

Name of person interviewed: Marco Randazzo [MR]

Facts about this person:

Age: 64

Sex: Male

Occupation: Retired fisherman; Rope Sculptor

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

Home port: Gloucester

Residence (Town where lives): Gloucester, MA

Ethnic Background: Sicilian

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber

Transcriber: Laura Orleans

Place interview took place: Working Waterfront Festival (outdoors at Ethnic Arts Area)

Date and time of interview: September 26, 2010

Abstract:

A retired Gloucester fisherman, Marco Randazzo immigrated to Gloucester from Sicily in 1969. From a family of fisherman he continued fishing and was usually hired as the “twine man” in charge of maintaining and repairing the nets. In his retirement, he has taken his skill with knots and rope and creates rope sculptures of figures and religious icons, many related to his life on the sea. He talks about his craft, his work as a fishermen and the future of the industry.

Index

Key Words: Gloucester; Palermo; Italy; Immigration; Regulations

000-3:00 Background: b. 1945 near Palermo, Italy. Immigrated to Gloucester in 1969 following an earthquake which worsened an already difficult economy.

3:00-6:00 from a fishing family; Gloucester’s Sicilian community

6:00-9:00 Discusses impact of regulations on the future of the industry. Worked as crew on Gloucester draggers—hired as the twine man to repair the nets.

9:00-12:00 how he got started making rope sculptures

12:00-15:00 changes in the industry, comparison of fishing in Sicily vs. U.S. and impact of regulations on industry today

15:00-18:00 town’s view of fishing community in Gloucester

18:00-21:00 scaled back festas b/c fewer boats

21:00-24:00 foreign factory ships; impact of regulations; buy out

24:00-27:00 memories of winter fishing; climate change

27:00-30:00 working on nets; engineer in merchant marine

30:00-33:00 importance of being on/near water; working on nets

33:00-End value of being independent

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MR Ready? Ok Marco Randazzo from Gloucester, originally from Italy, someplace Palermo area, but I live in Gloucester from, long time.

MHA Well when did you come over?

MR Was uh, 1969 I spent a little time and then I go back and did back and forth. It's forty years ago the first time I come here.

MHA Uh huh. And what made you come?

MR I don't know it's uh, from a young age it just we're lookin' for something better no matter what and then if we find or don't is another story, but...this is all age, all people young what their thinking, what's the plan and try to find. Sometime we find it, sometime we don't. Like everybody else. And anyway it was a good time for a fisherman, make some money and was much better fisherman in there and that's what's convinced me to move here and I'm still here. I had plans to go back in the old country, but...I'm still here.

MHA So when, well what year were you born?

MR Say it again.

MHA When were you born?

MR Oh in '45, February 15 I think, long time ago '45.

MHA Not so long [laughs]. We're not that much different.

MR But I'm still here! Oh I know I'm old, but I'm still here!

MHA That's the important thing. Alright so, now you were fishing in, were you from Sicily or

MR Yes Sicily, Palermo area.

MHA Uh huh.

MR Like a 6-7 miles far from Palermo.

MHA I hear it's beautiful there.

MR Bueno, today you're right it's beautiful, but at the time I come here 40 years ago, we were right after war and still no economy and uh especially on the 69 we had a bad earthquake in there and I started thinking it was better disappear and that's why I'm here.

3:00

I live in here; I live in there. I don't have a really special reason why it's just some little money making more money, get out from there at a young age it's all together.

MHA Did you know people in Gloucester?

Interview with Marco Randazzo conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber

3

Conducted on September 26, 2010; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

MR Today or?

MHA When you first came. Did you come straight to Gloucester?

MR No. I just, I had a some don't even related, someone come like 40 years before me and still they remember my family and so when I come in Gloucester, just like goin' there for a little while until I find some job or something like that.

MHA So, um, but back in Sicily you were fishing already, you had a, did you come from a fishing family?

MR Yeah all my life. My father and my grandfather and everybody I remember we were, they were the fishermen. I tried changing job, my mother was sending me in some school because my son don't have to go fishin' but I realize by myself I had to go fishin' it was my life and uh or maybe it was too late for do something else. What am I gonna say? But this is the truth. Sometime the fishin' come inside our blood and you gotta a good day job you like or don't that is your life and that's what I did.

MHA And how about um I assume you got married here?

MR No I met my wife over here and we spend three, four years and later we get married. And I got two boys and a daughter [laughs]. But I gotta say I'm happy I have [laughs]

MHA Is this your son?

MR Yeah. We lost another one is in the game, the Patriots game is today

[Laughs]

MR And then the last one is my daughter she yell at me like [laughs] but that's ok.

6:00

MHA So did any of your children wanna go fishing?

MR No. I tell them to change job because with the new regulation, see the new regulation they start a long time ago and I realized then I don't think there is any future for the new generation so I tell them go into school, do whatever you wanna do, but forget about the fishing. It's not, is no more the time like when I come in this country. Today is something else.

MHA So were you always, uh, I guess I should ask what kind of boat did you fish on most of the time?

MR Well what did they call a big boat, big for 7-8 people, like 90 feet 91 feet, 39 feet, sometime a little more, you know. I never own a boat so just I had to go find a job no matter what the bigger or smaller. I preferred not the kind of a small boat, fishing every day, come back home, but one I can stay out 7-8 days. And anyway it was a better way to make some, a little more money.

MHA That was trawling?

Interview with Marco Randazzo conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber

4

Conducted on September 26, 2010; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

MR Yeah trawling.

MHA And groundfish?

MR Right, groundfish. All kind of groundfish.

MHA So did you have a particular job, on the boat?

MR Well I usually because I'm born a fisherman I be twine man all my life. The ones that take care of the net when they damage, stuff like that. Build a new net or...

MHA That's why you do what you do now. How did you get started with your artwork?

MR Oh started because when I was a little kid I would make a kind of a sailor boat like the Constitution you know and in some boats there is a some, someone drive the boat like that one. And I had to go buy something, but with a little imagination I started to do the fisherman,

9:00

the seaman drive the boat on the wheel and I started thinkin' see when I come in Gloucester and I find the statue in there I said, look I did so many time, because I put in the sailboat another one, this is small, but I make some time the big one with the word like everybody do it. So in some boat there is the seaman and a bunch of seamen going to put the lead on so I really started little kids with the twine because I had to save some money because I was a time in school when I had to spend the money...so I make some knots or I use knots for the head and some for do the arm and all the rest. In little time I realize I can do everything almost everything. Of course sometime not all donuts come with the hole, something come better, something don't.

MHA Right

MR And I can never. I would try again, some other time. I enjoy this, all about it.

MHA When did you get started doing that, when you were a little kid? How it started?

MR Yeah. Really, I don't remember, probably, I don't remember when I started swimming, I don't remember when I started this because, probably because I was too young. So I cannot tell you when I started.

Son: He started off first he used to make the boats out of wood, next thing what he would do stuff like a ship in a bottle. I don't know if you've ever seen a ship in a bottle, stuff like that. And then he started this rope thing later.

MHA I see.

MR He's always made things. He always made boats, stuff like that. But rope came later on in life when he started, when he was fishin' he started certain things until he got what he wanted, you know and he would feel inspired, when it was like 9/11 like that. I imagine he felt inspired by that event. Whatever came to his head.

MHA Right. Must have been fun sometimes doin' it. Do any of you, do any of the family...

Interview with Marco Randazzo conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber

5

Conducted on September 26, 2010; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

Son: No. Cause he's got that fisherman

MR They don't even know how tie their shoes

[laughs]

MR And now so what am I gonna do. This is the story of my life.

12:00

MHA So how have you see fishing change from Sicily to Gloucester to now?

MR From Sicily is, we really working very close on the coast and we don't catch that much because the more was better price, but not that much. Here when I reach here it was a lot of fish, no price, but quantity make the difference. And today ?? I know the new regulation right they don't let them fish they don't let 'em catch what they can. It's not just they give you just forty days, but even when you go fishin' you can catch just so much of that fish, so much of the other fish and you gotta go to catch that, not here very close, but you gotta go so far you gonna spend more time to steam and reachin' there for the time that they give you like 40 days, I mean I am talkin' about 40 days all here. So I mean forget it. But that's why I said to my kids find something else and forget about fishin' the time has changed.

MHA When did you retire?

MR Oh about 6-7 years ago because I get hurt and breaking bones.

Son: He got hit by a wave.

MHA Would you like some more water

MR Yes please

MHA So do you have any stories that were about what you, about close calls fishing? Or, I mean that sounds like a close call.

MR I don't get the...

Son: translates

MR No I say no, there is so many stories to can say about, you know. I fishin' all my life and I see so many bad ways and I see so many guys, I saw many other people and I know it's part of the job but no matter what, no matter what else, it's a part of the job. You know fishing's mean, you can get hurt.

15:00

MHA I don't mean to bring up bad times.

Son: See he's lost friends and stuff.

MHA It's a hard, hard way of life. I know that and I don't want to bring that up.

Interview with Marco Randazzo conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber

6

Conducted on September 26, 2010; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

Son: No it's ok

MHA I'm just trying to get a feel for what fishing

MR I know what happens too.

MHA That's ok we can talk about something else, we don't have to talk about that.

Son: Talk about something else.

MHA Yeah. Maybe, did, when you were living in Gloucester, did you feel like the town appreciated the fishing industry, you know?

MR Yeah it was the most of the job in town at that time between boat and fisheries and a lot of people work in this kind of a business, it's not like to day when it's the fishermen remain, just a few. The boats are tied all the time and the fishermen that don't find the fish anymore in the supermarket what they got working, so

Son: So basically at the time when he first came fishing

MR It was a lot of moving it was. Everybody want to go down, everybody, somebody else was selling fish, somebody else would buy, somebody else would cut.

Son: Everybody had something to do.

MHA Right.

MR That time is gone.

MHA A lot of Sicilians in Gloucester so

MR I think what did they say that is 50% of the people there they are Sicilian, like here in New Bedford mostly all, so many are Portuguese. In Gloucester we are Italian.

MHA Right.

MR Sicilian.

MHA Um, one of the things I like in Gloucester is the fiesta, St. Peter's Fiesta. And all the little fiestas too.

18:00

MR Even the fiesta is coming down. It's not like 20 years ago, 40 years ago. Because so many boat, we would pay something, each boat for the fiesta and they can get some singers they want good singers, real singers and you know today with no more boat, no more pay, so they don't have so much money for do something special for the fiesta. They still do, but it's not like 30 years ago.

MHA How about the Blessing of the Fleet? Can you talk about how that has changed?

Interview with Marco Randazzo conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber

7

Conducted on September 26, 2010; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

MR The what?

MR Blessing of the Fleet. Do you remember?

Son: translates

MR I didn't pay real attention. In the last 6-7 years I stay home for the fiesta and I don't have any more kids to bring down, what am I gonna do the raise the boat this is something that's for me it don't...so I don't know really the change

Son: He watches the Gloucester parade when it comes by.

MHA Yeah. When I first started getting interested in the fishing industry they still paraded all the boats around in front of the Bishop and then the in later years the Bishop went around. And here I've learned that they were taking, not the, the Bishop wasn't going around in a boat, he was going around in a golf cart [laughs] so a little bit of a difference.

Son: Yeah that changes things [laughs]

MHA So, were you on a, did you go out to George's Bank? Or where did they fish?

MR Yeah most all the time in George's Bank because that was the bigger boat, I'm talking about 95-90' that's the place where we were gonna go, George's Bank. Sometime we had to go much more far to the Grand Banks depends the time of year, sometime there is nothing on the Georges Banks and decided to go much more father cause the Grand Banks we're talking about 4 or 5 days of steam[ing].

MHA Were you fishing when the foreign boats were out here

MR The who?

MHA The foreign boats, like the ones from Russia, the big

21:00

MR Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. They were there. Yeah. And we're talking about big ship, not or maybe a thousand miles, cause like the crews, build big boat and we had to get out of their way when uh, until they put a new the 200 miles I think, 200 miles yes, then they disappeared because the Bank is inside the 200 miles.

MHA So I assume that uh since your children, you didn't encourage your children to go into fishing

MR No, no, no. Really don't. Because I realized when they started growing up, I realized with the new regulation that we had to reach this point today. I somebody still make a living, but just somebody, many other they sell their own boat, sell it. They give it to the government for some money like that and

MHA Right, the buyout.

Interview with Marco Randazzo conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber

8

Conducted on September 26, 2010; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

Son: It wasn't just the regulations, it was also the dangers. He didn't want us to face.

MHA yeah.

MR Yeah, by now, it was already clear, the little time they had to tie and tie and tie, little time so many that was young were looking for some other job. People my age retired reach into their pension and forget about. But it's not a job anymore encouraging like it did my father or my grandfather. That time is over.

Son: I thought he was gonna say something about his father and his grandfather. Those boats were the small boats, little small boats, you know. Nothing compared to what people have today. How many miles they went out in the cold winters they just had the little, little boats

MR Yeah my ancestors is not like here, it's not that kind of a

MHA How difficult was it for you to go out fishing in the winter here?

MR Oh just, don't let me say nothing about it.

MHA [laughs]

MR I come here it was after Christmas it was, so I come in that time

MHA Yeah!

24:00

MR And I remember an old man asking me, so what are you thinking? I cannot say I don't like it because he can say why do you come back here where you belong, who called you. So I say, you know, it's good, but it's cold.

MHA [laughs]

MR And he said, "what cold, there is not more cold now." Maybe this is something you don't pay attention, but once in a while make like right now we are in a time when we go hot and hot, but there is a time when you go cold and cold and cold. The old man told me, "you know, time ago we were working on the top of the world across from that point to the other point the world was all frozen and the sea was mostly frozen to the breakwater and I'd been thinking it was just a usual fisherman story. The sardines become tiger shark and then ??shark and then, but time later I see I work really like the old man told me that piece get frozen and all that stuff. Right now we are in, we hear it on television all the time, we get hot and hot, we get worse and worse, I don't know. I think sooner or later it's gotta change again, start to get, I mean now I don't want to say we don't have, maybe need a little help to the world for shut down some, I mean maybe need to do something about it a little a lot or about, no matter what the weather sooner or later will be come back again cold and cold for little while. I mean we the world of the past, the age, the cold age and all this stuff. So sooner or later for one reason or another, we come back again, in my opinion.

MHA It's all cyclical

Interview with Marco Randazzo conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber

9

Conducted on September 26, 2010; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

Son: Yeah all cyclical

MR That just is more cycle because in my opinion there is more cycle the biggest cycle and very long cycle and right now we are in a cycle where we go up and up until when I don't know maybe in this year, maybe couple of years turn around and we gonna have frozen workin' again on the frozen sea.

27:00

Son: difficult to hear...about father's travels in merchant marine.

MHA Well I imagine you had safety training there too

Son: translates

MR Oh I was an engineer, working on the engine. But I mean even the engine is many different, you can be an electronic you can be, or my job was the engine.

MHA But when you went fishing you were on the nets?

MR Yeah you know because many people when they come in this country was a time when making money fishing so even some carpenter, or many other kind of a job

Son: translating

MR Twine man. But this is something I said before. I took care of the nets and uh, but not just the nets, that was my special job, somebody else was the cook, but everybody needed stand on deck for put the nets on the boat and work the fish and then somebody go cookin', somebody when they're damaged gotta take care of piece of the net so that was my job.

MHA I guess why I was asking that because you had said you were engineer in the merchant marine. So I know that some fishing boats have engineers who focus just on the engines. But you like

MR Know I prefer be the engineer, because the job I had was

Son: translating

MR I was so young I didn't know I cannot change a job. So I'd be a fisherman and no matter what, even a cargo ship is working on the water. So ok.

MHA It's ok, it's not important.

30:00

MR See even working in a dragon boat is fishing. It's water, spend the time on the water. The water is right there, I can see it. See now I am retired man, still every morning I go on a walk for to go see the water. I'm satisfied by the day. But it was at that time I decide no matter what in a cargo ship, it doesn't matter what I have to do, I still is in a boat

MHA Yes.

Interview with Marco Randazzo conducted by Madeleine Hall-Arber

10

Conducted on September 26, 2010; Transcribed by Laura Orleans

MR So and I prefer to be on the engine because of my school was for the engine. And plus my job was, I started working 7 o' clock and I finish at 5 o'clock so when the boat was tied in some place, I can get out and come back tomorrow morning. That you cannot do, the other guys because you do four hours and you gotta release somebody else. So Somebody else with some other job , with some other job you can stay out of the boat just four hours. So with my job, I can stay all night, all day just I had to be on the boat for the 7 o'clock and hours alright. I didn't like be that tied, like four hours of work, four hours go in town, four hours on. I feel be too tired. It was a much better day job working seven hours, eight hours and then I had all night until tomorrow free.

Son: translating

MR Oh but what I prefer is no matter what they were making me twine man, maybe because nets would disagree with everybody and so everybody hey you do whatever we gotta do or you tell us what we gotta do because if somebody started do their job but their damaging some other way I disagree with everybody. No there is a better way and so even if I start, I go in a boat and nobody know me, when I start yell to everybody, ok you be there twine man, this is your job.

MHA You knew what you were doing. Clearly

MR Yeah but now, still today I disagree with my kids for everything

MHA/SON: [laughing]

MHA Do they disagree with you?

Son: He disagrees on purpose cause he, 'cause it's fun for him

33:00

MHA: Right, challenge. So um when you were working were there any women in the fishing industry?

MR No. no.

[laughter]

MR No because I fish in the, I have fishing just with other boys no girls, no I had nothing to do with women.

MHA And did you belong to any organizations, any of the fisherman organizations?

MR No. I have a be free being myself when I like to stay on the boat, if you don't like it, goodbye, see you later maybe, maybe next time you're gonna need me, maybe I'm gonna need you. Maybe we can go fishing together again, but I'm not tied to no one.

MHA Ah, independence

Son: Yeah

MR Maybe that's one of the reasons why I be fisherman.

MHA Uh huh. And do you have brothers or sisters?

MR Yeah I have a brother and a sister in Italy. For some reason or another they didn't come, they didn't like to come because I immigrated some time ago when your father, your mother, you go with your father, your mother and you don't suffer. But when you gotta let, because my brother was already married, so cannot come here because of the wife he had to let the wife, the mother, the father, you know all that story. And somehow they remain there, that's how.

MHA Did your brother fish?

MR No. For some reason really I don't know, maybe because when he started fishing with us with my father it was he gets sick and then he started to find a job

SON: Mason

MR: Huh?

SON: Mason.

MHA Unfortunately we don't have a lot of time, we both have to do other things, so is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think somebody listening about the fishing industry who is interested maybe I'm talking too fast, but if somebody is listening to your tape here, and they're interested in the fishing industry, is there anything you would like them to know that I haven't asked you?

36:00

MR No but I retire so I don't care anymore, when I say that I have some friends that still are fishin' and I feel sorry for them, but I got nothing to do, I know Jesus Christ. See I can do some cross with Jesus Christ on in the side and the other side ??? You see I cannot do miracle, so

SON: ???

MR No like I said, we try and there's no more business. When I try six, seven years ago and in time, in a little time things changes so I don't want to say anything and maybe I'm wrong.

MHA Well it's been very interesting talking to you. I'd like to take a picture by your crafts ok.

End of Tape