

Name of person interviewed: Alan James [AJ]

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 29, 2012

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber [MHA]

Abstract

Alan James hilariously recounts his first day of fishing. Forty years later he is the cook and deckhand on the F/V Apollo.

Demographic information

Sex: Male

Age: 57

Ethnicity: White

Occupation: cook, deckhand F/V Apollo

Born: New London, Connecticut

Homeport: New Bedford, MA.

Key words

Role

Commercial fisherman (captain, crew)

General Social and Cultural Characteristics

Social networks (family, friends, neighbors, co-workers)

Social and Cultural Characteristics of Fishing

Life aboard a fishing vessel

Relationship with other fisherman

Socialization/ training to be a fisherman

Gear and Fishing Technology

Other gear and technology

Boats, ships, vessels

[00:00]

MHA: Sorry. So I'm going to ask you just a couple of questions in the beginning that are more or less formal, like what is your name?

AJ: My name is Allan James.

MHA: 'Kay, thank you. And can you tell me when and where you were born?

AJ: I was born in New London Connecticut, May 29th 1955. That makes me eligible for senior discounts. [Laughs]

MHA: And I'm gonna tell you right from the start here, I'm...because I'm doing the interview I'm not supposed to take an active role for the recording so there may be times when I just nod or something to...rather to...I'd like to have a full conversation but that's not what we're doing here. So anyway. So, where did you end up growing up? Did you...

AJ: Well I was born in New London and my family separated when I was about 2 or 3 years old. So I ended up growing up in foster homes, foster care around the Woonsocket Rhode Island area and moved back to Connecticut when I was about, I don't know, 14, 13, 14 and been on my own ever since.

MHA: And so, under those circumstances did you have an attachment to a particular neighborhood that you lived in, for example or were you just moving so much...?

AJ: No not really well actually I did kind of move a lot, I mean from home to home and then you know when I got older, there was just no roots I guess you could say. So I tended to move actually quite a bit within the same area. I mean as I got older and left Rhode Island and went to Connecticut it was generally in the same area of Connecticut but I moved quite a bit actually. I attended school there, you know, of course first job there et cetera et cetera you know, like anybody else.

MHA: Yeah. So how did you end up in the industry?

AJ: Well, it's a funny story. I have this problem. I sweat, a lot. If it's above 70 degrees, I look like I'm standing in the shower. I have sweat running off of me like the nozzle is right over my head so in an attempt to cool off I decided, well, if I went down by the waterfront, it'd be cooler. I'd get a job on the waterfront and that's what I did. Then I got a better idea while I was down there. If I got on a boat and got away from land it would be even cooler still. So that's what I did. I got on a day boat out of Westbrook, Connecticut and this particular boat, 45 footer, just a day boat. But I never done it before, didn't have a clue what I was getting in to, but that's what I did. I was gonna beat the heat. That was my great master plan. [Laughs]

MHA: How did that work out?

AJ: Oh boy. What a surprise. I did find a job, and then found out I had to leave at 3 in the mornin', well that was a big surprise.

[03:00]

But it was working so far, I mean after all you know, 3 'o' clock in the morning's pretty cool, sun's not out yet. You know, this is gonna work pretty good. So off we go. I had no idea what I was doin'. Didn't even know what a net looked like, anything. And of course back then we didn't have the technology we have today. So this fellow sets a net and tows by looking over his shoulder basically. If you line this buoy up over your right shoulder and you see that building over there on the beach, you put that over here and that's the way they made their tows in Long Island Sound. It was nothing scientific about it. And the other surprise came of course when you found out now you gotta go pull lobster pots as well. You've already got fish on the boat and now you've got lobster on the boat and now you're gonna go get clams too. And unbeknownst to me I never was a person of great strength, especially upper body strength. Pulling a potato sack full of clams around can get to be some heavy duty work, because by now the sun is up. And while it might be cooler out there it's not that cool. Needless to say, the sweat was coming [laughs]. And that was kind of enjoyable because it was new and I could see the skipper in that boat givin' me funny looks but he had been warned I've never done it before so that was on him. The big surprise came when we went in and I realized all of sudden that whatever was on that boat had to come off. Well that meant hard labor. That meant hard labor. We, we took all the fish off the boat and carried them up the dock to a cuttin' table that I apparently had failed to notice the day before. Had no clue how to cut a fish. Didn't even know what kind of fish it was, but here I was gonna cut fish and I didn't wanna tell the guy, hey I don't know how to cut fish. So I'm just gonna do this. I pick up a knife and proceed to massacre these fish. These fish were not edible. A cat would not want what was left of this first fish. Well, at any rate, that's when I found out that this fellow dealt directly with restaurants and he did this every day. Came in, took the 2 or 3 totes of fish that he had, filleted every one of 'em, skinned 'em and delivered 'em to the restaurant on a daily basis. So now it's like, what a plan this is. This isn't gonna...this is hard work you know. Not only that, I don't know what I'm doin'. So this guy in his infinite wisdom decided, well you can't cut fish that's apparent so you can skin 'em instead.

[06:00]

Well I couldn't skin a fish any better than I could cut a fish. Filletin' wasn't my thing. Skinnin' wasn't my thing. Well he was a nice guy about it. Didn't say much, gave me some funny looks you know, you could see the disgust on his face. He decided to kind of like skip over this and we'd load the clams, and take the lobsters out and we'd go deliver them and he'd come back and filet the fish himself. And I'm like, well alright this is working good I got out of that you know. I mean, a kid 16 years old getting' out of work is a big job. However by now it's 11 'o' clock in the morning. Well the shower's turning on now. It's hot, it's like 85 or 90 degrees and I'm soaking wet and more from sweat

than anything else. And this guy is really giving me some funny looks. So we take all the lobsters and we load them in the totes and haul 'em up to his truck you know. We did the same thing with the clams which by now are really heavy because you're not dragging them on the desk anymore. You're lifting them onto the dock, into the truck. And I'm saying, man, this job is really getting to be a little bit more than I expected you know. By now, I've sweat so much I'm wet down to my knees. My shirt, you could take it off and wring the sweat out. I hadn't considered all of this when I started. So off we go to deliver this stuff and it's like, boy this is good he's got air conditioning. And he stops at a little, I don't know what it was, 7/11 or you know one of the convenience stores. Comes out with 2 cans of soda. Gives me mine. And all I did with mine was hold it on my head, my arm pit, I rolled that thing all over my body 'til it wasn't drinkable. It was warm, it was hot. Tossed it out the window, never did drink it. And once we got all done with that and went back to the dock and jumped out of the truck. "You know, I don't understand why you're sweating. You ain't done a damn thing all day." He says, "you're really not worth a damn at all." I didn't know what to say, you know I mean. I kind of expected that but I was hoping I wouldn't have to deal with it. And I was tongue tied for the moment. It's like, jeez you know, it's still better than being on land. It is cooler out there and hey, I'm getting an income out of this I hope. I gotta come up with something to say, I gotta have a response right. But I couldn't think of one. So he looked at me, and he says you know just be here in the mornin'. Of course that meant 3 'o' clock the next morning. And as I'm walking to my car I'm still trying to think a way, some way to save face. I gotta say somethin' you know. I got in my car and started to leave, and finally it came to me. I rolled the window down and said, "Hey, at least I didn't get seasick." He said, "well you ain't worth a damn either." He says, "you want the job be here, if you don't want the job just don't show up." And that was my first day of fishin' that I had ever done in my life. And from there it just escalated into where I am now, 40 years later, you know. [Laughs]

[09:00]

MHA: That's amazing. That's a great story.

AJ: Well you know, sometimes the truth is funnier than a story you could make up. That guy had nothing but disgust on his face that day, I'll never forget it. I was really amazed that he didn't fire me. Had I been him, yeah I would have fired me. [Laughs]

MHA: Well he must have seen a spark in you that, of hope.

AJ: I don't know what he saw other than sweat. [Laughs] Oh my God, I was soaking wet.

MHA: So how long did you end up staying with him?

AJ: I fished with him for that summer. And from there, I decided to move further out in the water trying to stay cool. My whole life fishin', started out...well the first 10 years was nothing other than trying to get further into the ocean where it's cooler. That was my

whole premise. Unfortunately the other side of that that I hadn't thought about it was winter comes in the ocean too. Hadn't thought about that part. That didn't even happen for a couple of years before I was, my first winter in the ocean and found out that eh, so you beat the heat a little bit but boy you're gonna pay for it. [Laughs]

MHA: So were you only going summers because you were still in school?

AJ: No actually at that time I had quit school and I had, I had been working in a service station. When I was going to school, up until oh I guess from the time I was 13 'til I'd taken that job fishing, the service station I worked in had closed down. But I was going to school up 'til then and then I'd get out of school, I think it was 3 'o' clock or somethin' and work 'till 11 at night at that service station, because you know well things have changed now but back then you had to support yourself. Regardless of what age you were. You had to support yourself, you know. And not havin' family or any of that, you know, it was...you did whatever was justifiable. [Laughs]

MHA: So where did you live when you were on your own, when you were supporting yourself?

AJ: Well I, I had that job in the garage which gave me access to free cars. People didn't want the cars, I'll take your car. And you know, they were cars...they weren't the souped up models everybody else was driving, there was no cameros or any of that. It was more like a flathead 6 Rambler classic station wagon you know but for \$12.55, I made it run again. I had several cars like that you know. And there were times where I actually lived in the car. I spent most of my time working of course, so sleep was not a big thing and being young you didn't really care. You know what I mean. But at 15 I rented my first apartment and paid my rent, a year in advance.

[12:00]

So I had no choice but to work hard. I mean, I spent a lot of times stayin' over friends' houses because hey it was warm, it was a bed and their mothers used to force you to eat. [Laughs] It wasn't bad actually. You tell people these stories and they say, oh that must've been tough. Actually it wasn't. As you look back now, it was kind of enjoyable. Wish I could do that again. You know.

MHA: So have you always worked on ground fish boats?

AJ: Well I started...pretty much, I started out when I moved to bigger boats, fluking because of course on that day boat that was pretty much what we did. And so I ended up movin' to North Carolina and getting and a job on a fluke boat down there. And all we did was follow fluke from the Carolinas up into the sound up here and then back again. So and you know like any fisherman, if you have a job like that where you travel and follow one species of fish, where you live isn't important because you're never there. You know, so, it really wasn't an issue it was, you know, when I got married and stuff it became an issue, mostly for her. You know [laughs]. But to me, it was always a way of

life was, you know, the follow the fish. By that time, I'd been doin' it you know 4 or 5 years. So it kind of becomes habit and it doesn't bother you so much. You know.

MHA: How did you meet your wife?

AJ: Well that's a funny thing. I met her actually when I was working in the garage when I was younger and I've had a few wives now. But that was the first one. And that's where I met her, was, she happened to come in and she was looking for rest rooms and windows to wash. And that was her thing, she was going to start a business out of that, which she did actually. And that's how I met her. So. That's another story. [Laughs] You know relationships are always another story.

MHA: True, true. Has anybody that you've been married to, I don't know how many wives you've had but...

AJ: Oh my God I've had 4.

MHA: Seriously, huh.

AJ: Oh yea, I've had...let's see. She was from Connecticut. She still lives in North Carolina. I did marry another girl in Connecticut, as a matter of fact I have an ex-wife right here in New Bedford as well; they're all over the place. You know. [Laughs]

MHA: Well I was gonna ask whether any of them were involved in the fishing industry before they met you?

AJ: Actually no, none of them were. Well I think it was my second wife who used work down here when Captain J's was on Pier 3 down there in the basement I'd guess you'd call it. But that's about as close as any of them to the fishing industry you know. I mean, as far as being in the industry, no not at all. As a matter of fact, most of 'em hated it.

[15:00]

It's a, it's a hard lifestyle for a woman. You're gone, and then you come back and of course age makes a difference. When you're young, you're the guy. You're the man, you're in control. So now you're coming home and there giving up their independence and their control because people had the attitude a few years back that that's the way it should be. Well we've all learned better since then but we've grown up, matured and it is, it's hard on relationships. It's, it's hard for people who've been together for 50 years to still stay together when your husband's not home. You know what I mean? And the coming and the going. You have to respect anybody that can deal with that. Whether it's the kids, the wife, it's just a hard, hard lifestyle. And you add that to the fluctuation in pay and you know, it's just another whole ball of wax, that's it own subject.

MHA: Do you have children?

AJ: Yeah, I have 2 by my first wife. I have one that isn't mine but I consider to me mine with my second wife. My 3rd wife has 2 of her own that weren't mine and the last wife, wife #4...we number 'em now, we don't name 'em we number them there's so many of them. [Laughs] She has a child that's hers but I consider it to be mine as well. I mean, if you've been there when these children are small or newborn even and been there for 5, 6, 10 years...they're your kids. People when you tell people that this is my daughter. They say, "Well, that's not your real daughter." Yeah, it's your real daughter. Blood doesn't make a lot of different. What makes families is being there. You know what I mean. The continuity of it. The whole support system of the family unit. It's an important thing in people's life and to somebody like me it's more so because I didn't have a family growin' up which kind of magnifies that effect of holding a family together. You see what I mean? I think it's somethin' everybody wants and everybody strives to get. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out for people. You know, and with the fishing industry here it hasn't helped, but hey you do what you gotta do. Hey that's life.

MHA: So are you still close with all the different kids?

AJ: Actually not so much, they've grown up. Most of 'em have grown up, they have lives of their own. So you know, so you don't see 'em too much. I have a, my last wife has a 5 year old who, she would rather I don't see 'cause I'm too inconsistent.

[18:00]

You know, being where I fish so much. She just decided that that lifestyle was not for her and so you know, 'course it transfers to the children as well you know. She's looking for something you know a little more stable, something that's there all the time. You know in a way, you can't really blame her. I mean I would like my like my life to be that way too but unfortunately it's not, it never has been and it's never gonna be and you know sometimes you just gotta man up and admit to yourself and the world that you're not gonna have the perfect life everybody says you should have. You know, I mean it's like the white picket fence and the house; not everybody gets that dream. I didn't get mine, but you know what I'm not dead yet. It's never too late. [Laughs]

MHA: And do any of the, do any of the kids have an interest in the fishing industry?

AJ: I suppressed that on 'em. I don't want any of my children fishin'.

MHA: And why is that?

AJ: And not, not that it's a bad thing but I look at the lifestyle and then look at you know, people who work on land that are home every day and the way the industry's goin' in the last 10 years, my pay has been reduced by 70%. I don't think my children need to live that way. As fuel prices go up, it comes right out of our pockets. And you take the quota system, and you know, I fished 40 years. Where's my quota? What do I own? I don't have any fish I can sell. I don't have anything to fall back on. It's just, I think at some point you're going to see boats hiring people by the hour. I think that's what

coming. The money is just disappearing for the working man. The corporations are making money, the government's making money. Everybody is makin' money but the guy on deck is not makin' the money he did and it's only gonna keep going down. We used to share, just for example, I'll throw figure out that people can relate to. If you have \$10,000 in fish, you got a \$1,000 paycheck before taxes. Nowadays, just to give you an example, you stock \$35,000 and you're subject to walk home with \$395 for 8 days at sea, a day on the dock before you leave, a day on the dock after. That's under \$400 for 10 days of work. Because all the work you do on the dock of course is your time. That's part of the catch, that's how you're paid. And you know, not to really, I hate to be derogatory about the industry but it seems like everything is geared everywhere. The money is spread out, and if you go check it out. You look at the guy who takes the fish off the boat.

[21:00]

If he does 4 boats a day, which also isn't happening very often anymore, he's averaging probably \$60 a boat. Okay. So that's \$220 [sic] a day before taxes. He's already made more in one day than you've made in 10. And he's been home all night. And you know there's the good side to it also but it's hard to get away from that discrepancy in pay and the fact that the money just keeps going everywhere else and at a higher rate than the guy who does the actual work and takes the actual risk. You know, I mean I can side with the boat owner. I mean if you put yourself in his shoes, he's got expenses too. He's put out a lot of money to own that boat. He's got a lot of responsibility towards this crew. But the crew's still gotta make money. Now I'm not saying that every trip is like that, 'cause it's most certainly not. I wouldn't want anybody getting' the idea that it is. I mean I've had trips, well the last year for example where we were out for 8 days and had a \$5100 paycheck. But do the math. \$5100 on a \$116,000 stock is not 10%. You know. The money goes down. You know it's like the reality shows, oh they make \$32,000 crabbin' in Alaska. Wait a minute. The guy had to take a plane there, he had to take a plane home. Okay. He's gotta pay his taxes, there goes a third of that money. So, you know, forget the \$32,000 paycheck. That's not real. You may get that check, but when you're done you don't have that money. And people don't stop to realize that this big money everybody's talkin' about doesn't exist. That's a fallacy. You know and so after fishin' for 40 years, I've had friends that say, hey can you get me on a boat. No. No, I wouldn't do...I would not get my enemies on a boat. Because I don't think the future holds much promise for a working man on a boat. And that's a sad thing to say because you know what, the fishing industry provides a lot of jobs, a lot of revenue for a lot of people. A lot of tax revenue and the guy who does the work is always at the bottom of the ladder. You, if you pay attention to what's goin' on in the fishing industry; well we're gonna help the fisherman. But the guy on deck never gets the help. The guy who owns the boat gets the help. All the people associated get the help. The guy on the boat does not get the help. Although they've had things like retraining programs. It's a good idea except who's gonna pay you while you're going to school. Nobody addressed that. You cannot afford to change jobs and not work in the meantime. It's just not possible.

[24:00]

Now, I don't know about other people but I think I speak for quite a few. A lot of us stay there because, well number 1 it's what we do. It's what we love. We don't really want to leave the industry. Second of all, we can't afford to leave. [Laughs] And you know it's, it can be very confusing not only for us as fishermen but for the people outside the industry who really don't have a clue of what you go through. You know as I see these reality shows about lobsterin', fishin', you know, crabbin'...while I don't watch a lot of 'em, I think it's a good thing because I think it's...it's very educational that people see what fishermen go through. I mean we've watched reality shows about everything else. I mean, you know, we know what people who raise cows do. It's doesn't hurt that people know where their seafood comes from I mean, you just don't go in the supermarket and get it. Somebody has to go catch it. You know [laughs]. Overall though I mean, it is a good life. I wouldn't...I sound like I'm complaining a lot and I don't mean to. I mean, there are absolutely great parts to it. There's things in the ocean that other people will never see in a lifetime.

MHA: Tell me a little bit about that.

AJ: Well, here's a very simple thing people wouldn't even consider. As you're steaming out to the fishing grounds and the sun comes up and you start to notice that the sun is kind of orange and red. And you know what, there is orangey red diamonds as far as you can see. It looks like the whole ocean is covered with diamonds. And you just want to reach out, scoop 'em all up and put them in a bag and take 'em home and say hey look what I saw, look what I got. It's something that you really can't describe, you have to be there. You can talk to you're blue in the face. They're never gonna see the real picture or the beauty of it until they're actually there to see it. It's like seeing a sounding whale. How many people have actually seen a whale do that? How many people have seen whales 10 feet away, you know? I mean, there are things in the ocean that people will never see. There's strange things. I was once fishin' and at the wheel in the middle of the night, and I see a little orange ball. And the orange ball is getting' bigger and it's turning orange and yellow and it's getting bigger and bigger. And whatever this is, it's headed right at us. By now, it's probably the size of...I would say like a gong. Like you would see in one of those movies, the big gong they hit you know. It's about that big. So it's apparently coming right us and we're right dead in the way. This happened so fast, that the only thing I could do was downwheel the boat and duck behind the wheel. There was no time to get anybody up. It's like, get away from this thing.

[27:00]

And as I peaked over the top of the counter, it just went straight up. It just went straight up in the air and it's like, wow, I just saw a UFO. And there's no doubt in my mind. I've read about it, you read it everywhere. I saw a UFO. I'm getting' everybody up on the boat...you're not gonna believe what just happened. Of course, they thought I was crazy but I'm tellin' you I was convinced 100% I had seen a UFO. Well 3 weeks later I found out it really wasn't a UFO, what it was is we could see them test firing a Trident missile out of a submarine. So I'm pretty sure the stories about the light that goes straight up is

something equivalent to that. But up until that point, I was convinced I'd seen a UFO. I had no doubt in my mind. So there you go. There's your oddities of the sea you know. It's a sea monster story from space. [Laughs]

MHA: Have you ever dragged up anything that was...

AJ: Oh my God we've dragged up mines, small munitions, all kinds of weird...we've dragged up the keel of old boats, old blocks that they've used on the brigantines and things like that. Old bottles, I'd like to say old coins but you know that never happened. [laughs]. I mean, we've actually caught whale bones. The one that sticks in my mind in particular was about 60 feet long, a rib bone. And you know people say wow that's something! You go stand next to it 'cause when those things come out of the ocean they stink. They stink to high heaven. But you don't want it on your boat. And then you added problem of not only did you tear up your net to get it out of the net, but now you gotta get it off the boat. And years ago people used to bring 'em home, 'course that's now been outlawed, why I don't understand but you know. Myself, I don't have any at home, never did because they stink. [Laughs]

MHA: Oh goodness. So, you're a deck hand, right?

AJ: Well, yeah. At this point I'm working with Shawn on the Apollo and I'm the cook and a deck hand and just the all around guy. But my title is cook. I gave up the rest of the hat, it used to be the mate, the engineer, and the cook, and the deck hand. But you know I'm getting' at an age now where it's like, some of these younger guys need to be pick some of this you know. Unfortunately with age, you do slow down and it starts to tell on you a lot quicker you know what I mean. I'll probably be doin' it 'til the day I die but I'm wondering just how much I'm going to be doin'. [Laughs]

[30:00]

MHA: [Laughs] You just cook real well so they will still want ya.

AJ: [Laughs]

MHA: So how did you learn to cook?

AJ: Well that's self sufficiency. You know, after a while of eatin' in restaurants when you're growing up, you get tired of that and you try your hand at cookin'. The more you cook and screw up the better you get. [Laughs]

MHA: So how many crew members are there usually when you go out?

AJ: Well most of the boats I work on are 4 handed. Up until about 5 years ago, we used to go 3 handed but now up here ground fishing, cod fish, all that you gotta have at least 4. And that's been cut back I mean years ago they were taking 5, 6, 7 guys you know it's just again, how the industry has changed over the years you know. You try to keep a

minimum amount of crew because of course that increases your paycheck you know and we don't want to talk about that again [Laughs].

[Start Tape 002 – 00:00]

MHA: So the owners of the boats that you work on, is it 1 owner that owns several boats that you...?

AJ: Yeah it's Carlos Rafael I believe he's up to about 42 boats now.

MHA: Ah yes.

AJ: He's a, he's a major player. Good guy, he's a good guy to work for. He does look out for his gang. I mean I, I think it was last year or maybe the year before I got hurt on the boat. Actually I got a hernia and when we got to the dock he did all he could do to get me taken care of and financially as well. He's a real stand up guy as far as that goes you know what I mean. It's, it's nice to see in the industry. I've worked on boats where, you get hurt, I don't know what to tell you man. We're gonna pay you \$5 a day. Well you and I both know you can't even eat your sandwich for \$5 a day so you know, there's a lot to be said for the bigger companies. Especially the people that run 'em. And I think Carlos does one hell of a good job at taking care of the people that are on his boats. I mean as far as injuries and stuff he's right there. You know.

MHA: Good. So where do the most of the other crew members on the boats come from? Are they all New Bedford people? Or?

AJ: Well no you got my nephew Shawn of course lives in New Bedford. Well actually I guess its Fairhaven now. We have one fellow that comes from Newport, Rhode Island. Let's see. Francisco lives in Dartmouth I think and I of course live in Connecticut. And commute back and forth all the time. So we're a pretty varied group. You know Shawn was originally brought up in Manns Harbor, North Carolina which is like, Manns Harbor where's that? You won't find it on a map. [Laughs] And yeah you know, I think a lot of people in the industry who live in other places, they either eventually move here, some never do. I lived in New Bedford for a couple of years but you know, I like Connecticut so you know I deal with that.

MHA: So it's, it's your nephew, Shawn is your nephew is that what you said?

AJ: Yea, Shawn is my nephew; he's the skipper of the boat.

MHA: And he is a sister or brother's child?

AJ: He's my brother's child. As a matter of fact, his father was running boats down in the Carolinas and Shawn broke in with us all those years ago. So yeah it's like a family thing. You hear that in this industry a lot, I, I was the first one in it and then my older brother John he followed me in it. And then I had a brother Bob who followed me into it

and then of course the kids come in. So yeah it's, if you remember I told you I didn't know my family very well but it turns out that my, I believe it was my great grandfather was a fisherman.

[03:00]

And my father drove fish trucks which of course I didn't know him very well but it seems like we go back 3 or 4 generations in the industry and didn't know it. You know I was under the assumption for a long time that I was the first one there, well, they keep claimin' that I am because they still all cuss me out now and then for even gettin' them involved you know. Whenever they're having a bad day it's my fault. I should have never introduced them to this industry [laughs].

MHA: So when you were in foster families, did you, you obviously kept contact or where you all together? Your brothers?

AJ: No actually, we were all...I had my brother Bob and I were together, pretty much all our lives. But there were 9 kids and all separated and I pretty much didn't know any of the rest of 'em until I was a teenager. I think somewhere between 13 and 16 when I discovered where they were, that sort of thing. So you can see what I was talkin' about earlier about the family aspect of things being a little more important to me than the average person but I find that in that situation it's more like, forced friendship. You know the family background is not there. You didn't have the time that other families had together, growin' up together that sort of thing so. It kind of starts out as he's my brother so I guess I gotta be his friend. And that's pretty much where you start from. And of course you build a relationship after that but it's a little different than what's considered normal. You know. [Laughs]

MHA: Yeah. So what, if you were starting out today, would you go into fishing?

AJ: Probably not. Probably not, I would probably go to law school like I wanted to do. But you know being the kind of kid, I had the, I've had a lot of opportunities in my life, unfortunately for me I can be pretty stupid and hard headed sometimes and one of the things that I did as a teenager was, don't help me I'll do it myself. You know the attitude. The chip on the shoulder, that's what it was. It was you know, hey, I've come this far by myself I don't need your help. And I had...my first wife's father was gonna put me through law school, put money in my pocket, I wouldn't have had to work and all I had to do was pass. And my answer to that was, I'm not gonna be your lawyer for the rest of my life. Forget that I'll do it on my own. Now, is there any other definition of stupid? [Laughs] How stupid can a person be? But you know, see you have to get older to even admit that you've done somethin' that stupid. You know. [Laughs]

[06:00]

Oh yeah, if I had the opportunity again I don't think I'd miss it this time. You know, I, I can be an argumentative person and I don't even have to believe in what I'm arguing.

Which side do you want me to argue, I can do this. You know, I just, I like the game.
[Laughs]

MHA: So what characteristics would you say make a good fisherman?

AJ: Well I think number 1 in my book is loyalty. You know you have to be, not only loyal to the boat, but to the skipper you're working with, or if you are the skipper, to your crew. And I mean it works both ways. That would be number 1. The other thing that's always irked me is, be on time! You know, 8 'o' clock is 8 'o'clock. It's not 10 after, or 8:30 or 8 'o'clock I gotta change my clothes. 8 'o' clock is 8 'o'clock. You know, I gotta quirk about that being mostly because I commute so much I'm always the first one there. It's like, jeez these guys only live 6 blocks away why are they always late.

[Laughs] The other thing is stamina of course I mean. You know fishin' doesn't look very hard but it's a very strenuous job, there's a lot of physical labor, there's a lot of lifting, there's a lot of weight involved. Course those things have involved in the fishing industry like, like you would expect. I mean in the old days you pulled those nets around by hand. Now you know you have machinery to help, things have gotten a lot better. But it's still a strenuous job. There's a, there's a lot of things that people don't consider in the fishing industry such as you know, where's your head gonna be 3 days from now when you're been gone from your wife and kids. Have you ever done this? Can you deal with this? You know, the mental strain sometimes can get to people. Of course, there's the other side too. It's the greatest way to run away from home. Think about that. The baby's cryin', the wife grouchin'. Think I'll go fishing. [Laughs] But it's true. I mean there are times where, boy I'm glad we're goin'. [Laughs]

MHA: Did you ever want to own your own boat?

AJ: At one time years ago I did and that was when the federal regulations just started coming out and I was pretty convinced the industry was done. And so having, I had another fella talking about going partners in a boat. I backed right out of it, nah, this industry's dead. We're gonna be lucky if it's still here in 3 or 4 years. Once again I was wrong. I mean as much as people want to complain about the conversation effort... When it was first instilled, nobody was convinced it was gonna work.

[09:00]

But it did. It did work and it did save the industry, you know. The problem in the fishin' industry as far as regulating itself is, everybody wants to be top dog. You know what I mean. I had 1000 more pounds than Joe. Yeah but you only got half the money. Who cares but I had more fish than he did. You know, and people just get that attitude of you know it's a competitive business and everybody wants to be the top dog and when I was growin' up it was discussed in my age group at that time, how stupid it was, how wrong it was. But yet here we are, 30, 40 years later nothing's changed. We're still that way. Promised ourselves we wouldn't be, but here we are. You know, it's a competitive business and let's face it, like any business you have to be competitive to even survive. You know.

MHA: So we talked already a little bit about some of the unusual things that you've picked up. Have you had any close calls due to weather or anything like that?

AJ: No, well, you get those on occasion. I guess a lot depends on what you consider to be a close call. I consider close calls not only dealing with water but gear as well. I've, I've been swept off the boat through a scupper and thrown back on the boat one second later thank God. I've seen people go off the boat and we've got 'em back. I've been hit by cans which are the floats on the nets. I mean, things happen. That thing comes over the reel and you just happen to be in the wrong place or not payin' attention is usually the case and bonk right on the head. It'll put you right on your knees, you're lucky if it doesn't crack your skull open. You know. All sorts of things, I mean simple things. Like you're cuttin' fish and the next thing you know you've cut your finger down to the bone. I mean, its normal everyday stuff that happens but when it's on a boat, it happens a lot quicker, it's always unexpected. I mean even after all the time I've been on boats you know, it could happen to me. They think, a lot of people think that well you got experience that'll never happen to you. It can happen in an instant I don't care how long you've been fishin'. It's a, it's a very dangerous job. And you know, if you were to go down to the docks and walk on the boats, well this isn't so bad. But you haven't stopped to realize there's nothing movin' over here. You know, you're in calm water, there's not gear moving, there's nothing goin' on. You get in the ocean and you take the ground you're standing on and start tossing it back and forth while you're trying to stand there with a knife in your hand.

[12:00]

Or somebody's trying to move equipment across the deck. Anything can happen at any time and it only takes a moment I mean. I replaced a guy not long ago who happened to hit a reel at the wrong time and it was chained off. Well the chain broke and he's got 100 stitches in his face. He laid in the hospital with his head swollen, they could not even do any surgery until they got the swellin' down. Now he has scars up both sides of his face. He has no teeth because he took all those out, he broke his jaw in 4 places. And was it his fault. I guess you could say so, he hit the wrong knob at the wrong time but you know what? He didn't do it on purpose and now that makes it an accident. It took exactly about 2 milliseconds for him to get hurt that badly.

MHA: Wow, that's...

AJ: Things happen quickly you know and you can't watch everything all the time.

MHA: Do you take, or has have you and your crew taken safety training?

AJ: Oh yeah, oh yeah. All of us do. A lot of guys don't but you know what? It's your life. And nobody, nobody's gonna save you 'til they can save themselves. You're next so you better take care of yourself. And who knows, you may be able to help them. I mean, let's face it you're in it together. You have to watch out for each other. We spend

more time with each other than we spend at home or with our families. So I guess you can say we are brothers whether we wanna be or not. And we take care of each because that closeness is ingrained in you. And you save him and it might be his turn to save you next. I mean, nobody wants to see anybody get hurt, nobody wants to see anybody lose their life. And so training is a very important aspect of this business. It was, years ago it was never offered. You learned it on your own, or you didn't, most people didn't even bother with it. But now there's training available and it's free. In most cases. And anybody who doesn't take advantage of that, is risking their life.

MHA: So, do you go to the training at S MAST in...

AJ: Yeah, I've been, I've been to those training classes several times now. Because you know, you think you know it but it comes and goes.

MHA: Always something...

AJ: You know it's gets old, and you start to forget. Refresher courses never hurt. I mean it's like draggin' out a survival suit once in a while. And just seeing how fast you can put it on. Not because you need it, not because it's necessary, but should it be necessary it'd be a lot better if you could do this in like under a minute rather than taking 10 minutes. You know, it's your life. [Laughs]

[15:00]

MHA: Right. So, we're gonna have to wrap up. But is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you think you would like people to know about the fishing industry or about your life? Or? Anything?

AJ: Well no I think, the one thing I could probably say for people who don't fish but live with a fisherman is that you need to remember while we're out to sea. We're trying to earn a living to support our family. And we're thinkin' about our families. That's pretty much it. And I know that people at home think about us when we're out there but we have a lot more time on our hands. We don't deal with the kids you know, and so of course we're workin' but we still have a lot more time to think so when we show up and we're not quite in that frame of mind you think we should be in, probably thought about this one thing way too much, we over thought it. Give us 10 minutes we'll come back to normal. [Laughs]

MHA: That's good advice. It's been great talking to you. I, I...I wish we could talk longer even.

AJ: Well thanks for having me. Oh yea, jeez I could sit here and talk all day but [laughs].

MHA: You have a great way of presenting your stories and, very nice, it's never nice to talk to you.

AJ: Well thank you very much for having me. I appreciate it.

MHA: Thank you.

[END INTERVIEW]