



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview March 8, 2017

Bob Bowers ~ Oral History Interview

Madeleine Hall-Arber

Bowers, Bob. Interview by Madeleine Hall-Arber. *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront*. New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. Date of interview: 3/8/2017.

This oral history was produced in 2017 as part of the *Workers on the Waterfront Oral History Project* conducted by New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center with funding from an Archie Green Fellowship provided by the Library of Congress.

New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center
38 Bethel Street
P.O. Box 2052
New Bedford, MA 02741-2052

Background

Name of person interviewed: Bob Bowers [BB]

Facts about this person:

Age 57
Sex Male
Occupation Tankerman
Residence New Bedford, MA
Ethnic background Portuguese

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber [MHA]

Transcriber: Aneshia Savino [AS]

Interview location: Twin Piers

Date of interview: March 8, 2017

Key Words: Fuel barge, tankerman license, changes in fishing, changes in fishing community, differences between fishing and scalloping, fish prices, nicknames, superstitions, water barge

Abstract

Description of the job of the tankerman, a licensed position on a fuel barge. Explanation about the benefit of fueling from a barge rather than a truck. Description of changes in fishing and scalloping since 1977. Demographic changes in the fishing community, lack of interest among young people. Some discussion about nicknames and superstitions, loss of the old-timers.

Index

[00:00] Introductions, Bob Bowers born in Dartmouth, 30 years working on the New Bedford Waterfront. Finished school, fished about eight years, then became a tankerman. Describes job and job licensing.

[5:24] Describes what could go wrong while fueling, thunder and lightning as threats, explains what a manifold is and compares old and new styles of fueling.

[9:40] Bower remembers first fishing with his father in '77, his sadness from losing his dad 10 years ago, and that his dad's arthritis came from the old style of fishing. Old style of fishing was harder, longer, and more dangerous. He finished high school in '79 where had studied marine industries at New Bedford Vocational before fishing a few years and eventually stopping once his son was born.

[15:18] Bowers describes his beginnings on the water barge in 1988 and eventually fuel barges, his mother's family is from Portugal, and his father is from Nova Scotia, both fishing families, though he is the only one of five kids to be involved in fishing. Dad began fishing around age 12, ended up in Gloucester, MA and owned a wooden dragger

[20:50] Bowers remembers growing up on the waterfront. He accounts for current drug problems among the waterfront community, discusses his current employer, Bay Fuels, and previous barge work, fueling with trucks or barges

[25:19] Description of how vessels pay out vendors and crew, and how it differs for scallopers and draggers, how crews stay employed between shipping out.

[29:54] Discussion of children's lack of interest in fishing as an industry, tools used on the job, dangers on deck, work in the shop after fueling hours, and the specifics of filling fuel tanks.

[35:07] Bowers least favorite part of the job, competitiveness in the job in the past and present, effects of regulations, the future of the draggers, and the importance of the scallopers, few vessels are currently family-owned and operated

[40:05] How the changing demographics have changed the community, Bower's advice for anyone interested in the marine industries, how to fix fuel in the wrong tank, and finding fuel tank location

[45:37] Terminology on the job, nicknames and the role of the Fishing Heritage Center, Bowers drawing hobby has continued from his youth and he now draws on shells

[49:47] Future of fuel barges, logistics of trucks and barges for marine fueling, the physical required for tankerman's license, difference of marine and land fuels and regulations surrounding pollutants in certain oils, and the Blessing of the Fleet in the '70s and today.

[55:47] The future role the Fishing Heritage Center in preserving waterfront culture and community. Bower would like to donate his dad's dory to the collection, the current pace of life at the Waterfront, regulations' effect on scalloping from the 90s to now, cod monitoring and its

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

importance

[1:01:10] How pricing variability hurts fishermen, little price difference over 3 decades, and having a poor market for locally caught fish

[1:05:00] Bowers asks interviewer about her graduate work aboard Provincetown fishing vessels in '75, discussion of the use of orange on masts and dories on vessels, the change in crew numbers over the decades and their working schedules, events at the Fishing Heritage Center

[1:10:03] Discussion of superstitions, old timers who aren't around anymore, New Bedford's old fishing bars

[1:14:58] The hard work scraping and painting a boat in the summer of '79, the book named "The Dragger"

[1:17:14] End of Audio

00:00

Madeleine Hall-Arber: Okay, so, what I need you to do is just introduce yourself, and that way I can make sure that the sound is up high enough.

Bob Bowers: Okay. Hi my name is Bobby Bowers and I'm a tankerman down here on the waterfront, New Bedford waterfront.

MHA: Terrific. I'll give you a little formal introduction. It's more for the purposes of the tape than anything. It's March 8, 2017. This is an interview for the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center funded by an Archie Green Fellowship from the Library of Congress. As part of this project we are interviewing shoreside workers in the New Bedford/Fairhaven fishing industry to record their stories, document their skills and knowledge and better understand their important role in the fishing industry. The recording and transcript will become part of the permanent collection at the Library of Congress. I am Madeleine Hall-Arber and today I'm speaking with Bobby Bowers at Twin Piers, right? It's, now it's about noon. It's 12:15 actually, and you have given us permission to record this story.

BB: Mmhmm.

MHA: Oay, great. You can introduce yourself again...

BB: Okay, Bobby Bowers, worked down here on the waterfront, on fuel barges. This year will be 30 doing, just fueling up boats and whatever comes around, we fill it with fuel.

MHA: 30 years?! I didn't realize that. And where you born down here?

BB: I was born in Dartmouth, next town over. Right on the line, New Bedford/Dartmouth line. Eight miles from here.

MHA: And when was that?

BB: 1960.

MHA: Okay, And I assume you grew up here.

BB: Well I grew up down, basically I was down here most of my whole life. My father was a fisherman and I was always down here with him. When he was in, I was down here and then, I worked at Almas dock on a ferry back in '78. It was a ferry that used to run. I worked there for the summer. Back to school. And then when I got out of school next year, I went fishing for about three or four years. I got out of that racket. I just ended up buying a skiff, a bull rake and a tongs, and that's what I did for four years. Called bull raked and tongs for four years straight and that business was going down hill because of the pollution going into the water and everything and it was, it wasn't worth going. Every time it would rain out and you couldn't go out for five days, so, that's when I just came down here and I got my tankerman and started working on the fuel barges down here, been here ever since.

MHA: So, the tankerman. Can you explain a little more about what that is?

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

BB: Well, a tankerman is somebody that is licensed to pump fuel, run the barge around the harbor and, you know, knows what to do. Because, if you don't know what you're doing, you could be pumping fuel and not [unintelligible], and fuel's coming out. You got to know how to... You got to know the boats, cause if you don't, you got serious problems. And big fines. So it's kind of like, when you do it a long time, you kind of know what boats you got to watch out for and ones that you can have no problem with it. But it's basically simple, but it can be, your heart can beat a lot, cause you don't know what's going to happen when, you're scared something happens, something let's go, but so far, so good. I've nothing. Never had nothing big happen to me, so far.

MHA: Good! So who gives that license or permit?

BB: Well you go through, the Coast Guard gives you that. You have to go to the school for that. You do so much on there and they um...take a test. You go to Boston, you take a test, when you pass that you got it. It was good for like five, ten years, you wouldn't have to do nothing. Now all of a sudden, they make you do a physical every two years. Its, um...you got to renew everything and it's all money. Got to every two years it's a physical, they check your eyes, they check your reflexes, they check everything on you. Make sure you're sound for doing the job, you don't have no, any problems with you. You don't want to have a bad heart pumping fuel and the next thing you know, you have a heart attack and nobody's around, and the fuel's coming out! By the time.. So that's basically, they want to make sure that you're in tip top shape. You don't have nothing wrong with your eyesight, has to be good. You can't be colorblind. And it's all little stuff.

MHA: Why color blind?

BB: Well I guess they figure the colorblind out, because if you're on the boat and colorblind, there's lights. A lot of boats they work at night around the harbor, they use lights. Red on one side and green on the other. One light on top of two white lights, and if you don't pick those lights out, there could be a boat coming this way, and could have a collision.

MHA: Interesting

BB: The lights at night, that's when you got to pay attention. You got to know your lights, your buoys, you're coming in at night or whatever, you got make sure, your red is on your right and your green in on your port, so you got to know your lights. That's how you see at night. Nowadays everything's with GPS, so it's kind of like you can follow, the channel with the GPS, you know go right in but, a while back its was just all lights. You used to get in the harbor, whatever you could, follow the lights. That's how it went.

[5:24]

MHA: So the kind of things that could go wrong, that they train you to watch out for, like what?

BB: Well you got to make sure you tie in, tie your barge right. Make sure everything is good, and um, tie everything right, because surges. Don't forget when you're filling, your pumping from one to another, you're going to go up and the boat along next to you is going to go down. You got to kind of keep an eye on everything. Because if you're going up and he's going down, your

lines are going to go slack. And you're going to have a big gap between there, in between your boat. And you don't want the hoses to get in there, and if somebody comes by with a big wake and starts, you got a big a surge, it'll pinch the hoses and things can happen. You want to keep everything, everything snug. You don't want everything loose and let it drift away cause you can, that's when accidents happen. Lines could snap because of the slack. You just want to keep everything, keep your lines, just enough-- not too tight, not too loose and you'll be all right. Just keep an eye on everything, If it starts lighting, thundering and lightning, you have to shut down and you can't, when you got a bad lightning storm you can't pump fuel because it'll um, anything can happen. A big time bomb, but so far I haven't seen that yet. I hope I never do.

[Both laughing]

MHA: And you mentioned that some boats are a little trickier than others. What kinds of...

BB: Well some of the old time boats were made with manifolds, that you, the pipe goes down on deck and it goes down, and it's a long pipe it goes in the engine with the manifold on it. And it's all, could be six, eight tanks and it's all manifold valves and you have to adjust all them while you're filling it. There's not too many around no more like it. Yeah, there's only a few down here. The one's basically around here are pretty simple to fill up now. But the old type is, you're down in the engine filling them. You have six tanks and you're filling them all, and your nozzle up top is screwed in. That's how much back pressure there is and you got to, one guy up top and one guy down below. The other guy's up top you got to have, bucket around the vents so in case anything happens. And that's uh, that's probably, those are trickiest ones and you, that's the ones that nobody wants to do because they, anything can happen. If the boat's laying over a little bit, that when stuff can happen. So you just got to pay attention on that. That's the scariest part, you know. You have to fill the boat even, while it's filling. You don't want to open everything up and all of a sudden the boat starts laying over to one side and you hear screaming, there's fuel coming out top. So it's basically, the boats made now are all simple. They're not the old style. Everything just put right in the pipe and let it go.

MHA: So when you, can you explain a little more about what manifold is?

BB: Manifold, okay, let's just say like, it's a long pipe you screw on your nozzle on and on the end them there's probably eight valves or ten or whatever, how many tanks you got. And then there's valves you open up to fill certain tanks. So you got eight tanks, you got eight valves and on all these tanks down there, they all have sight glasses. And you can watch them while they're filling. So you open the manifolds up and if one's starting to fill a little too fast, starting to lay over, you just choke the valve a little bit. You try to fill the boat even. Pretty simple, it's like, like somebody who has a, I don't know the back of your house, on a spigot, the hose with two hoses going off it. Sometime you have two or three spigots you can run a garden hose off of. Basically almost like that. And then that, each one goes to each tank, they're all lettered, so it will tell you which one is going to fill. Say it's the port forward, you can slow the port forward down. It's pretty simple once you get it all down. It's not that hard. Nothing to worry about. There's only like one down here. The rest of them are all gone. They're all, there's none around no more. The boats here are all simple; they're not, it's not hard like it was back when I first started. There was

some down there that was scary. You had to watch out.

[9:40]

MHA: Those, were they steel boats?

BB: All steel. Well, there was a lot of steel, but there were a lot of wooden ones. And the wooden ones they were, it was the same thing. It was a manifold, but the manifold stayed open, you'd fill it up and you did that buy sound. You'd stay up there and sometimes you'd be up there for an hour, two hours just sitting by there. You could tell by the sound. The sound, it makes a certain sound when it gets close and as it gets closer, you just slow the nozzle down. It makes a weird sound, and what its doing, it's filling from underneath. It's not filling from the top so it gives a sound. And you tell when the sound starts disappearing, you just keep going back slow on the valve and all of sudden it'll come up the pipe and it's full. If you didn't fill them all the way back then, and the boat left, went out fishing, normal eight, nine, ten day trip, if he ran out, it was you that ah, didn't fill it all the way. So you made sure that when the boat got in, it was filled either to the mark or right to the top. So back then, the boats only held so much fuel. These here, now they hold plenty of fuel. They can go a long time without running out. But back then, the old type was fill it, sometimes you'd be five, ten degrees out. You'd be there, just standing by the pipe. You couldn't move! You didn't want to move, because you didn't know when it was going to come up. You had buckets under the vents in case anything let go. And you had everything there, you know, spill pad. But there was never, no nothing. It might, a little come out, not much at all. It never went into the water. There was never none of the spills in the water. A couple here or there but it was just something freaky that happened, that would happen back then, but them days are over with them boats. Those boats are all gone. Everything here now is steel and it's simple. It's not, it's just two guys. You don't need three guys no more to fill a boat. It's just, basically simple now. It's nothing.

MHA: So when you started out, you said you went fishing for a bit.

BB: Yeah.

MHA: Did you go with your father?

BB: I went with my father in '77. My father in '77, a brand new steel dragger. And he just started to get into the steel draggers, because it was all the eastern rigs, the old types and he went on there. It was his first trip on there. His boat was brand new. And I went with him and he just couldn't believe how something like this, how from his style of fishing to these over here, like what you're seeing over there. He couldn't believe it. He just said, "Wow, all the years I worked like a slave, and I come on this thing and I don't even have to come on deck, it's all, everything is right there. The guys do everything." He fell in love...he fell in love with the boat. He'd always used to talk about the boat, was Big Blue. He was, that was the name of the, he used to call, it was the Captain Mannow. He fell in love with that boat. And then he started, you know, my father's been gone ten years now and so, but he started, he worked until in the '60s, late '60s. He kept going, then he got sick of, what's that, 2007, right around there. Yeah, 2006 he started to get ill, and that was it for him. He stayed home and loaded with arthritis. His hands were

humongous, his knees, everything was humongous on him from the arthritis. From that old style of fishing on the old, old eastern rigs. Those, that was, whew...

MHA: That was tough fishing.

BB: Oh, yeah, cause they had no shelter. Them, the boats back then had no shelter. These here have shelters on. They go through the wind and then, but them guys had nothing. There was nothing. There was spray coming over all the time. It was wet. These over here, they are all, you got shelter. You know what I mean. You get out of the cold weather. Them, the boats back then went a lot more than these guys did. They go in any weather, these guys don't go anymore. They'll wait another day and then they'll go out. But back then they had, it was eight days out and three days home. Eight and three, it was round, year-round, I can remember that when I was kid. My father's be going out, there'd be a storm coming, he's going. I'm like...I don't know. He loved it, I guess.

MHA: So you only actually stayed fishing for a while, and then you did the...

BB: Yeah, well, I got out of school '79 and I got out early in April cause I had a job with, in the shop I was in. You went to Voc, you had a job in your shop, you could get out of school early. I was in marine industries, and I got out April 2nd, and I went the 3rd, I went out. I had a new boat, I went on there, I fished there all summer, then I went on another one in the winter. Then I went back on there in the summer. Like, '81, '82 until my son was born, I didn't, I decided I wanted to stay home with him. I'd rather grow up with my kids and just pull, and stayed home and did what I had to do. But, there was, yeah till like around '86, that's when it, they just started shutting everything down for us, you know. I guess it was a lot of stuff run off, going around in Dartmouth and all through there. And they'd shut everything down. You couldn't do it no more. They'd shut the area for five days, you can't go. So what do you do, five days you got nothing. You have to go everyday or it's not worth it. That's when I decided to come down here, and here I am now.

MHA: So how did you decide to do the oil delivery?

[15:18]

BB: What I did was, true story on that was, I was painting this guy's house and when we got all done painting the house, when I got all done with it. It took me all summer because I had a regular job, just a regular job and I went and did that. And when I got done, he said, "How much do I owe ya?" and showed him the price and he says, "That's there's something's wrong with that." "What's wrong?" He says, "It's got to be more than that." Now I told him, "Now I want you to get me job at the co-op." He says, "alright". Cause he was, he was... he was a big shot over there. So he says, "I'll get you a job there" and I ended up getting a job there. What it really was, I wanted a house. I wanted to buy a house. And what I was doing, I couldn't. The jobs I had, you know, with a bull rake and any of that stuff, self-employed, they're not going to give you a loan for a house. So what I did was, he got me a job there I waited a year and then I bought my first house in '88, '87 '88, whatever, '88 I think I bought it there and that's what got me going. Because I got nothing. You know back then, they wanted you, if you wanted to buy a house, you

had to have a stable job and they... that was my first house I ended up on that one. And that was it. But that was, and I ran the water boat for like ten months. Right before I went to the, right before I went to working at the co-op as a tanker, I ran that water boat for like ten months. You just water the boats around here. They all got water, you do them all, you do the whole waterfront. That was an early, four o'clock every morning I was down here until six, seven, eight at night.

MHA: Does that require any kind of...?

BB: No, there's nothing there Because it's not...

MHA: It's not dangerous?

BB: Because its not.. No it's just, you got to be careful. That's a very dangerous job. that one. That's more dangerous than this in the winter. Cause it gets icy on there, you fall in and..., you fall in there and it's all over. It happened to me once. Right on here. Right on the dock here. February fifth. I'll never forget. I went in and I went whoooh! I thought it was all over with. I saw my whole life go ahead of me and all of a sudden I felt somebody, the back of this pull me out. There was three guys on a boat. They heard me screaming. It was around... it wasn't light yet. It was around 5:30. I slipped on a piece of ice. I fell right off the bow and I went right in. That was on the water boat. And that was a very dangerous job.

MHA: Yikes! So, what kind of ethnic heritage, what... where are you folks from?

BB: Well my father originally was from Canada. He was from Nova Scotia. And my mother , my mother she was from the city here. My grandparents were born in Portugal. Madeira. And they came here and they worked at the rope place, I forget what it was called. He had his family over here in New Bedford, up off Rockdale Avenue. And that's my mother. There was four of them. I guess my mother met my father and the rest is history. Five kids. They had five. Five kids.

MHA: Are any of the others in the fishing business?

BB: Not really no. My brother does alarms. My two sisters work in a ticket office and my other sister, she's um, she's a round somewhere, doing, I forget what she does now, but they're not really. I'm probably the only one. My wife's family, they're, she has a big fisherman family. They're all fishermen. On my wife's side. But not too many on mine.

MHA: How did your father end up in fishing?

BB: Well, I guess, back where he lived growing up there was, up in Nova Scotia, was a hard way of, I mean you're on your own at 10, 12, years old, You're on your own. You got to keep things together. You want to eat, you got to go hunt something. I know when he was young, he jumped on a schooner boat and you know, tried to make some money on there, and that way, what do you call it? And then he went into the Merchant Marine, I believe during the war. He was on there for a little while and when he came back he got off and I think he made his way to Gloucester. Worked out of there. I believe he worked out of Gloucester for a little while. And

then he made his way down here and dragged out of here and then he worked his way up to captain and then he, around 1960 a guy had a new dragger made, a wooden one. He ran that for, I don't know, 15, 16 years, he had that. And he had that for, nobody ever took it out. I think he had it for the book was wrote was called The Dragger. Did you ever hear of that? The Dragger, the book. Well it was written on, back in '69. A guy went out on it and he did a story on the living, you know, what it was like living on a dragger. These guys working and... there's a book, I might have one in my, I have a copy in my truck if you want, to have a look at it after. But you'll like, it's a lot of pictures, you'll enjoy that book. Very good book to read.

[20:50]

MHA: So I imagine growing up here, you probably knew other fishermen...kids...

BB: Oh yeah, you meet a lot of people down here. You meet a lot of people down here. Every day you, you meet a lot people down and they come and go. They just, wow, you can be talking to a few guys and every, once and while you talk to them and next thing you know they're gone. It's just a lot of drugs down here. You see a guy one day and the next day he's gone. A lot of guys I've known down here just...

MHA: Really?

BB: Yeah, it's, there's a big drug problem down here bad. It's just... not good.

MHA: Yeah it's all over. But I have heard that about here. And what do you attribute it to? Some people were saying that it's because there's so much money coming in with scallops that people don't know what to do with the money...

BB: Well, I'll tell you what. Back when I was a kid there was a lot of, I mean a lot of fishermen would drink a lot, but that, it was whatever. They were tired. They worked for it. They deserved it. But it's nowadays, these guys here, whatever pills they're doing it's to keep them up. Taking pills or heroin. But they're doing the pills to stay up to keep up, to keep up. If you don't keep up you don't have a job. And once you're hooked on that, you're hooked on it. When you come home you're still going to be on it. It keeps you all... keeps you going all the time and that's the problem down here. There's young kids in their 20s, late teens, 20s that are on it. You look at them... I've known guys down here that I've seen them. I haven't seen them in 10 years and I look at them know and I'm like, "Wow!" I mean they come down the boat, they don't even have a car, they're walking. They have nothing; they have no gloves, looking for a job. These guys have been fishing 10, 15 years and they don't even have enough money to buy gloves. They have nothing...to go fishing with. There's a lot of that around here. A lot of it.

MHA: It's' discouraging.

BB: Yeah. You got to use your head right. If you get into this racket here, you have to use your, you're going to have to use your head right. You get in you take off, you get your check, go home. Don't be hanging around with the boys. You start hanging around with the boys, you start hitting the bars and the next thing you know, go the wrong way. I've seen it. I've seen these guys do it.

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

MHA: So when did you get hooked up with Bay Fuels?

BB: I've been, I've been, I don't know, it's been what 13, 14 years I've been over here. I worked for another guy on the other side. I ran his barge for like eight years. And, it was just too much over there, too much headaches over there, so I ...

MHA: In Fairhaven?

BB: On the other side of the bridge. And this is five days a week. This is nice five days is enough down here. I was working for that guy for six, seven days a week and it was just like, I mean early in the morning till night. It was just like, there was no time to do nothing. You know what I mean? Yeah, it was just too much. Over here is nice. Its five days, the way I like it. Leave me alone on the weekend. Do my thing, go camping with my trailer, just...got to relax.

MHA: So do you know how most people learn how to become fuel oil...I mean obviously have to have the....

BB: There's not too many around anymore. There's not too many guys that, these guys, let me think now. There's not too many young guys coming in this. I mean there's another guy, Ray. He's old, He's probably got about 25 years in. Al's been at, 20, 20 something years I'd say. And there's, and the other guys, let me think...a young guys, but one guy's... there's not many guys getting into this down here, anymore. It's not a, it's not. You don't know what's going to happen. And on the other side of the bridge, that's all done by trucks. There's a lot of trucks. They do a lot of fuel up there, but it's all done by truck. It's not, you really don't need a fuel barge for a... they figure it's cheaper to do with a truck than a barge. Cause a barge is a lot of maintenance and a lot of insurance, liability. You never know what happens, so you got to...

MHA: You need the double hull...

[25:19]

BB: Yeah, It's a lot easier on one of these than with a truck. It's, you can do a scallop in less than an hour, that's moving. I mean you don't want seven, eight thousand an hour. That's good, let's get it done, because the faster you get these done, the faster the guys get paid. Because they don't get paid until the fuel everything comes on, all expenses come in and it's all deducted off and that's when they get their check. That's how it works on the scallops. Dragger's, it's a little different on there. But the scallopers, let's just saw, its 8500 gallons, whatever the price, two dollars, just whatever. You deduct the grub, whatever expenses they got that comes off there. Whatever's left, split 7 ways, or whatever, and that's how they make their money. They don't get paid until the fuel's on. That's how it works. So that's why you kind of like got to hustle down here to get, these guys start getting mad, they don't want to wait.

MHA: How about the...you said the draggers are different?

BB: I believe the draggers, the owner pays for half and they pay for the other half. I believe that's how it goes on there. Scallopers, that's off the percentage and I believe that fuel comes off the top. I believe the owner pays for half and the gang pays for half. I'm not sure on that. You never know, it might have changed. So it's not....

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

MHA: It's kind of a moving target

BB: Yeah... It's...

Mha: And how has your job changed over time, if it has?

BB: It's definitely a lot less than what it was for... When I first started down, we were starting at 4:35 in the morning. We were doing 11, 12 hours a day, five days. And that was four barges running. Nowadays, it's just like us. There's one barge, you can be done by 11, 12 o'clock. These scallopers, they only have so much, so many days a year to fish and then that's it. They're all over... you can be done in four months if you went right on it, you got all your trips done. You could be done in four months and that's it till next year, till March 1. So that's why it's, it's really cut a lot down. A lot of gallons are cut because what they, cutting all the time back, and days at sea for these guys, closed areas. It's really... years back it was average, two trips a month. So figure 22, 23 trips a year, now it's what, 5? Three closed areas, four closed areas, Yeah, it's like four, five. That's it! That's all they get now.

MHA: What do people do the rest of the time?

BB: Collect. Or they jump on another boat. A lot of them just jump on another one. Like say some guy has four or five boats, he's got two captains. They'll take the two. They'll run the two boats and then they'll just jump on the next boat, and then the next boat. They'll go two or three boats. That's how it's done. But a guy with a single boat, a guy that owns a boat. he'll be... If a guy owns a single scalloper, those guys go on, and they'll jump on another one. And then they'll, somebody else will, there's always somebody with time left. They'll jump on there. They'll still make money. It's... You just got to be a good guy and you now you got to use your head, and you can fish year round. If you lose your head, you're gone. Fishing down here... because they come and go right through here.

MHA: Do you ever regret, not continuing with either fishing or scalloping?

BB: Well, the money now, kind of like, I see that and I just like, I shake my head. Phew... If I was younger, but yeah. That was... These guys, it's big money now. But I see these guys making checks, 20 grand. 15, 20 thousand dollars and I see them coming down the dock, they got nothing. Three days later they're broke, no thanks. I'd rather be broke than get like that.

[29:54]

MHA: So, you mentioned kids

BB: Yeah, I have a son and a daughter and they're in their 30s. My son works up at dockside and my daughter works up at Taunton State Hospital. They got good jobs. They are, my son made a trip fishing, he wasn't into it. So he works up at East. He's got a good gig up there, up at Eastern Fisheries. You know where that is? On the other side? He's got a good gig. He's been there, I don't know, 12 years? My daughter started about a year ago at Taunton hospital. She's got a nice job there. Hopefully it'll pan out good for them. That's all what it's for, I guess.

MHA: Yeah. So, what kinds of, do you have any special tools that you have to use?

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

BB: For this? Just your head. And hands! [both laughing] Just your head and hands! No, it's not really. Do your thing, just plan ahead what you're going to do. And think ahead before you do anything. That's the main thing down here. It's wintertime, there's ice on it. You come down the morning. You jump on a boat. There could be frost or ice, and you don't even know it. That's the main thing, you got to think ahead when you come down here in the morning. You could jump right on in the morning and all of a sudden you're gone. You don't even know it's there. A little bit of frost. That's the main thing, you come down. I'll play the temperature. If you see the temperature, if the temperature's below, like 30, watch out. Whenever, 40s, 50s, you're fine. But you start getting below 30, you jump off the dock on there...so far, so good.

MHA: Well, knock on wood. So, what was I going to ask? Oh, I know that you work also in the shop...

BB: Yeah, in the back. There's not much goes on back there. Everybody's in the back working on little stuff. There's not much...after 12 o'clock, there's nothing going on around the waterfront. Everything, after 12, everything's...The waterfront's basically early in the morning till 12 o'clock. If you come down here early in the morning you'll see guys working on nets. But after that...after 12 o'clock it's all over with. It's always been like that. The afternoon, you see welding going on. A little painting, stuff like that. But after like 12 o'clock, lots, it starts, it's slowing down. It's not much. Like this guy here'll have his welders or painters, you know, guys working in engine rooms, little, little stuff. As you can see, look at how dead it is. Look, there's nothing going on down here. In the summer time it will pick up a little bit.

MHA: What's your favorite part of your job?

BB: what's my favorite part of the job? Down here in the spring, early in the morning. It's nice. Right, get around, April, May. Early in the morning, you come down here, it's nice down here. Early in the morning. You start getting in the summer when it's dead hot. Around noontime and you're out it gets hot. It gets very hot. You wouldn't think so, but it does. But early in the morning like five, six o'clock, coming down here, not much going on. You can go from one boat to the other. Nobody's moving around, and get the stuff done. Before, because once they start moving around. One those boats start moving around, you're all done for the day. "Oh, we're going to move! Can you move?" Here we go...

MHA: So how many boats do you typically handle in a day?

BB: Like today, we had, well, we only had two or three. Usually, six, seven. On a good day, seven, eight. It depends if there's a storm coming. Like if there's a storm, and they all shoot in together and they all unload the night before, we'll end up filling them the next morning. That's probably what's going to happen Tuesday. There's a storm coming. They'll all be in Monday and Tuesday and we'll be right at it again. But it's not, not like it used to be, when there would be 60, 70 boats in a day. That's what we did over there. But over here you get 10; that's probably the max you're going to get for, eight, ten a day. That's it. At the co-op with the four barges, we have, we did a lot of them. We could get a lot done in a day with four barges running. And there was three guys on each barge, so it was nice. It helped out a lot. It was good. Because when you are two or three boats in, it's a lot easier for that guy to pull the hose to you, to the other one. It

wasn't as hard. But once you plan everything, plan everything You'll be fine. You just got to plan what you're going to do.

MHA: So, where is the inlet, or I don't know even what you call it where you put the hose in...

BB: Oh, the fill pipes? Yeah, they're on the sides. Basically, all these here. There's either two or four. Or there might be another tank, but they're all on the side. They're simple now, they're not... And then you go down to the engine room and there's sight glasses and you just watch them as they come up. And they're all marked. Basically we have them all marked so we know. Each at a thousand gallons, there's another thousand, another. So we know where everything's at. So you know, well it's going to be at least 3000 here, 4000 there. At least we know, when it's going to get close to, so we can stay on deck and we can make sure everything is cool and then we run down and check it. Another 500 there on this side, then we're done, that's how it... Every thing's marked. To tell you know what's going on. Its simple now, is not bad. Very, it's simple. Anybody can do this.

[35:07]

MHA: And what is your, and what do you like least about the job? Ice?

BB: What do I like least? I don't know. Not really. It's... I don't think there's anything... least about the job. I don't know. I don't have nothing. But I think probably the worst would be just start filling a boat and the guys got to move. That's probably like the, you know, the worst. You know if you pull the hoses two in and you just start and the guys says I'm going to move. That's, kind of like a, can be a pain, but like anything else. You get used to it.

MHA: So is it, when you think about the waterfront now, and you can tell me about the old days and then, now. Is there a lot a competition?

BB: What do you mean? Between fuel barges?

MHA: Fuel barges, and even...

BB: These boats work? Oh, I'm sure there is with these boats working there. There's competition. Skippers on skippers, definitely. One's got to have more than the other. That's always been like that down there. That's always been like that down here. It's, but no, it's not with the barges. You know, you have your own boats, everybody has their own. Everybody's got a piece of the pie, so there's no, there's nothing on that. It's just do your barge... I mean do your stuff with your barge and them guys do their, and everything.

MHA: How do, I guess why do some boats choose one company over another?

BB: I don't know. Everybody, it's weird. It depends who you like. That's what it amounts to. Everybody basically stays where they're at for years. They don't move too much. So everybody stays with their... I don't know, they take care of them, got problems, we'll tow you around, we'll move you around. You need to move a boat and you can't start your motor, and we'll tow them around. Or somebody else might do this. Everybody has their own boats, There's no, there used to be, try to get but, it doesn't... You got to be well-liked down here on the waterfront. If you're

not, you're not going to make out. You know what I mean? You're always crying the blues, nobody's going to come to you when you have money. Some people cry the blues and they got no money. And then they got plenty of money that's the ones...Crying games.

MHA: So have the regulations effected, well, you mentioned, actually...

BB: Definitely, definitely. That's ...definitely knocked out a lot. All the draggers are gone. There are no draggers left. That was... the draggers would, when they started in the 90s with the scalloping, different rings and stuff like that. Boats would tie up or whatever, the draggers would keep you going for the winter because they went all the time. But they're starting on them too. These guys have to pay for quota to go fishing, to go dragging, you got to pay to go fishing. I don't know what's going to happen. I have no clue what's... it's going to be very small the way it's going. If the scallopers where out of here, this waterfront, there would be nothing here. That's what keeping everything going.

MHA: I'm curious about one thing about the scallopers. I know the old days when I first started, I dealt mostly with the trawlers and there were a lot of family boats, and I don't know if that's true of the scallopers. Or even if it's still true on the draggers?

BB: Well, um, there's a lot of family, especially on the other side. Not much here. Because this guy owns all these here. But in the other side, there's still Norwegians that have passed down to their sons or nephews and they run, there's a couple of them over there. Let me think...There's just a few guys that they're just in their 50's. They just sold out their scallopers. They got big money for them. But there's a few around. There's still a few around from generations that passed it down to their sons or nephews, but it's not, I don't know. The dragging... that's, a... that's dying... that's going fast. It's not good, the way it looks.

[40:05]

MHA: So has that affected the sense of the fishing community? You know, is there still people feeling like it is a fishing community and...

BB: Well the... I think what puts it together is the scalloping keeps, you know, all these young guys, and guys in their 40s or 50s, they're scallopers, they're making a decent amount of money. And the draggers, these guys that are in their 50's and 60's, they can't really go scalloping, they don't know nothing else. They just got to finish, finish their time, what they have, working and that's going to be the only way. There's no... It's not like it used to be years down here when I can remember when I was a little kid there would be... we'd be down with my father and there would be the other boats down here, and their kids would be on the boat, they were like our age, eight, nine, ten years old. They'd be jumping up on the rigging, they'd be all over the boats having, eating whatever they could. But you never see that no more. You don't see too much of the young kids, young, ten, twelve, eight years old, come on the boat anymore and just play around, you don't see that no more. I can remember when I was small I would, if my father was in it was the summer, I'd paint, whatever, paint boards, or I used to paint the wheelhouse floor, the grates, I used to clean and but, that, them day, they don't see that no more, There's no bringing the family down to the boat anymore. I haven't seen that in years, oh in years! It's all

changed. Definitely has changed.

MHA: Do you think it's that the kids aren't interested anymore?

BB: I think it is, yeah. Well you got to remember, kids now, back then, we didn't have nothing. Back then there wasn't really much. Nowadays its all computers, all this stuff to fool around with. They don't want that, that's what they want. They don't want to come down here to these stinky boats, they're all rusted up! You know they don't want to go on that. Kids don't find that interesting. But you know, its definitely has changed, that's for sure.

MHA: What would you give, what advice would you give somebody who is just starting out?

BB: What to go fishing? Or to...

MHA: Whatever even, you know...

BB: Working on the barge?

MHA: Yeah

BB: Well, just use your head. Don't get into trouble. Go home every day. Don't go to the bars! [Both laughing] Just use your head, get yourself settled down, buy yourself a house and then you know, there's something to work for. You don't get in trouble. Because you know, I've seen a lot of them come and go down there. Even guys that worked on the barges with me. They're all... got into the wrong stuff... gone! Nope

MHA: So, does everybody who works on the barge have to have the tankerman?

BB: You could... As long as the guy in the wheelhouse has or the guy operating the barge has that, and you could have a kid on there and he'll take care of the boat; he can fill it up Because you really don't need anybody on the boat to fill it, with the license. But it's good to have two guys on both ends. Because if you was to come to a boat and you gave this guy who just came in fishing, been out for twelve days, and you gave him two nozzles, you tell him, "here you go!". That guy's going to stick them in the pipe, open them up. He's going to walk away; he's going to go in the shower... Next thing you know the fuels coming out. So you're better off having somebody come in and do it, they know what they're doing, jobs done and it's over with, because you can't just give these guys believe me! They'd take right off. Or they'll put in the wrong tank, or they'll put lube in the water tank. I've seen that, I've seen lube go in water tanks. I've seen water go in fuel tanks. But it's, you got...Best to know somebody who knows what they're doing. Let them do it. Less aggravation.

MHA: What happens when something like that, when they do screw up like that?

BB: Well, I did it once, long time ago. But it was nothing. It was, it was when I was on the waterboat, I had a booklet on there and it gave every boat where the fill was. Everything and you open up to that page and it said to pull it forward. And there was a pipe there so I stuck the hose in there and I started filling, and I could smell fuel, I had it running for like minute or so. I shut it off, and somehow or another, they put, they moved the pipe around and in the booklet they never changed it. So I ended up putting 100 gallons, but it was no problem. I called the owner up. He

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

said, I'll be down there at 8 o'clock. We'll straighten it all out. I went down at 8 o'clock and he says, "just open that valve up, leave that open, and when the fuel starts coming out, it's all set." Cause it separates.

MHA: Ah, right. Of course

BB: So it all came out and that was it. That's the only time I've ever had a, had a something like that happen. But that was running the waterboat when I put water, you know, in the pipe.

MHA: Yeah.

BB: It was just one of them, the booklet was never changed. They never changed the booklet. But the booklet came with the boat, where the fillers are --starboard bow, forward pipe, stuff like that. And they never changed that one. And by the way, that's the guy that gave me the job for the co-op. That was his boat. That's so it wasn't, he was cool. "That's nothing. Just open it and it'll all come out. Just stay right here till you see fuel. And when you see fuel just shut the valve and that's it! And I did it. There was no problem. No problem at all.

[45:37]

MHA: Is there any special terminology that's part of your work?

BB: Not really. Just, not nah, nothing.

MHA: How about nicknames?

BB: Well everybody has a nickname down here, just about. A lot of these people don't even know how to say a Portuguese name, so they give him a nickname. Even when I was a kid, I could remember that. And there was nobody, everybody had nicknames down here. It's just some of these people are from different countries, Polish or Norwegian. You couldn't remember their names, so you just give them a name. So that, that's how anybody remember it. That's how, you can't, I mean, sorry, it's Tom, Billy, Joe, you remember that, but you get this guy, what's his name, I forgot how to say it, just give him a name. Everybody knew that. Everybody would call him that. Every body would, I know at the co-op how we used to. We didn't know. We used to do a lot of draggers, Portuguese draggers and we'd forget the guy's name and we'd just kind of see who he looks like and we'd give him a name. And that's how we, the next guy, "Hey what's up, Tony" His name wasn't Tony. We used call him Tony Danza cause he looked like Tony Danza. That's how he got the name. And still till this day when he's around, everybody calls him that. Tony Danza. It's all, everybody has a little nickname or something to. I'm sure if you go up to the Heritage Center, you'll see a lot. In the back. There's a ton of them. There's a few hundred, two or three hundred up there. Even more.

MHA: So how did you get into your drawing?

BB: Well, When I was a kid, that's all I used to do was draw on my desk in school and I remember the teacher saying to me, she says, "if you paid attention more to your work than your drawing, you'd be the teacher here." I'm like, yeah I know. I used to tell, "yeah this is boring I'd rather draw!" She's "No, you got to learn this first." And I can remember in seventh grade we had

this, it was an hour and a half, different like, math hour and a half, then on Fridays you had drawing for an hour and a half. And I remember sitting at the desk we went to the art teacher, went to her class, start drawing this thing. Next thing you know she tapped me on the shoulder, I was all done and she says, get up. I'm like, "What?" "Get up." She sat in my chair and she says to me. Now you teach the class. Because I just went to college to learn how to draw and you just drew that in five minutes. You teach the class! I'm like, Nah, nah! Give me my seat back. I've always enjoyed drawing. It's just relaxing to draw. I'm sure you seen the shells, and like that. I like, I've got to be in the mood to do it. It's like anything else. If I'm in the mood, I love drawing this stuff. It's not a... I got to be in the mood to do it. I've always fooled around. Drawn murals and all little stuff like that. The shells I enjoy doing. I've done all right with the shells. Stuff like that.

MHA: So do you, either of your kids draw?

BB: Nope.

MHA: Isn't that interesting

BB: Nope, they won't even, won't even pick up a pencil or nothing to draw. I try to show them. Nope, they're not. Can I put this down a little bit? [fiddling with the mic]

MHA: Oh, yeah, let me. I'll get my keys. It is getting hot in here.

[keys jangle, door opens, and vehicle beeps]

BB: There we go.

MHA: All right. Okay. I'm going to just review the questions here and see if there is anything I forgot to ask you. What do you see for the future of the fuel barges? Do you think everybody's going to turn to trucks eventually? Especially if there are no young people coming in.

[49:47]

BB: Well we just got to, see a lot of these barges down here they're all basically new. So they got a long time to go on them.

MHA: Right

BB: Just get the guys to run them, it's fine. But do it with the truck, if you tie up a truck, you can't tie a truck up that long. A truck has to make so much money per hour. If it doesn't it's not worth it. If you put a truck down there filling a boat and the thing's there for a long time, I'm talking about an 18-wheeler, he'll come down with eight, nine, thousand. For him to get rid of that, he's going to be there a while. But for him to drop that somewhere, it's 22 minutes. Say a gas station, that's gasoline, you can't tie, hang on second.

MHA: Sure.

BB: You can't tie a truck up that long. Cause then you're... These are all moving barges, as long as there's boats around, it's fine. It doesn't take much to get it. Just take the course for that and just work your way in. There's probably, one, two... There's probably eight guys down here. One, two,

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

six, eight guys that have a tankerman. Other than that, there's nobody. Once you're in, what happens if you don't use your tankerman, if you don't use your tankerman, in like five years, when it's time to renew, and you got to have a letter where you worked. You lose it. So you have to work in it. You have to work in that field. So somehow or another within five years, or you lose it. Yeah, they just don't. If I left here for five years, six years, and came back, I got to renew everything. I mean you got to do everything over again, not renew it, do everything over again, that's the hard part.

MHA: So taking the test and going up and getting your physical. You got to get your physical anyway though...

BB: Yeah, well the physical isn't too bad. Just go to Fairhaven and they, just I went last week. Renewed everything, the physical for two years. Now I got to do it in another two years. I want to hit the lottery!

MHA: Yeah! I think I asked you everything I planned to ask you. Can you think of anything that I haven't asked that I should have asked?

BB: You pretty well got it all down. You pretty well got it all down, the way it works down there.

MHA: Are you, do you see, are you mentoring anybody, coming up? Do you see anybody maybe, you think, eventually...?

BB: What, to work down here? Not really. No, it's not, it's I don't know, it's very hard to... I mean it's the fuel. Who knows what's going to happen to this place here, if that place gets shut down. If they end up taking that place out of there. That's the fuel right there in that whole building, it's all connected to them, if something happens there. The only place you're going to get fuel is right over here. By the Ice House and that's...

MHA: Yeah, I didn't know this was still active.

BB: That one is too, and there's another tank with 2-oil. And there's another tank that's shut down. But this is, this tank you see right here, this tank is marine fuel.

MHA: Okay, I didn't even realize that.

BB: I would say, I was told, in '18, that all the fuel is going to be the same. Boat fuel and house fuel. Because it's the sulfur they're trying to get rid of, pollution. And this fuel right here, it burns clean. Not, it'll give you the... stop pollution going in the air.

MHA: Yeah

BB: This is different fuel from what goes in your house. 2-oil is, doesn't burn good. It throws a lot of stuff in the air. That's what the fishing boats used to burn. Now they switched them over to this. This is a cleaner fuel. It burns hot, it burns good. So that's the...

MHA: Is it more efficient for the boats themselves?

BB: It's a better fuel. Yeah, thing with that, it's a better fuel, it's cleaner, it doesn't have much

lubricant in it, but it's better for your engine. It'll burn cleaner. You can tell by some of these over here, if they're not. All the rigging turns black from this stuff right here. It doesn't... The old stuff they used to have would turn all the mast, the boom, everything would turn black from the way it burned. That's not, there's definitely a lot changing down here on the, down around this side here. I don't know what's going to, what's going to go on.

MHA: We were talking about, for a minute, about community and I want to go forward with that a little bit more. I know there used to be a blessing of the fleet that was pretty active...

BB: That was big. Now they have it. It's not... It's not like it used to be. Back in like the 70s, late '60s and '70s, There was a lot of these Portuguese druggers, just about all of them used to go out. But now, nope you don't see that no more. It's all the past all that now. It's all changed. Nope they're not into it no more.

MHA: So do you think that the Heritage Center will become a good collecting place?

BB: Sure! Just keep loading that place right up with stuff. People like looking at stuff. They love just going in there and staring at things. That's what they like looking at, from the years back. And the more pictures up there. People like staring at that.

MHA: Yeah.

[55:47]

BB: And you'll... I was there a few times and I was watching some guy and he was just staring at a picture for like five minutes, and I'm like, "Wow, what is this guy looking at?!" [both laughing] I says, "Hey what are you looking at?" He says, "No, I just thinking, if that was me at the time, I'm just thinking, wow, they went through a lot." It was a picture of something they had hanging on the wall, but that picture's gone. The guy's expression in the wheelhouse... he was very attached to it and he... That place, as long as they keep that going and get more things in there, get some movies, some old stuff, I think that'll turn out.

MHA: Yeah, I think they are trying to also do more events, so that people will come for those.

BB: Yep

MHA: Make it a little community center or something.

BB: Yeah, if you get more stuff in like the Whaling Museum... You go into the Whaling Museum, everywhere you look, there's something. There's people just hooked on that. Got to get more stuff. I'd like to find an old dory to put in there. There's supposedly one around with my father's boats. Supposedly down at the Cape, and it's still around. I'd like to put that in there. That would look real nice in there. Nice orange-painted up. Put that right in there. Even if you could hang it. Whatever. Just put it up in there. That's what people want to look at, they like looking at stuff. Hey, hopefully it will stay there.

MHA: Yeah, I hope so. Well, let's see. I think I've asked you everything that I...I'm sure I'll think of something as soon as...

BB: Well edit it in!

MHA: I might have to give you a call or something.

BB: Yeah, no problem. You can see how, look how dead it is here.

MHA: Yeah

BB: Just look at this. There's nothing going on. Everything's, all the rules, regulations just wiped everything right out, there's nothing.

MHA: Well they almost did that to the scallop industry too.

BB: Yeah, well back when all that scalloping was getting bad in the early '90s. These guys were... well they had to. They had mortgage to pay for on these boats and they weren't doing nothing. They did everything and they just... They took all the small ones, they had to do it. They had to do it. That's the only way they made it. What they did, when they started coming around with the big rings, so the small ones would fall through, that's what kind of got it going. Now they've been using them for a long time and I think that's what helping it. What happens when it's rough out and the dredges are coming up off the bottom, a lot of the small ones fall through the rings and they...you know what I mean? And that's what bringing it around. If you get even a little, if you let it settle a little bit down here. A few months, five, six months, it'll come back again. But if you have these guys, they'll just take everything. That's what happened before. The way they got it now, it's just perfect. Just regulate it and the boat's done for the year. It's done. That's it. It's the best way to do it. These guys will always make...this will be here for a while.

MHA: So what about the finfish? Now, there have been so many regulations, so many cutbacks but there's still a lot of fish; well the haddock's come back, but the cod...

BB: The cod's around, they just can't go to the area's where cod is.

MHA: Ah.

BB: Yeah it's all, there's stuff out there. There's guys that go out there with cameras and their nets and shows the cod going through it. And that's open just to see, it's a monitor. It's like a big cone on top and it just watches. It's got lights on it and watches the fish go through. The yellow tails, it watches everything. It watches everything go through. The cod end's open, and then it just goes back out. They don't, they're not there to kill the fish, they're there just to watch what's in there. And it shows it, what's in there. There's different areas that you can't go in. They don't want you there. So they're, that's the problem. But it's like anything else. You start opening up, these guys will just tear it right apart, fast. These guys got big nets, big power, they'll rip it right apart and all the work they've done, it's all gone. They'll rip that apart in no time.

MHA: So there has to be a happy medium though.

BB: The happy medium is going to be the fish swimming out of a closed area. They're picking them up. That's probably about the only way. You can't, those fish are in there breeding. You start going in there tearing it apart, it's all over. It's tough; it's hard. The nets are bigger than they were years back, so they're catching all, these nets humongous. It not like years, 30 40 years ago,

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

they had small nets. These nets are three times as big and they're wide and they're taking everything. And that's, its takes, it destroys everything. Yeah, little by little it's tearing apart. If it ain't rules and regulations, it's taking everything. If they gave these guys good money for there stuff, you wouldn't have the problem.

MHA: Right, right.

[1:01:00]

BB: But they don't give you. everybody comes in at one time the price is junk. You got a day when there's only two boats in, they get three, four dollars a pound, and two days later it's 60 cents, 80 cents a pound. I mean come on, how do you... And these guys wouldn't need to go back out again and tear everything apart. You give them a set price on everything it would... I think, I don't know, what do I know? I'm not... That's my honest opinion. Everybody gets a set price and that's it. It's definitely not a... I don't know, [unintelligible] I guess.

MHA: Well it is true. I started going, I went out on boats out of Provincetown when I was grad student and it seems like some of the prices are the same now as they were then and that was a lot of years ago!

BB: Oh yeah! definitely. Definitely. Well they, what do you got, there's no body there to back you, they can do whatever they want. These buyers can do whatever they want. "Hey, if you don't like it, I can get it somewhere else. The problem down here is that there's fish they can get, it comes in, they can get it frozen, boxed up ready to go. When it's ready. Like McDonald's or where do you think there fish comes from? It doesn't come from here! There's no market. There's not enough fish coming in. When big ships come in, comes right off the ship, its boxed, it's ready to go, it's going wherever it...California, wherever, it's all, not here. There' not enough here to do anything. There's not enough fish coming in, they couldn't keep up. They can fish in the Bering, Sea, or where ever, North Sea, wherever, that they get two or three million pounds and they come home and it's all, forklifts right off the side onto reefer trucks and it's gone to wherever it's going. Over here, you're not going to get that.

MHA: That's why they have started trying to push local catch and the community supported fisheries and that sort of thing for at least a few people to get better prices.

BB: Yeah, I mean if you had fish around here that you could sell to a fish market, but it's, I don't know, I'm sure like down the Cape and up in Maine where all the tourists go in the summer, that's from people like fish, I'm sure you can move a lot of fish. But in the winter, you're not going to move, you're not going to move nothing. You know what I mean. The scallops...I don't know who's eating all the scallops, but there's a lot that comes through here. I do about 20 of them a month and that's it. Basically that's...

MHA: So what do you think they'll do with Carlos' boats? Will they keep going do you think?

BB: I don't know. I don't think they'll touch the scallopers, I don't think. I think that if anything it'll be the draggers. I don't know. I don't know what. There's nothing on the scallopers, because they didn't do nothing! Guess if it is, it's just the draggers that are... It was in today's paper. There's an article in today's paper. Did you see today's paper?

MHA: I haven't seen it yet

BB: Well, yeah.

MHA: It's in the Standard-Times?

BB: Yeah.

MHA: Well, I'll take a look.

BB: Yeah, that'll, domino effect! Greed! That's what happens. You just, you know, you're hurting, you hurt more than other things, you're doing a lot. You know, a lot of people that work down here. You know what I mean it all adds up to, it comes down to everybody.

MHA: Yep. Yep.

[1:05:10]

BB: Yeah. Now what, did you go out of P-town on a boat when you went out?

MHA: Yeah.

BB: What one you go out on?

MHA: I went out on a bunch of them. I'd just go down at 4 o'clock in the morning and I'd hail a captain...

BB: Oh yeah!? What year was that?

MHA: Oh, that was in summer of...it was just summer! I had it easy. It was summer of '75. And I'd just hail a captain going out and just ask if I could go out with them for the day and almost always said yes. There was one guy that didn't. It was just as well, the wind was really blowing and he was Portuguese-speaking almost entirely, so I would have had a hard time communicating with him.

BB: See, did you ever take picture of that or anything?

MHA: Oh yeah.

BB: Yeah, see that. That's history you got right there. Because you don't see that no more. Have you ever had those pictures? Ever had them blown up and put them over here? People like looking at that.

MHA: Yeah that, there were a couple of pictures that really were kind of fun. I mean I wasn't a fantastic photographer, but there was one that I took of a dory on top of the...

BB: The wheelhouse.

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

MHA: The wheelhouse. And it was one of those wooden dories and it was filled with those wooden fish boxes. Oh it'll do a lot of good...

BB: That was all just for show...that was all just for show.

MHA: But it didn't occur to me! yeah! Well they had to have them I think.

BB: Yeah they had to have... and back then, if I can... They had, a lot of them they had to have orange masts, so you could see from a distance if something was wrong, if the Coast Guard had to come out, orange goes a long way, with blue. That's, I'd often ask my father, how come the masts are all orange down here? He says " that's if something happens, if the Coast Guard or somebody's coming up." Cause back then there wasn't much communication, it was a like a radio that was all static. He said they'd look, they could tell by the masts, there's a boat over there. Let's go to that one. That's how they, that's why they had the orange color. It would show everything. I remember him telling me that.

MHA: When you were, when you first started when you were out on the boats how many crew members where there?

BB: 12, 12, 13 guys. It was a six and six. On deck for six hours, off, and now it's seven. These guys work hard. There's only seven guys. You can't go more than seven. But back then it was, you had four guys on deck all the time, you had a cook. Cook would get up early in the morning and cook breakfast, he'd go out on deck around nine, ten o'clock till 11:30, he'd cook lunch and he'd come back in the afternoon and after supper, he'd sleep to the next morning. And the engineer would watch everything, down the engine room. Then you had the captain, the mate. It was easy going. But these guys, no. It's a lot of cutting, for seven guys, the trips that are coming in. But it's not, that's the way they figure. If they were to let these guys go, 12, 13 guys go out, they would have wiped up right out. Instead of having 40 thousand they would have 60 thousand and that'll just wipe it right out. I think the best thing down here is putting the closed areas 18,000, that's the best. Because then it's it, it's all over with. You give these guys, six trips, seven trips a year in a closed area, whatever, and that's it for the year. You don't go out and try to make a big trip in 40, 50 thousand, then you're cleaning everything out. You're wiping everything out fast. I don't know. What do I know? I'm just a tankerman.

[both laughing]

MHA: Well, You're around, and you hear things.

BB: Yeah, I just been around a long time.

MHA: Oh I know...that was one thing I was curious about. Do you have much interaction with the boats, with the crew?

BB: The crew, oh yeah! Yeah, I do and a lot of guys to talk to. And every boat you go on especially like on the scallopers, the guys always talk to you and they want shells. Or draw something for them. A lot of that! All these guys will talk. When they're unloading, it's, that's usually the best, when they're unloading. You can talk to guys when they're unloading the boat. Makes it go by, you know, the time goes by faster, than sitting there with nobody there. Its... I

Interview with Bob Bowers, March 8, 2017

mean seen these faces down there for a long time. A lot of guys. Basically.

MHA: We should have you be doing some of the interviews!

BB: Oh, I can't do that! This is all right like this. I can't get in front of people. Nope. nope. Yep, so I don't know what's going to happen down there next week, whenever this thing goes on. Or what they're going to do. So where do you go from here? You go up to the Fishing Heritage?

MHA: Yeah, I'll do that. They have an event tonight. They're going to be talking about superstitions.

[1:10:00]

BB: Yeah, Laura was saying something like that. Yeah, there was a lot. My father was bad on that. You couldn't whistle in the house, it was weird stuff on the boat. I had to go, you could never say "pig" on a boat, well whistling in the house was the worst.

MHA: That's interesting, I wonder why the house? I mean I...

BB: I don't know why...

MHA: Usually the ones I've heard on the boat you can't do...

BB: But no, it was in the house. I can remember as a kid, "Aw don't be doing that!" I'm like why? "Ah it's bad luck." I'm like, come on!

MHA: Well, they also, when I was going out on the boats even then, there were some people who didn't want women on board.

BB: Same thing. I remember that. But when, you could go on a boat when you tied to the dock, going out, unloading, or whatever, that's fine, But to go fishing... that was like the... it was like an omen. But hey, there's been a lot of girls that fished out of here! I don't know, I've never heard of any, you never see any boats going out with girls on them, do you?

[both laughing]

MHA: Yeah, and then now, with a bunch of the observers, are females

BB: Yeah, some of that stuff, some of that stuff...foolishness, definitely foolishness. I don't know. All I could tell you about something, when something goes wrong, three things are going to go wrong. And if something's going to right, three things are going to go right. That's my honest belief. You got a flat tire here today, you get that fixed, two more things are going to happen. And that's definitely true. I believe in that.

MHA: Trouble in threes.

BB: Yep definitely. Most definitely. Yeah, I'd like to see if I can get that dory. It's supposedly down at Hyannis.

MHA: Well, that'd be fun.

BB: It was built in 60, or '59? It was on the Olamarie. That'd be nice to put that up in there

MHA: Yeah, it would be great

BB: So who's going up there tonight? Do you know? Is there a lot of people going up?

MHA: I don't know. I haven't, I don't know if they have any kind of sign up for it whether they're just hoping...

BB: See, all the old timers are gone, it's too bad, I mean there's probably a handful. And maybe three or four or five fishermen that are in their 80s, that are still around. My step father-in-law, he owned a boat and he's in his 80s and he's not doing good right now. He's like the last of them, he's in his 80s. And then there was another guy I sent, he finally went there two weeks ago. Leo Tuttle. He was a captain. He was from the old school. And other than that there's really, there's not that many old-timers that are around to, you know what I mean, it's tough.

MHA: Well, I know that we're trying to make sure that we get some oral histories from people that are getting up there.

BB: Yeah, there's a few around. I'm trying to... And the thing is down here, there's not many places where fishermen can go to anymore. I mean years back there were hardcore barrooms but, the Harborside, the Cultivator, the National. And Fairhaven, there's two over there. Those were hardcore barrooms; if you went in there, those were the old-type fishermen. You come in there, have a couple of pops, whatever and go home. Those were the guys you wanted, they would tell you the old stuff. Nowadays, you got to watch out. Nope, back in the late 70s, early 80s that's when they were, the old... those boys are all gone.

[1:14:58]

MHA: Yep, even in... I spent a fair amount of time in Gloucester and they used to have, well they still have the St Peter's Club but that used to be the place where fishermen would go.

BB: Fishermen would go...

MHA: Hang out, yeah.

BB: I remember back in '75, the guy that owned the Olamarie he came and got me and my brother, it was like a couple weeks before school. They come up to the house on a Sunday, got me and my brother, we went all the way to Gloucester in his Cadillac, the boat, my father's boat was up on the railroad, railways, I think it was called Rocky Neck.

MHA: Oh yeah.

BB: It was a shipyard. So we get up there, we're scraping and painting, whatever. We thought we're going home at the end of the day. Nope. Sleep up on the boat, same clothes, next morning, get up, scrape, prime, paint. Thought we were going home that day. Nope. We got there Sunday. We were there Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. We left Saturday. We were there for the whole week on the boat. Brought no clothes with us, the boat, it was, he took us out to eat every night... whatever, how do you... 14, 15 years old and you're... I'll never forget

that. We got paid, but we never saw the money. My mother got it. She claims she bought school clothes. I'll never forget that. I even took pictures of it. I brought a camera with me and I took pictures of the boat on the rails. They were doing work on it. We just painted the wheelhouse, all the inside the wheelhouse and a few things here and there and inside for a whole week. Well, you haven't seen the book *The Dragger* yet?

MHA: No.

BB: I tell you what. Take a ride over there, and let's see if it's in my truck and you can look. You know I had it in there. I don't think I let anybody borrow it.

MHA: I'm going to turn this off now

BB: That's fancy!

MHA: Yeah!

BB: Is that yours?

MHA: No it belongs to the, actually they bought it with the grant...

[1:17:14] End of Audio