire; Smaller crews and longer shifts; "Less civilized";
- [66:17] Closing remarks
- [End of Audio/End of Interview]

## TRANSCRIPT

[Start of Audio]

[00:04]

JF It's been a good life, ok. I'm gonna just ask you to say your name on the tape.

JI Ok.

JF And what's your name?

JI John Isaksen

JF Ok. Those levels look good. I'm just checking to make sure that it's picking up .... And this is Janice Fleuriel interviewing John Isaksen at the Working Waterfront Festival. Today is September 24<sup>th</sup>. Usually what we do is start by asking some general questions.

JI Ok.

JF And then we take it where ever it goes. What year were you born and where were you born?

JI I was born in 1936 in Brooklyn, New York.

JF Brooklyn, New York. Ok.

JI And from there we moved to Norway and then the war came and I lived there and I came back in 1945.

JF Oh, ok. So how long had your family been in Brooklyn when you were born there?

JI About—my folks were married in Brooklyn and they had been there about a year I guess, or two. Probably two years.

JF And had they come from Norway?

JI Yup.

JF So why did they go back? Do you know?

JI Well, my grandfather was sick and my mother was going to go over there to help my grandmother with my grandfather. And then we were ready to go home and my grandfather passed away and we were gonna go on the next boat but it never went. So that's how we ended up in Norway from '37 to '45.

JF Wow. So you were there the first eight years of your life?

JI That I remember, yeah.

JF That seemed to happen to – I've talked to people from Poland that that happened to.

JI I guess that war, the Second World War put a lot of people – Separated the families.

JF Now when you all went back to Norway, did you have other people in Brooklyn that you left?

JI My father was left there, he was fishing. Then I had uncles and aunts. Actually I had an aunt that came on the last boat so they made it out on the last boat. They were over there for the same reason. So it ended up it was just me and my mother and my grandmother that were over. And of course I had cousins and uncles and aunts and stuff like that over there in different parts of Norway, in Karmoy.

JF Is that an island?

JI Yes, mainly most of the people in New Bedford come from Karmoy. A lot—

JF How do you spell that?

- JJ K-A-R-M-O-Y, I guess.
- JF That's close yeah ok. Sometimes when I'm transcribing the interviews and people have said a place name, I'm like 'I have no idea how to spell.'
- JJ Around here, most people, you tell them Karmoy. They know.
- JF It sounds like maybe St. Michael in the Azores.
- JJ It's about the same. Yeah. A lot of fisherman here from Karmoy.
- JF Interesting. Now where you were, was that on the coast of Norway?
- JJ It was a small island outside of [inaudible – geographic area in Norway] where my mother came from. We had potato fields, well little—it's not very big stuff over there, a patch may be as big as this room. We planted potatoes and we had a couple of sheep. During the war of course the Germans, we had to share with them. They took a portion, you know, for taxes I guess or whatever.
- JF Oh they had invaded actually. I don't know my history well enough.
- JJ They had come in after my grandfather died I guess. That's why we got stuck there.
- JF Huh! So was your family also involved in fishing in Norway?
- JJ Over there, there was a lot of farming and fishing. My grandfather on both sides, they fished. But my mother's father was mainly into... he had a small coastal schooner that he delivered freight and stuff like that with... up and down the west coast of Norway mainly I guess.
- JF So then you rejoined your dad in Brooklyn?
- JJ In 1945, right after the war I guess.
- JF And what kind of fishing was he doing there?
- JJ He was there... At that time they were doing both dragging and scalloping.
- JF Oh, ok. On the same boat?
- JJ Yeah. My uncle had a boat and they would change over every winter and go dragging. Because the boats were not that big, not as big as they are now and dragging was a good business in the winter time. So I guess it was better; they went fluking and stuff like that.
- JF Uh huh. Now were they going out to George's bank?
- JJ Well in the summertime they came up here and went to George's. They fished out of Brooklyn in the winter time. And then eventually they ended up up here after the war I guess they most of the boats because it was close to both places they could steam down to New York and they could steam out to the George's bank. I think maybe years ago – I'm not sure why they went back to Brooklyn all the time. There was a lot of Norwegian families in Brooklyn. They called it Flatbush Avenue.
- JF Oh, I've heard of it! That was the Norwegian area?
- JJ There's a big Norwegian community there. They even had churches and everything else, yeah, bakeries and such. There's still a few different bakeries down there that got a little bit of Scandinavian food. It's changed quite a bit though from years ago, that's for sure. I was there about ten years ago and I didn't hardly recognized Fifth Avenue.
- [6:31]
- JF So when did you end up actually in New Bedford, or the New Bedford—

- JJ Well we came back here right after the war. Well, we stayed in Brooklyn; we stayed with my uncle, my aunt and uncle in Brooklyn, until we could find housing. My father had bought a house during the war before—He went in the navy, before that he had bought a house, there were people living in it and we couldn't evict them so it was difficult to find a place and we finally found a place and we came up here late fall of '45 I guess and then I started school in New Bedford. And that was not nice, not good.
- JF Why?
- JJ Well, I was nine years old and they were gonna put me in kindergarten because I couldn't speak English, you know? And then I ended up in the second grade.
- JF And you were still older than all?
- JJ And I had just graduated from second grade in Norway. Then we moved to Dartmouth the following year and they put me back in second grade again because they didn't recognize me being in New Bedford or whatever. So second grade I did good.
- JF You did really good. Oh man! So then did you actually finish through all 12 years?
- JJ I finished, yeah. I went to vocational school. They took me into vocational school. I guess I was not a very good student.
- JF No? Well sometimes the problem is I think that schools, they only gear toward people who are good with books and paper and pencils. Like my husband who's so good with machines probably like you are, they don't let kids do that in school.
- JJ Well we had, you know in Norway, we were way advanced compared to over here. We were working with decimals and multiplication—
- JF In grade two?
- JJ In grade two yeah.
- JF Oh! You must have been bored!
- JJ So I did the multiplication, they gave me a box of pegs with numbers and letters and I put the multiplication and at the time they, you know, gave stars. I knew what was going on more or less but I didn't understand everything. There was a girl across from me and she had stars on the black board, you know? And I was gonna get stars, you know, but she says, 'no' and she put it back in the box, you know? No star! But it was good, I did all right. The teachers were good, everybody was good. They tried to get me to—they say I have an accent, but I don't hear it. I guess my mother was my teacher, I guess that's where I get my English from is her, so now I can't speak English or Norwegian. It's been an interesting life.
- [09:55]
- JF So your dad, when they moved up here he stayed in fishing I take it.
- JJ Oh yeah.
- JF What kind, both? Or?
- JJ He was doing both and then they started doing just scalloping year round and he stayed with just scalloping. So he just did scalloping up until he was—I guess he retired when he was 65. I guess he stopped fishing.
- JF That seems old for how people do it today.

- JI Well not back then it wasn't. I was the youngest one on the boat for many, many, many years and then I went from the youngest to the oldest it seemed, you know? It was a different fishing back then compared to now, you know? There was more I would say, family had owned the boat. And he fished it all his life and took care of the boat and he had the crew, a lot of them stayed with the same boat for years and years. We were 11 men; it was a little more civilized. We ran watches six hours on and six hours off. We had a cook, an engineer, maintenance skipper. Now its way different from what I, you know? Now I just shake my head. It's all regulations and all that kind of stuff. And it makes a big difference, makes it hard a lot of it because we don't know anything they say, you know?
- JF Right, of course not. Right. You only supported your families and a whole bunch of other people with your catch.
- JL Right, but we still don't know. We don't have a degree.
- JF Oh, yeah right. So obviously then when your dad had his boats, they were wooden right?
- JI Yup. And then I fished with him up until he retired and, well, the boat was sold and he had a partner and he wanted to sell and he got a little bit. And then he fished with my uncle dragging, he went back to dragging; it was a little more, a little easier, I guess, and when he was 65 he went on a beach and then he worked on the boats. By that time, we had a boat, a wooden boat. We fished then and he worked on the boat when it was in, you know; doing repair work, and whatever it took to keep it going. You know, it helped. So it was nice and then we bought a second boat and that was a wooden boat too and we had the two of them up until the strike, that kinda put everything out of commission. It went haywire.
- JF Was that the 80's? No?
- JI '82 I guess. '83?
- JF Right, that was pretty nasty I heard.
- JI Yeah, it wasn't a good thing. It was a lot of, you know? It's too bad that it happened but that's what happened.
- JF Yeah, and isn't that when the auction stopped too?
- JI Yeah, a lot of hard feelings and stuff. And then it's kinda bad when one side gets too much power, too much power. You know? With the union over the years we always worked together which seemed to work out good. But by that time it was starting to get so that everyone go their own way, and having their own, you know? So then we sold the two boats and we built one new boat, a bigger boat.
- JF And was that also wooden?
- JI No, that was a steel boat. And that's what we have today is a steel boat.
- [14:17]
- JF What's the name of the boat?
- JI The name of the boat is *Hustler*. Which my wife loves that name, you know?
- JF Yeah? Why?
- JI Well there's a magazine apparently named *Hustler*.
- JF And that's not probably what you meant.
- JI Well I didn't name it really. You know, it was a joint [inaudible]. No, I had thought, 'that's a good name,' I never even thought of it and then of course my

wife, you know, oh boy! It's still a kind of a thorn in her side, the name. But we try to tell her we don't mean that, it means to go, ya know?

JF Right and it's interesting but maybe I've heard people used the term but certainly to describe the way fishermen have to be on the boats.

JJ You have to hustle.

JF You have to hustle when the fish are in right?

JJ Yeah, so this is Hustler. I was surprised when she came and told me because I figured she knew Playboy that's all over the place but Hustler, when you see that much, I don't think, but anyway.

JF Did you ask her how come she knew?

JJ No. I tried to side step the whole issue.

JF What were the names of the boats that you had before that you and your dad—?

JJ The first one we bought was Poseidon. And that we bought from [inaudible – name perhaps Leif] Jacobsen. And then we bought the Leianda [unsure of spelling] and that we bought from [inaudible – name perhaps Bob] Breeze and that's a boat that we fished with both my partner and I for many years we worked for him, [inaudible – name perhaps Bob] Breeze. He was a good guy. Mrs. Breeze is still here, he passed away but I see Mrs. Breeze on Sundays she goes to the Lutheran church over here in Fairhaven. He was a good guy.

JF Nice. So you liked working for him.

JJ He was a good guy.

JF What makes him any good to work for?

JJ I think that if they know the fishing and they know the weather and, you know, they don't push you and tell you what to do and I think most fishermen are fishing because they're independent. It's my idea anyway, you know? When we went out fishing we left the harbor and we were on our own until we came in again more or less. Communication was not that great especially in bad weather. And we went out and we fished where we felt there was places to catch something and what we caught if we could sell it, we kept it. Now you may catch it but you're not allowed to keep it so you have to throw it overboard. Which is kinda crazy but that's the rules. And if you come in, and they have... What we used to do back then if we brought in information about where we fished and what we caught and how many and the depth and all this information, which was not gonna be used against us. The first thing they do is close the area we fished in. Smooth bottom and everything and that's the places—that's my opinion. A lot of, you know; where we fished were protective areas. The first thing they do. I went to a meeting and I guy says, 'well we know, we have good information on where the scallops are.' And I says, 'yeah of course you do because you got it from us, and now you're closing the areas.' You know?

[18:09]

JF And was this guy that was running the meeting or whatever did he have any—

JJ He agreed. He said, 'yeah, that's right.'

JF But did he have any fishing background? Was he—?

JJ No, he was a doctor. Marine biology or something I guess.

JF The real environmentalist and scientist versus—



- JJ We were out fishing one time they said that the scallop shell is three and a half or four and a half inches big. And the meat in there will be a certain size. And we said, 'no that's not true. It's not true. It don't work that way.' If the depth of the water or the feeding...there's a lot of things involved here with the size of the meat. You may go a few fathoms in and you get meats that are twice as big.
- JF In the same size shell?
- JJ In the same size shell. So we went into deep water in the channel and I got a scallop shell about this big. And we towed over to [inaudible], first time I ever did that, with the new boat we had a lot of power so we towed right over there and I got a shell about the same size. And the meat was as big as this.
- JF As the tape case.
- JJ And I took and saved the two shells, ok, and froze them. And I brought them in to the guy in Law Enforcement and I says, 'here's the two shells. There the same size shells, but the meats are way different, you can see it.' 'You glued that meat in there.'
- JF Even though there was just space enough for it.
- JJ And I said, 'you can cut the meat out and you'll see that that's the size.' And he said, 'no, you glued it in.' It's been kind of a frustrating thing with the fishing with Woods Hole and doctors and stuff like that. But I think that with Dartmouth, UMass Dartmouth...
- JF The SMAST people?
- JJ Yeah, they've been good because we've been—we need somebody to help us talk because we don't talk that good, ya know? We probably get a little excited when they tell us we don't know anything, you know. So we came in a few years ago and there were scallops out to the east in a closed area and of course we, apparently I was not out at the time they had done this, but apparently the guys went a little bit close or went a little bit over where they shouldn't be and they filled the dredges up with scallops. So, we brought this information in to them and said, 'look, you know there's plenty of scallops out there.' And they said 'there's not any scallops out there. There may be a little more, but not that many.' So at UMass Dartmouth they got permission to get a boat and they went out and fished and they towed for one eight minute tow and a five minute tow and they have five hundred bushels of scallops. Where they said if you fish in the open area you'll get two bushels and in a closed area you'll get three or four. So now they had one quarter of the time on the bottom you had four hundred some bushels, you know? So then they had to change a little bit. That was because of what the doctors said but this is my story, the way I hear it, ok, and understand it. I may be all wet but...you know.
- JF Well you're not the first one to say things along this line so I doubt it. I mean I think it's great that the SMAST is helping out and speaking out but does it make you mad at all that they'll listen to them but not you?
- JJ No, it doesn't make any difference to me because I know what I know, you know, and they're entitled to their opinion, you know. I don't agree with them but that's fine, that's all right. But they're making things tough for me but hey, I lived with this here for all my life so it doesn't bother me.

[22:57]

- JF That's good, I guess. When did you retire from fishing?
- JJ Well I'm still involved on the boat and stuff. My knees gave out, so I had a tough time and then they cut the crew down to nine men and I had to be on deck as much as I was in the pilot house and I couldn't get up and down the ladder that good. And I was working with a bunch of young fellas I was probably twice their age, probably the whole crew. When they started calling me grandpa I figured, 'well it's time for me to go ashore.' I was thinking of going on another boat but at the time we had engines that required work on. So I got in a little bit with that engine repair and I like that. My wife is very good at making ends meet which over the years; we never made that much money. Later years here now we've been doing very good. We don't live on the top shelf and we live a nice comfortable life and pay the bills and so I was able to stay ashore. I told her I think the first ten years was the hardest for her to accept that I was coming home every night.
- JF Why, do you figure?
- JJ Well, she's not used to it. I was hardly ever home. I guess I was home two Sundays a month, I guess. And then when the boat was in back then when we worked on the boat together ready to go back out again because well, we were five days home, I guess, at the end, but in the beginning we were only home three days. One day was taking out, and one day was fixing gear, so you had one day off, you know. And that was spent repairing and getting ready to go back out again.
- JF So that's interesting because I know a lot of people that have said that it can be hard on the families when the fisherman is out. On the other hand they have a routine that they get used to not having you.
- JJ Exactly, sure. The wife has got to be a mother and father and you know. I get a kick out of it, if something needs repair, well, she calls and gets it repaired. Where some of the people ashore they don't understand that your wife calls. And she handles the check book and pays the bills. I don't think I've written a check in my life on the house. I give her the money and she does what has to be done.
- JF It worked all those years.
- JJ So far, so good.
- JF So did you miss it at first when you stopped fishing?
- JJ Yeah, I liked it. There were times of course with bad weather and stuff, we didn't miss that too much but it's a nice life. I would do it all over again.
- [26:24]
- JF You would? And you were scalloping the whole time after –
- JJ No, dragging and scalloping.
- JF Oh, you did both. Is that true when you got the steel boat also?
- JJ No, with the steel boat we just went scalloping when I went dragging I worked for somebody else. That was before we bought the boat.
- JF Now this is a whole sort of thing with boat types and eastern rig, western rig. When you had the wooden boats, even if they were scallopers, where was the net, or the dredge, off the back or the side?
- JJ No, no. On the sides.
- JF So that was the eastern rig?

- JJ Right. And the same thing with dragging, we hauled it in over the side.
- JF Both types?
- JJ It was done by hand. With the nets.
- JF Was that hard work?
- JJ Well, you know, you learn how to do it, you know, you let the boat do the work. You take with the roll, you know, the boat rolled down, and then you would take and pull in the slack, and then when the boat rolled the other way, you would take and hold it over the rail, and you had four guys usually on the side and they would hold the net, and then the boat rolled back and pull it up until the caught end came up and you get a hold of the [inaudible] put a choke on and pulled the bag on board. If you tried to work against it, of course, then it would be difficult.
- JF Was that very hard to pick up or was that something a new fisherman would sorta get pretty quickly, how to pull the net up?
- JJ Well, I never got to be a good twine man. It's an art. I could do what they call straight but when you start to taper and cut, and dog ears and all that kind of stuff, you know? I was the engineer. So if you were okay with the engines then you didn't have to know that much about the twine, you know? But a good skipper, he knew my capabilities and he would tell me to do certain things, I would sew cans on or I could splice, I knew how to splice so I could do that. I knew how to splice wire and I could run with the boat if I had to be. So it's kind of a team, kind of a teamwork you know? And you get a crew that works together and it makes it easy. That's the nice part about it. And if you get a new guy that's a square peg that he don't fit in the round hole they know and they'll leave or they get asked to leave or whatever.
- [29:34]
- JF Now, during the strike then, was there a time before the actual strike, when was tensions getting high and was it uncomfortable on the boats or did it not happen that way?
- JJ I never noticed anything really. There might have been a few guys that were not happy and then of course the union comes in and promises everything and the owners are not going to give an inch and the union is not going to give an inch and you know, and that's what happened. There's give and take in everything, in negotiations, there was hard feelings on both sides. And then of course with the new boat we had just bought the new boat at the time we were not in the union so we went fishing. That didn't help matters much. But we fished during the strike. And then everything went haywire. Seafood producers went out of business and Boat Owners United went out of business and independents, everybody was on their own.
- JF To sell your fish?
- JJ Well, like they say, if you stick together there's strength in unity but now there was no more of that. Every boat owner had their own idea, you know? And then the crews, there was nobody to talk to so the union just went south and after that the government came in with their rules and regulations and there was no one to really talk to. There was about 50 or 100 guys now and you get 100 fishermen together and we all have our own ideas, you know. It was good for me, never

mind you. That didn't help matters. And again, this is my observations, what I see.

JF So today are the fishermen a union? I know the lumpers have one, but the fishermen—

JJ The lumpers I think have. The fishermen—there's a few maybe, but not many. We had a pension fund or we have a pension fund, there was a lot of money involved in and I think that as an owner I think that's what the union people...it was good for everybody, but before the owners and the union both had control over and now I'm not sure who really controls it. I think it's Seafarers International which is in Baltimore, I think, before we were independent and it was controlled in New Bedford. But I do get a pension every month which is nice, you know?

JF So it was from the catch of the boat that the money went into the pensions?

JJ A percentage, every trip, yeah. And then of course you had, I think you needed 95 sea days to qualify. Which today it would be almost hard to get 95. But then you had to go 95 days which you could do fairly easily because we fished, we were at sea 240 days, 230 to 240 was the average. So that's the way we did it. You miss a trip, you miss a payment, you know, mortgage was due.

[34:03]

JF Yeah, interesting. So, you were an engineer on lots of, on lots—

JJ Mostly mate and engineer mainly, and then I would fill as skipper if he got sick or whatever. I like the engines, that's how I got into this, what I have now in Fairhaven, I have a little shop.

JF Does it have a name, your business?

JJ John and Bob's engine parts. We sell small engines, we sell big ones too but what we're mainly involved in is a German engine which is a Deutz, made in Germany. There are a few of them around, but there's a lot of them with generator sets, air cooled, smaller horsepower, around 100 horsepower. But the bigger ones, not that many.

JF Now when you say small engines, you're meaning for what kind of boat?

JJ For big boats, but for generator sets. We have to make our own electricity; we don't have a cable when we buy the boat, you know?

JF Oh okay, I just saw the engine display and he was explaining that it would probably be the size of what they have for a lobster boat but he was explaining that the boats would have four engines for different things.

JJ Right. The one we have has got four engines in it and when I first started fishing, 225 horsepower, that did everything; it charged the batteries, it ran the winches, and it ran the boat, it did everything. Now we have an engine just to run the generator.

JF And how many horsepower is that?

JJ 100 horse. And now we have an engine to run the winches, that's 300 horsepower, and then we have a separate engine to run the boat and that's 1400 horsepower. And a spare generator in case one quits, we have a spare. We have a shower and a bathroom and everything else. Before, you had a bucket.

[36:20]

- JF Right, yeah I just went on the *Pacer* and looked around. I was impressed! It was a very nice bathroom!
- JI Yep, we have a shower and everything.
- JF Now you didn't have that on your early trips?
- JI No.
- JF Did you ever even sponge down or did you just—
- JI Oh yeah. The guys came ashore a lot cleaner than some of the guys I see now. And they came down, we had a lot of people come down, a lot of people dressed like this and they would go onboard and take off their street clothes and put them in a locker and put on their fishing gear, and when they came in we had a pump, a hand pump, and we had a ship-mate stove which was run by coal to begin with but they converted them to kerosene and that had a big tank on top and that heated water, and some of the boats had a sink but most of them had a wash basin, and you shaved and you washed, 'cat washed' they called it. Cat washed, you know sponged down. And you would go ashore and you would look like the day you went down. Now I see these guys come off the boats sometimes and it's different. But that's—and they have earrings and such.
- JF Haha! Yeah, different!
- JI Which is not a bad thing. Some of them overdo it, I think. One earring I can live with that, but when they start putting them in their tongue, and the lip, and the nose...
- JF I had a hard time talking to someone when they have one in their tongue. I don't want to look at it, but I can't help looking it.
- JI Yeah...better get off that subject.
- [38:18]
- JF So as far as the changes that you have seen, as far as technology on the boats, what changes really stand out for you?
- JI Probably the GPS, I guess would be – You look at the television screen and it tells you where the boat is, you know, within a few feet. And I remember when I first went out as a [inaudible – slang?], as a kid right after World War II, they had these [inaudible – older type of direction finder], there you had to line up the loops and stuff and you had a radio direction finder so you could home in on the light ship until you found the light ship, once you found the light ship you did the dead reckoning. And of course you went by the sounding machine; find your way with the sounding machine. I went with a young fella one time who was following the lines and I said, 'well, what if this thing quits, then what do you do?' Well then you call the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard! Well I'm here, you don't have to call the Coast Guard. Electronics have gotten way sophisticated. I mean, before if you are fishing in lumps or in certain places if you hit the tow two or three times during a six hour watch you were doing pretty good. Now you can hit that lump every time because you're working within tenths of a microsecond.
- JF Does the lump mean its—
- JI The bottom. If you went up to this lump you would catch scallops or fish, so know you have to find that lump or wreck for fish, you have to be careful of coming up a wreck and getting the dredges caught in the wreck or the lump or

whatever, so you have to come up on it, and now you go between them with this machine. It's quite something.

JF But still I suppose if somebody has the dredge out, they have to be keeping in mind it's much wider than the width of the boat right?

JI It's further back so you have to judge that too, and the tide, so the boat is here, the dredges may be over here 20 feet or something—

JF And if there's surge that must really complicate it right?

JI There's things to take into consideration. We used to set a buoy out, a marker with an anchor and fish from that, and then you could get more or less lined up. But today you don't see any boats today with buoys because of the electronics. Its way different, and it's good with the radars in fog and what have you.

JF You've been caught in some bad weather you said.

JI Yeah, a few times.

JF Was it very scary?

JI Yeah, you get religious a little bit. Most of the guys when they come ashore they don't act it but out there, it puts the fear of God into you a little bit.

JF And of course, I know before—maybe during a storm it's the same but communications are much better now.

[42:25]

JI Oh yeah, I think so. But in bad weather, it's still a little bad but not like it used to be, you didn't get a hold of anybody back then, even the fishing right next to each other you would holler because you couldn't get him. In one storm there we were out...and a boat was lost and I ended up in court. The lawyers of course knew exactly what happened and we didn't know what happened to the boat we felt it had been run down by a steamer or took a sea and capsized, you know, or something like that. But this lawyer here, he knew that it took the sea and the dories filled up with water and tipped it over. And I said, 'if they took the sea and the dories filled up with water it would tear the dories off the boat' 'cause it wasn't that strong, the boat is stronger than the dories. 'Oh no, no, no'. And I mentioned at that time what we call a queer sea, which was the name of that movie they made *The Perfect Storm* where the sea swirled not all the same. The lawyers said 'if it's blowing this hard all the seas are that high' and you know he had the whole scenario and I said, 'no, that's not right.' And, of course, I got thrown out because I was only asked to answer yes or no.

JF Oh, so were you only brought in as an expert witness?

JI No. I don't know what I was; I just had to go up there.

JF It wasn't your boat or anything?

JI No, it was my wife's uncle that got lost and apparently I was the last one to talk to him so they wanted to know. He was operating the boat recklessly, steaming full speed and I says, 'well we were still fishing at the time so, you know, the storm may have hit further to the west, you know, coming our way.' And of course they didn't want to hear that. After court that time, that time, I didn't have much, what'd you call it, faith in the court system or whatever. I felt like the lawyers can twist things around a little bit. And you can't say that. 'Well I feel it's the truth', but you can't say that.

JF It's funny because they make you take a vow to tell the whole truth but then they don't let you.

JI They don't let you say that because it may—you know this is what happened. It's the way I saw it. But you can't say that, you're not supposed to say that. Ok, you're outta here.

[45:53]

JF So you own a boat today.

JI Half a boat.

JF Half a boat and who captains it? Is it one person?

JI Right now we've just got a new captain. And he is a friend of ours, I guess, we knew him as kids and stuff; we had seen him grow up more or less. He's a little younger than we are, probably in his 40's or maybe 50. I don't think he's 50, probably 40s.

JF Now who would pick the crew? Does the captain?

JI He would.

JF That captain. So you just trust him with your boat and he does sorta the rest.

JI Well, you pick the captain and you trust him with his abilities, you know, and if you don't like it then you have to get another captain. Well you could say 'This guy here, I've known him, and I don't think he'd be a good choice.' If the captain decides, you can voice your opinion. If you put too much input, you're likely to lose the captain.

JF Now when they're out, are you every day in contact or do you just let them do their thing?

JI Once they leave we usually say, 'no news is good news.' But they showed me, they got a computer in the shop, they made me get a computer, which I'm not too happy about, I don't know how to run it too good. A friend of mine came—My cousin's son was younger he came in and, Max, and he came in and he said you can call up the black box people, you know we're got a cell where the boat is all the time, and you call up and get a code from them and you put the code in and you go online and you can see where your boat is on the computer screen. And he showed me, he had two boats, and he said 'There's one and there's the other. There's the closed area', you know. The stuff that they have today is unbelievable. It's unbelievable. The same thing with sounding machines they see the bottom, I mean it shows in three dimensions, you know, the bottom.

JF Can you actually tell what an object is?

JI They claim if a guy that really know what he's doing, he can tell.

[48:40]

[Audio stops for a moment as interviewee's wife approaches]

JI I don't know where we were, what we were talking about.

JF Oh! The fish finders. Oh yeah, can they tell what the object is or no?

JI They say they can tell. If you know your instruments and how to operate it—you can tell the hardness of the bottom. Yeah! It's no wonder they say there's over fishing but with instruments you have today you can't hardly miss.

JF Now back when you were skippering or whatever, what would it be that would make you say, 'okay, this is probably a good spot, I'm gonna drop my nets here.'

JJ You would take from past experience, your father or one you skippered with, certain times of the year you fish in certain areas. And that's one of the things we tried to tell the people. At certain times of the year the meat is much bigger than at other times of the year. I think it's getting a little more knowledge in that sector for them that yes this is what happens. Because we had, at Woods Hole one time, they were telling us that there was only a bushel or so scallops down that area. And they made the research. But I saw the vessel and we were fishing and we had deck load, and he made the tow offshore from us. And he's telling how bleak it is, and we're laying with a deck load. But probably if you had come in a little bit further, you would have gotten all kinds of scallops. But at that time, it was, they were told to set out in a certain area. If you made a tow one way and turned around and went the other way, you may catch more going one way than the other because of the tides. And if you moved a little bit and let out a little more wire, or took in a little more wire, slack off on a sweep, the different things you did to do this, you know. But I think they made one tow and this is what is there, you know? I didn't think it was a true picture.

JF I think in one of the interviews last year or something, somebody mentioned something about how they didn't have the net out exactly right, and it was off just enough so that they wouldn't have caught what was there.

JJ Sure, yeah. I think that while the net was dragging it was very important to have the doors and wires the same and if one door is ahead of the other the net is not gonna open up properly, it's gonna flatten out. So what we used to do, we used to take the wires ashore because they stretched. And then they were not equal so we laid them out, we pulled them up the street. And every ten fathoms we would put in new marks so that they would be exactly the same.

JF So you had them laid out right on the street?

JJ On the dock, in the street, yeah.

JF Interesting, because they're very big right?

[52:35]

JJ They're long, yeah, what we use, well for scalloping, I can't remember exactly, it's depending on the depth. Three or four or five to one, depending and that varies too on the bottom. Sometimes you do better with shorter wire. It's a little bit of everything, the speed that you tow... Now with the computers it makes it a lot easier for a man in the pilot house if he's good with the computers he's almost got it made, you don't have to know. The weather reports are a lot different now than they were, you get a piece of paper and it's all written down and television... I mean you see a front coming of course. Before, we didn't have that. That storm we were in they were giving good weather. When the storm was over, then they gave bad weather reports. It took us, I think we were four days coming home, mainly we lay drifting, we drifted off the edge out in deep water which got to be a little nasty.

JF And what did you have for equipment then to know where you were exactly?

JJ We had the Lorans. It was the sounding machine we had.

JF But you weren't in sight of shore by any means.

JJ Oh no, we were way out. About 100-150 miles out of Nantucket, we ended up drifting.



[54:35]

JF I was just wondering as far as your engine business, do you also, do you sell parts, but do you also repair?

JI Yeah.

JF And how does that work, do you have to go to the boat?

JI I try not to go to the boat anymore. They understand, but I go down sometimes and try to get onboard and everything and I had two new knees put in a while ago so that gives me a little bit of an edge that I don't have to complain as much. No, I go down sometimes.

JF But to repair an engine, they can't bring the engine to you right?

JI No, no, usually no. But I go down for the light jobs and stuff but I work mainly in the shop. They bring a part up or a pump or smaller pieces that can be taken off and I repair them in the shop which is nice because it's close to the coffee pot.

JF Yeah you don't have to crawl as much.

JI I have a little chair that I can sit in.

JF What is on the boat in the engine is the space something that people can stand up in or is it too small?

JI Oh yeah, on the bigger boats. On the smaller boats like the lobster boats and stuff, it's a little more cramped. The smaller the boat or the bigger the engine it gets a little cramped. Usually if...It's not like the yachts where they more or less cram everything into one little space and put a cover on it and forget about it. Whereas the guys living he'll make it so he can work on it himself. He's gotta go down and work on it too.

JF And do the different engines have manuals?

JI Oh yeah.

JF Can you just look at an engine and just sort of know what it is?

JI No. Usually a diesel engine, if it gets air and if it gets fuel it usually runs unless you can hear a big banging or crashing or whatever. But now everything is electronic, and I'm not in on that, everything is computerized so I'm staying away from that. I don't have that expensive equipment to buy, to repair these engines. They seem to shut down when they feel like it. Everything is that way. They have engines now where they eliminate the camshaft. Now the camshaft is a very important part, it tells the valves when to open and close and they've done that with what they call solenoids and it's electronic and they can fine tune them while the engine is running with a computer. It's amazing.

JF It's more hands off or something right?

JI Well, you have to know computers. To be able to do this and you need schooling. Years ago you could go fishing and if you worked hard you could make ends meet. Today, it takes more than that, and the government tells you where to go. Ok you guys are gonna go fish over here, and you can go there for so many trips. Everyone goes to the same area for a few days and wipes it out but they still have to go to the same area for their three trips. I'm talking about Hudson Canyon; everybody had to make three trips down there. To begin with, it was fine, but now everybody and his uncle is down there in this little box and it's more or less wiped it out, and you still have to go there if you want to get something. It's not the way it used to be. A lot of people probably feel its better, I don't know.

JF Well I think it may be with everything the impression I've gotten from people, some things are better and some things aren't. The sort of question I'd like to wrap up with, well there's two: one is, is there anything I haven't asked that you wanted to talk about or in the other is, what would you want the visitors to the festival to understand about the industry, your business, or—

[59:30]

JF You know the thing that I've seen a lot is down on the docks people come down to visit, and if you have a friend that's in the fishing business or a friend that knows a friend, I had some people a few times, different people, and they'd come down with relatives from out in the Midwest to come to see the boat and I took them on board, at that time it was the old wooden boats, and the wives and stuff they went down on the, foc'sle, the ladder was very steep and they were down in the foc'sle with eight bunks, one on top of the other, and the galley and the pump and they couldn't believe it. And the lady came back afterwards to thank me so much because it was the best part of their vacation to get on board a fishing boat to see what it was like. When I went with Social Security to collect my social security I told her I was a fisherman and I owned a boat. Well, I wasn't eligible because I had made too much money. They had taken what the boat made for the year, I didn't make that money. So I says, 'well you can call the settlement house.' Well she didn't know what a settlement house was. 'Do you know where the piers are? You know Pier 3.' No, she didn't know where Pier 3 was. 'Do you know where [inaudible – name of a location] is?' 'Well, of course I know where [inaudible – name of a location] is.' Do you know where any other fishing... A lot of people on the other side of that Route 18, you know?

JF I got that there's a real sense of this side of highway and that side of the highway. It's amazing to me that the proximity, and yet they have so little—

JF Nothing, well you can't blame them, to get across that highway there—Before with New Bedford Ship Supply, we would tie up here, and you could run up to ship supply and get things all in a few minutes. Now with this Route 18, if you had a truck you couldn't get there from here. It kind of cut the waterfront off from the city. And I think this waterfront, whaling and everything else, was part of New Bedford.

JF Yeah, it's like they didn't even consider how it would sort of split the culture of it right in half.

JF Maybe we were undesirables down here but there's a lot of good people here in the fishing business too. About 99% of them I think are law abiding citizens, you know. But you go into a mill and there may be one or two bad ones in there too. Any occupation! Drugs was a big thing that came into New Bedford and it was too bad, a lot of young fellas got involved with that stuff, they had all the money, and the guys would come down and sell on the docks apparently and I could see it with some of the younger fellas, you know, and they were good people.

JF And I think the last person I spoke with today said that during one period where it was just hard to get crew, the catches weren't that good maybe, so they had to take whoever they could get.

JF Right, we were down to about 18 scallopers here in New Bedford. And the crews, we were 11 men at the time that was considered a safe working, to operate the

boat you needed 11 men. If you went less than that the insurance and everybody, the Coast Guard figured it was not a safe vessel. Now things have changed. I don't know why, but they go seven men now, they even go six and five men, and that's okay. Maybe they're better men today, I don't know.

JF Does any of that have to do with nets being—is it easier for fewer men to haul in nets?

JI Well, on most of the draggers now [inaudible] they have hydraulics to haul the net in; yes, that makes a difference. But scalloping, the boats are bigger and the drags are fifteen feet now, that's as much as you can have. But the piles are bigger. And the work, but of course—

JF So like what you said it's become in a way less civilized, where nobody gets to sleep so many hours.

JI Well that's one of the big things. If they're coming in with a big trip, they're working a lot of hours. I guess you tell somebody, back then we would 12 and 12, and six and six, that would be 12 hours. But on your watch off if you were the engineer you would have an hour or two if you needed repair work then you would be working round the clock to get the thing fixed. Or if the skipper weren't catching anything he would be up. So we worked more than 12 hours back then too. But now, I hear they're up in 18 hours working, or even more, so that makes young fellas old fast. And I don't think it's necessary to do that. But they want to make a big check or a big trip, whatever. There's a little bit of prestige in that. This guy made a big trip!

[66:17]

JF Well, is there anything else you wanted to say?

JI Nope, I think you covered more than I probably hoped that you don't have it all on tape.

JF We do! You said you didn't know what to talk about, but I figured we could find something.

JI I'm a blabbermouth!

JF Well thank you so much.

JI Nice to meet you.

[66:40]

[End of Audio/End of Interview]