



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview: April 13, 2017

Jim Mercer~ Oral History Interview

Madeleine Hall-Arber

Jim Mercer. Interview by Madeleine Hall-Arber. *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront*. New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. Date of interview: April 13, 2017.

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Jim Mercer [JM]

Facts about this person:

Age 47

Sex male

Occupation diver

Residence Westport, MA

Ethnic background English, Irish, French-Canadian

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber [MH]

Transcriber: Amy O'Donnell [AO]

Interview location: New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center

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Key Words

propeller, zincs, boat bottom, barnacles, diver, diving, captain, commercial fishing boat, rope, fuel, dive shop, New Bedford, Westport, tautog, spearfishing, coolers, knives, scrapers, Fairhaven, search and rescue diving, dive training, dry suit, wetsuit, gloves, diving gear, diving certification, haul out, shipyards, intakes, sea chest, welding, valves, lazarette, wooden boats, settlement house, diving equipment, Guatemalans, dangerous, fuel, fishing community, dredge cable, quohogging, lobstering, dandelions

Abstract

Jim Mercer is a 47 year old diver on the New Bedford/Fairhaven waterfront. In this interview, he enthusiastically describes his job, how he became a commercial fishing boat diver, and why he enjoys his job and the waterfront community so much. He speaks about the importance of having a diver's assessment on the bottom of a commercial fishing boat and the process of doing an assessment. He describes the dangerous nature of the job and the satisfaction he receives from working in the New Bedford/Fairhaven fishing community.

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[00:00] Intro: Speaks generally about what he does, gives an overview of the work involved on diving for a commercial fishing boat, and the importance of his work. Speaks also to the fulfillment he gets from his job.

[05:00] Describes where he and his family grew up on the Southcoast and his ethnic heritage. Speaks about his family's history with swimming and recreational diving and the diving store that they owned and continue to operate in Fairhaven, MA. Talks about the recreational diving he does on vacation in the winter.

[10:00] Describes and details the process of the boat inspection in the water. Talks about inspecting the propeller and other areas of the underside of the boat for tangled rope and barnacles. Describes his equipment including the importance of sharp knives and scrapers. He explains how he communicates while under water with the fishermen on the boat.

[15:00] Expresses his enthusiasm for the complexity of the fishing industry. Speaks about his enjoyment of always learning new things while on the job. Details the types of boats he works on. Talks about the other divers on the waterfront. Briefly comments on search and rescue diving, salvage diving, and pumping out a boat that has sank.

[20:00] Speaks about the huge responsibilities of boat owners. Describes his huge responsibility to the boat owners he dives for. Details where he will travel to dive on a boat. Describes his wet suits.

[25:00] Talks about his gear. Describes gloves, wetsuits, and dry suits. Speaks about the importance of the condition and appropriateness of diving suits.

[30:00] Outlines the possible certifications for divers. Describes his certification. Talks about the importance of knowledge of boats to diving. Describes how he learned about boats.

[35:00] Explains the zincs on a boat and their importance. Speaks about how often boats have to haul out and reasons for hauling out.

[40:00] Speaks in detail about the zincs on the boats. Describes the boat cooling systems. Talks about blocking up holes, valves, and/or intakes on the boat bottom so that the internal systems can be worked on.

[45:00] Speaks about valve changes. Describes the lazarette on a boat. Talks about the difference working on wooden boats. Begins to talk about the difficulties of diving.

[50:00] Continues to talk about the challenges of diving on fishing boats, such as low water clarity after rain. Relates his system of remembering particular boat bottoms for when water clarity is poor. Describes the seafloor, talks about finding keys on the sea bottom. Begins to talk about his work hours/schedule.

[55:00] Continues to describe how he schedules his dives. Talks about working at the family's dive shop. Speaks about his family.

[1:00:00] Continues to talk about his family members. Outlines how he gets paid by the settlement houses. Talks about his respect for the settlement house “ladies.” Begins to talk about technology changes on the boats.

[1:05:00] Talks about improvements in technology for fishing boats. Speaks about his use of cameras and how he keeps up with diving technology improvements. Locates where he gets his knives. Speaks about fishing regulation days being cut and how it affects him.

[1:10:00] Explains how line cutters on a propeller work and how they may not work. Speaks about gender on the waterfront and a female diver he is aware of.

[1:15:00] Talks about a fisherwoman he knows. Speaks about the diversity of the New Bedford waterfront. States that most people speak English that he communicates with.

[1:20:00] Describes dangerous nature of the job when boats start up if he’s under a boat. Talks about how nervous he gets when his son dives.

[1:25:00] Gives a summary of what advice he would give to someone interested in diving on commercial fishing boats. Describes the incredible dangers of working on a propeller.

[1:30:00] Talks about his son’s job cutting trails for mountain bikes. Says that he doesn’t think other types of diving have industry associations. States that he never got into other types of diving.

[1:35:00] Speaks about and gives an example of nature of the community on the waterfront. Gives some ideas for an exhibit to illustrate what commercial fishing boat diving is about.

[1:40:00] Continues to describe useful items for exhibit. Speaks about the complexity of the fishing industry and gives examples. Talks about less draggers and the desire to maintain fish stocks.

[1:45:00] Talks about his experiences commercial fishing. Gives examples of local knowledge of fishing.

[1:50:00] Conclusion of interview.

[1:50:34] End of audio.

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Madeleine Hall-Arber: Okay. Is this --- It would help if I plugged it in! *[laughter]* There, that's better. I was wondering why it was so quiet all of a sudden. Okay. So, this is April 13, 2017, it's 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 shore side 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 the transcript will become part of the permanent collection at the Library of Congress. I'm Madeleine Hall-Arber and today I'm speaking with Jim Mercer at, well, it was at Tia Maria's but we're not at Tia Maria's, *[laughs]* we're at New Bedford Heritage Center. And the time is 10:20. So. Jim can you just introduce yourself?

Jim Mercer: James Allen Mercer, to be official.

MH: And what is your job?

JM: On a day to day basis I wait for phone calls, and take care of the fishing boats in the water. On the bottom, looking at propellers, the coolers, the intakes, the transducers, the zincs, and any other problems that they might run into along their trip.

MH: So what kinds of things are you looking for?

JM: Well, the obvious would be a rope in the propeller, which sounds simple to everybody else, but, a few extra barnacles, or any growth, or anything that possibly went through the propeller to disturb its function. Maybe like a bend, or something that wasn't there the last time.

MH: So is that how people know to call you? Something's just not right with a ---

JM: Yeah--- there's a checklist that the captains have, and it will just say diver on there, and the shore engineer will, will call me, or the owner will call me and say "Okay, you know, we got to check for the diver, let me know what everything's looking like."

MH: So there's no real clue, it's kind of a mystery for you?

JM: Yeah, it could be a mystery every time, every once in awhile they say, "Ok, the starboard side has a buoy attached to it," and I know to go look at that, get that buoy off of there. And the rope's attached to something on the bottom, or there's a wobble in the wheel and the propeller, and I'll know, okay, that's a pinpoint. But after that it's again, check the whole boat, just because you never know. Check the whole boat.

MH: So even if you find something that's obvious and you fix that, you still check everything out while you're down there?

JM: Yes. Yes. Yeah. Just to be sure. You know, it's got sometimes five or six, seven guys on it sometimes going out so something misplaced can be dangerous if we let it go. Or, if we didn't look at something and it dragged rope or whatever and it ended up by costing a lot more money in fuel---

MH: Right.

JM: Probably one of the biggest things is keeping the boat smooth on the bottom, making sure that they're not burning extra fuel, and that takes out on the seven guys that the trip they have to pay for the fuel.

MH: Sure. So how did you get started with this?

JM: Probably family business was a dive and ski shop.

MH: Oh!

JM: So my dad stuck me in the water and in the '70s, I remember getting into a wet suit with some soapy water and squeezing into it. And that was --- yeah the rest is just history. The first job I did was probably fourteen years old, I cleaned a couple of tug boats in Fairhaven, and that, I should have, that was a, that was a really tough job. I should have known [*laughter*] from that that it was going to be tough but I always just enjoyed the --- I enjoyed getting guys off and running. It's a good feeling when you, when you watch, watch, the boat go out and you just checked it and you know it's good, and so on. That being, being a necessity, is--- I mean anybody is, in life, would want it to be a necessity, it's--- it's needed. It's a much needed thing, it's not like they would they would, they got to

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call somebody else if I don't answer --- so yeah, it's a --- fulfillment end of it is, is nice.

MH: Yeah, yeah. Good. So we're going to back up for a few background questions first. Were you born here in New Bedford?

JM: Westport. I grew up in Westport.

MH: And when was that? When were you born?

JM: Nineteen seventy. Westport, Mass.

MH: Okay. And what is your family ethnic heritage?

JM: Let's see, we've been going back and forth with that. Probably French-Canadian Indian, and English and Irish. So.

MH: Have you ever done the swab to see ---

JM: My dad just did and he discovered that we're more Irish than... we were all laughing. [*laughter*] We're more Irish than what we thought. But, yeah. Pretty much English and Irish and hopefully the French Canadian's not too far off. My mom says, "We don't need the swab, that's what we are."

[*laughter*]

MH: So your parents are from Westport as well?

JM: Yes. Yes.

MH: And they grew up there?

JM: My dad grew up in Tiverton, from a long line of swimmers, they were all swimmers back in the day. Pictures of my dad's whole family, the whole gamut, from eight years old all the way to fifteen or sixteen, and all my aunts and uncles, they swam long distance.

MH: Wow.

JM: Yeah, which was --- it's pretty, it's pretty impressive. It's, it's, yeah they don't do that anymore. Neat stuff.

MH: Yeah, so, how did they get started with, well they were all swimmers, but what made them decide to go into the business?

MJ: My mom's brother, was a diver, and actually got my dad into diving in the, '60s. Sometime ---

MH: For recreational diving?

JM: Yep, they said, let's open up a store, and then my dad started teaching, sometime in the fifties, he was a dive instructor, and then that turned into many stores and then it kind of shrunk back down to the Fairhaven store. Fairhaven I think was, '67, '66 possibly? On Main Street in Fairhaven? And then, yeah as it got you know my brother and I got older, and it got bigger, and we needed to get into the different seasons, and got into skiing, and the diving always stayed, it's always been the draw of the area. Being so many different, having so many different water seasons, it's really fun, there's the recreational diving, there's tautog in the spring, there's striper that come in in the summer, there's spearfishing, there's plenty of treasure hunting around here, and all different clarities, all the time you can swing to the Cape to get some cold clear water in the middle of the summer. It's a pretty unique area, the Northeast is fun, fun to dive.

MH: Have you ever been outside of the Northeast diving?

JM: Yes, yes. I go on vacation every year. The boats lose their days and their season sort of ends January and February, which is lucky for me, because I don't have to dive so often ---

MH: Yeah! [laughs]

JM: Because it's super cold, but I go on trips down south, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica. I also surf along with spearfish, so yeah, my mask and snorkel always come with me, goes with me wherever I am. This year I traveled to Samoa, in the Pacific ---

MH: Really?

JM: Absolutely beautiful, yeah, it's funny, you know I have extra stuff, dive belts, and dive gloves and whatnot. I'm always bringing the stuff just in case. And I met another diver, who spear fishes for the village in Samoa, and I practically brought him to tears, just giving him a weigh belt, some extra gloves, and yeah, it was kind of a good feeling, it was what my dad would have done if he had brought the dive groups down there. Because we traveled with the store, we traveled to a lot of different destinations, especially the Caribbean. All over the Caribbean actually, just diving in the

[10:00]

super clear water in the summer, in the winter rather, and, kind of breaks up the, breaks up the winter.

MH: Right! I would say.

[laughter]

JM: It's a must.

MH: Yes! So, the most common task that you perform is ---

JM: I would say just an inspection, make sure that the propeller hasn't got rope tangled in it, it's, it's yeah, it's the first thing that I look at is the propeller. After that it would be, a good look at the coolers, so the, a lot of the larger boats if you see them out of the water they have these --- it's basically a radiator. It's outside the boat, and it's very tough to paint because it has to disperse heat and if you paint it, it bothers the heat dispersion and the barnacles love to grow on it. Barnacles or worms or mussels or whatever you might have would bother the cooling and it -- the engines have all sorts of sensors and they're constantly telling the captain if it, if it's at all over the mark to get the diver to look at it and that goes on his checklist. So it would be propeller, then the coolers, and then sometimes the obvious stuff, changing pipes on the inside, changing valves on the inside of the boat, they need me to block up the vents, stand by, they block them, they fix them, I'll take the blocking off, and then let it --- see how everything works for them, on the inside.

MH: So what kinds of equipment to you normally take down with you, when you go under?

JM: Well I have a lot of trusty knives; I probably purchase four or five knives a week, because I found that trying to sharpen is just a waste of time. You need a nice new sharp knife. Unfortunately. To, A, get the job done quicker, and you know, to know when I get down there, okay there's this amount of rope, all right I'm going to need this amount of knives, and it's, then it's consistent that way. Or if I have a different knife or even maybe something will work better, then my, my times are off. I try to spend an hour on a boat. Every once in awhile it goes to two hours, it can be --- I'll know when I get down there, okay there this amount of rope, I can't see the propeller, it's going to be more than an hour. So yeah, knives... there's a whole array of scrapers that I have that that get the job done, some of them, some of them look a little funny they've been bent up pieces of metal that I found work. It, unlike, like a paint scraper scraping a house, they need to be a little bit stronger because barnacles are really stuck on, and working under water you need to, you need a little bit smaller, scraper circumference, that way I'm not getting tired. Sometimes two or three boats a day, will just beat you up and make you exhausted for the following day, so ---

MH: Sure. So how do you communicate, when you go down to check out what's going on, and say you have to block it up for them to do the pipe thing, do you have a set amount of time? Or is there some way to communicate?

JM: There's usually a set amount of time, there's always an --- in that case there's always an extra guy and believe it or not I can hear them talking when they're inside the boat. They can't

hear me talking obviously because I'm under the water but a quick knock, or a couple of knocks and they bang back usually, usually way too loud. They knock back and then we come up and say, you know, is it working? Yeah, whether it's working or not. We'll go back down and try to fix the vent, and try to fix the block and get things rolling.

MH: Sounds interesting.

JM: It is! It is, it's a

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unique job and it's what I like. What I like is discovering other jobs like, you know everybody knows that there's a painter, and everybody knows that there's a wire guy, and there's, but there's --- it's endless it seems like, as long as I have been doing it, I'm like, oh! That's what that guy does! And it's another quirky little thing that, that gets a ten million dollar boat up and running to go get you know, two hundred thousand dollars worth of scallops or fish or whatever you might have. It's a, it's unique, it's a pretty neat industry to be in.

MH: Yeah, it's one of the things I've loved about studying the fishing industry. It's just --- people have no idea.

[laughter]

JM: No! None at all! And just yesterday I drove down the docks and I was trying to describe to somebody what the doors did. What do you mean those go in the water? And you look at the things and you go, oh, it's just a fishing boat, and yeah they don't go out with a hook and a worm! [laughter] It's a little more complicated. And the guys that do fish I don't even think, unless they took somebody out with them and explained it word for word as they were doing it -- - it's, it's complicated.

MH: Yeah. Yeah.

JM: It's not something that you just pick up on, the guys that have been doing it, have been doing it for many years, they --- first they welded on the docks, and then they --- helped clean the boat, then, and then you get a job on the boat, and then you know you're still a green fisherman for a little while, but the guys, that most of the guys that are captains, did all those jobs to work up to, to work up to captain. You know you don't just like walk on a boat and become a captain.

MH: Yeah.

JM: Neat. Neat stuff.

MH: So do you end up working on both trawlers and scallop boats?

JM: Yes. Lobster, trawlers, occasional recreational boats, scallop boats ---

MH: Clam boats?

JM: Yep, yep. Yeah there's... when the, when the guy calls, I know whether it's a scallop boat or a clam boat or whatnot, but if somebody calls that I don't know I'm on my way, whether what

kind of boat it might be, it doesn't matter. Most commercial boats, they're going to get taken care of.

MH: So are there many other divers around?

JM: Yeah, there's a fair amount of divers. It's kind of funny, a lot of them my dad has taught through the years. We all know each other, we're all super friendly with each other, there's no, there's no hard feelings you know, you understand that you can't be there all the time. They all dislike me because I go on vacation in February and they have to cover my jobs. *[laughter]* But, that's okay, but --- a cool neat group of guys, some of them are firemen, some are policemen, they, they are all, we're all on board with the same thing, just trying to get the job done, and get people on their way, you know?

MH: Have you ever had, had to help recover somebody?

JM: No. Not in the recovery business. My dad told me about when he first started, they, they asked him and he tried it once and he said, no, no, no. He said, "From now on I'm going to teach. I'll teach all the policemen and the firemen and *they* can go do that because that's what their job is." So yeah, I've helped train some of the guys for search and rescue but not, not actually going and going and done it. Just to make sure it's orchestrated correctly, they have a super large amount of training that they do and practice dives and sometimes it's as small as finding a coffee cup and they, they find it, because it's eight guys and they grid things out, and ---

MH: Wow.

JM: Yeah. Neat but never got into that.

MH: Yeah.

JM: Never got into that. Salvage stuff, I did get into boats that sunk. I kind of got my name on the books for such stuff cause you know, boats sink right at the dock, and then all of the sudden guys are saying, "Who is this guy?" You know, you're saving the day, blocking stuff up, and pumping the boat out, making it float again

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and get that off and on their way.

MH: Yeah. It amazes me, I mean I know that boats sink and they are able to bring them back up and get them working again, but it, it, when you are land based, it's hard to imagine that something can really---

JM: Yeah.

MH: --- be recovered. *[laughs]*

JM: There's a lot of --- if you --- I always, you know I got a few boats in my yard, and I'm always working on boats, and then diving on boats, but I, I envy the guys that have --- that own five boats, and they're in their coveralls and they have a checklist of five boats that they have to go through, a tremendous responsibility of --- fifteen or twenty, maybe even thirty or forty guys

that go out on those boats. Checking and rechecking intakes and valves and engines, and just changing oil to --- for the small easy stuff that we would understand.

MH: Mm hmm.

JM: You know the motors need oil changes. Some of some of the engines on the boats are thirty and forty years old because somebody changed the engine oil every time they went out, back and forth. So that the list that they have, maybe it's on a piece of paper, maybe it's just, in their head, taking care of stuff and making it- making it come back to port is tremendous. That gives me, that gives me, the go- to you know, when they call, I get right there, I- and then I'm off their checklist. They know what the bottom looks like, they know everything's okay. If it's not okay, I tell them and, you shoot them off but checklists are very important. There's a lot of, there's a lot of thought that goes into how much work and hopefully they have a life other than that but it's, I don't know if I --- it's a large, large amount of work. And head work to make sure stuff is okay.

MH: So do you confine most of your work in the New Bedford/Fairhaven area or do you go farther afield?

JM: Funny you say that. Just couple days ago I was in Wickford. One of the tugboats that was in New Bedford had a job at a marina over the winter. They dredged out the marina, and he was there for an extra long period of time. The marina couldn't haul him cause he's too big of a tugboat and he said, he called me up and he said, "Jim, I got to have you come down, do you mind coming to Wickford?" So occasionally I'll, I'll run to Wickford, or Connecticut, or couple boats in Hyannis that I take care of, but I try to stick close to New Bedford/Fairhaven. When I'm called it's usually twenty minutes that I got to, I got to get there in twenty minutes. That way I'm off the checklist, that way they can move on to the next oil change or whatever it might be.

MH: Right. And how does the way --- you mentioned the dry suit, can you just describe what kind of suit you wear and what time of year?

JM: Yeah. Well the suit thickness goes by millimeters. Let's see, I have a seven mil dry suit which is the thickest, and that would be up until about now, which is April. I'll be taking that off shortly, hopefully, but right now I'm in my warmest drysuit. I can wear regular clothes or maybe some like thick pajamas underneath, and that's going to keep me pretty comfy. Water can't touch me. If I have a little cut in the glove, which usually the gloves are three fingered mitts, it's seven millimeter. If I have

[25:00]

a little cut in the glove I need a new pair of gloves. And I'll, I'll save them for later. And then as it warms up, I'll go to six mil, and a five mil, and a four mil. I got the whole, the whole gamut. End up with a lot of suits, end up with a lot of gear. When it, when it comes down to it, if something's wet and cold from two or three hours ago, I'll put the warm dry one on, so that I know that I'm going to be safe and warm for the next job. In case it runs into a little bit of time. So that in the summer I'll finally get to the wet suits, and the wet suits can be pretty thin, same millimeters, four millimeters but wet, and I'm safe. If I go too thin, I end up poking myself with barnacles because they can cut right through the neoprene.

MH: Huh!

JM: Yeah, they're durable, and I burn through those also, probably two or three suits a year, with the wet suits, depending on if I get a tougher job that really beats them up, but it, some jobs I go, okay, it's time to get a new suit.

MH: Yeah.

JM: That way I'm happy going to the next one. There's no reason to be cold and miserable doing your job. It's got to be, some of my friends have been like, "Well it looks like a really nice suit!" They can't --- well I got to spend six hours in it today so it's got to be nice! It can't be ratty.

MH: Yeah. So do you go by the temperature of the water or do you just know the season?

JM: Yeah, I'm in it so much, from day to day, if I'll get a warm day outside in the colder season I can go to a thinner suit, but April/May it starts to warm up and I'll start to see my jellyfish that are a telltale sign of warming up and I know I can, I know I can go and look at that suit that's been in storage all winter and say "okay, I'm getting ready to use you pretty soon." And if it's a real warm day I have to jump down to a cooler suit because you can overheat also very easy. Seven mil, dry, it's very cumbersome, and if you have to do a lot of work with it, it can make you overheat fast.

MH: Can you describe the difference between a wetsuit and dry suit? I mean ---

JM: Yeah.

MH: Seems obvious, but ---

JM: Yeah, seems obvious but it's funny but the dry suits have a --- sometimes they look like a bag. They call them bag suits, looks like a bag; it's real heavy nylon. And a dry zipper across the back, with, with seals on the wrist and neck, and usually boots attached. I use a neoprene dry suit, which are much, they look like a wetsuit, but there's a layer in between the neoprene that's pressed and completely waterproof. All the seams are sewn and extra glued. Same zipper across the back with seals on the wrist and neck. The hood --- my hair will get damp. The hoods aren't really completely dry but I have a full face mask that doesn't let, again, doesn't let any water, no water touching me.

MH: Really?

JM: Yeah. So I get wet on the hands, and damp on the head and everything else is, unless I poked a hole in it, everything -- when I'm getting out of the water I'm completely dry. And just go with the clothes I have on. A wet suit, much different. Snug fitting. Most, most people know wetsuits are snug fitting, the water warms up in between you and the suit, and you keep that water in there to keep your warmth. Less cumbersome, way more mobility in a wet suit. Thank God because the summer I'm usually busy and I'm in and out of, up and down ladders a lot more than in the winter, so I'm not as tired with a wet suit. Wet suit season is coming up soon, and I kind of can't wait for it.

MH: Do you have to have any kind of certification?

JM: Yeah, yeah- you definitely need --- having my dad as a dive instructor growing up,

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and then myself being an instructor Dive Con Helper, it's like a dive instructor helper, there was so many people that are instructors allowed in a class. Let's say the number is six, and if you go to seven, you don't want to turn that person down, but if you have a Dive Con Instructor Helper with you, you can go to seven or eight ---

MH: I see.

JM: Yeah just pretty much, all the way to the certification, all the way to teaching. It's Open Water Diver, Advanced Open Water Diver, you go through all your specialties, Specialty with Search and Rescue, and then Dive Con Helper. Yes, you need a, some sort of certification to get your tank fills, but as far as diving underneath the boats- a lot of knowledge and no certain certification for it, but a lot of knowledge and a lot of --- you're talking to people that own sometimes multiple tens of millions of dollar boats, and I've always said this, that they know who they're talking to, and they want the job done, and they see through any kind of phoniness. You know they know that I'm, I'm giving them an honest answer, I'm really looking at the boat. If they want video and pictures I get them that. If they want the rope that I cut out I get them that. It's- it's an anything type of call when they do call. No, no certification for diving underneath the boats but I do- but I have had certifications in the past. Plenty of them.

MH: Have you ever run into anybody else trying to do the boats that really doesn't know what they're doing?

JM: No, what you got to realize is the boats, I'll say this, the guy -- some people take their car to the wrong mechanic. These guys that own these boats are definitely not dummies. And I've said it before but I'll say it again, they see through B.S. So they know, and they might appease somebody and actually give them money to go and look at it, but shortly after they're calling me or somebody that's dove for them before that knows what they're talking about. It's a lot of lingo, and a lot of stuff- different words. I have a friend of mine that writes books, she says, "What was that word you just used? [*laughs*] I mean it's kind of funny and I said, "Oh it's a nozzle." She says, "Where's the nozzle on a boat?" Yeah, it's a- there's different things you have to know and the owners know them, and it's second nature to us, but some people just don't know that stuff you can't go and dive on a boat without the knowledge.

MH: So did you learn that terminology from your father?

JM: Let's see. From my dad, from just wanting to know about the boats, and growing up- the store was, about two blocks from Kelly's shipyard, which is now Fairhaven shipyard. And walking by a boat out of the water, anybody quickly learns that there's a lot of stuff under there and it's not just a big smooth boat with a propeller. There's rudders, and court nozzles, and zincs, and you got to ask a lot of questions, when I was a little guy I would ask those questions, and they always just stuck.

MH: Huh.

JM: Yeah, what makes the propeller spin, and simple stuff. You know some guys are into the tractors, and whatnot, but I was always into the boats, the bottom of the boats.

MH: What are zincs?

JM: Zincs are sacrificial metal that's connected to a big steel hull, so that the steel

[35:00]

doesn't corrode. The zincs corrode hopefully within a couple of years. They get, they get low and they need to be replaced. It's usually about the time that they have to haul out. But occasionally with all the work that's going on, and different docks have different currents, under the water, so good boat, bad boat, and then your boat's in between and salt water conducts...

MH: Right.

JM: So, the zincs get eaten a little bit faster than normal and they need to be replaced.

MH: Oh my goodness.

JM: Yeah like a twenty-four pound plate of zinc, and I believe zinc is nickel and lead. And it's, it's softer and gets eaten before the steel does, before the brass propeller. You know, a lot of people, it's kind of funny, a lot of people don't realize that numbers on a fancy propeller nowadays is in upwards of seventy or eighty thousand dollars. And you know, most people don't spend that on their boats, but alone the propeller for your boat! So you keep, you keep that, you keep looking at that. You have the diver look at it while you can't, you know two years is a long time to not see the bottom ---

MH: Yeah.

JM: --- If you want a picture of it, then the diver gets you a picture, or sometimes I'll take the zinc off and I'll go "Okay, this is what it looks like," and they have a piece of mind and they can move on to their list.

MH: Right. So have you noticed- I know that in the past that people hauled their boat practically every year, before the blessing for example. Now people aren't doing it as frequently, right?

JM: I think that the schedule, is about a year and a half to two and a half years? A haul out can cost I'd say twenty to seventy thousand dollars depending on what you're doing. So, there has to be money in the bank to complete such a task. They make stuff- paint jobs, when they do paint it up, zincs, when they add zincs, they make stuff last a little longer for different guys. Some guys have not quite double the zincs, but they got an exorbitant amount of zincs. Different boats will sandblast the bottom every ten years, instead of every fifteen, and it's taking care of a vessel that's making them money, so they're putting money back into it. I don't think it's been any different. I think probably from recreational boating, yeah, they're going to haul out every year because they're not staying in. But the shipyard's got its hands full, there's always boats above and then in the summer it seems like a lot of fancy boats will come in and they try to separate the two shipyards. And they're busy. And a lot of people don't realize, New Bedford's a port that's known, there's a few shipyards in Gloucester whatever, but there's a whole another couple of four or five ports that travel here just to get hauled out, just to get worked on, because they can handle

the size of the boat. And then you can go to four to five different guys to weld on it. You can go to you know whoever's not busy to get it done quicker in case their days are coming up and they need to head out there quicker.

MH: Right.

JM: Yeah, a lot of service, you know, along with the diver that comes within twenty minutes! *[laughter]* And gives him bad news that they have to haul out! *[laughs]* But yeah, they- there's a lot. It's a busy little- it's a busy little beehive.

MH: The zincs are attached near the propeller?

JM: All over the boat. Near the propeller, there's a little bit more than further up, but further up the coolers will have their own zincs

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and then next to the coolers will be zincs, next to intakes, sometimes in intakes there'll be zincs. So any of the water that's going in is not corroding any of the parts on the inside. There's a --- on a sixty, seventy foot boat there's probably in the neighborhood of forty to fifty zincs, strewed throughout.

MH: Huh. I didn't realize that. Now the intakes are for water?

JM: Yeah, some engines run on raw water to cool them, some engines have the coolers to cool them. So water would be some engines and any kind of wash down, any kind of- anything to keep the boat clean would be a wash down pump. Let's see what else --- mostly wash down stuff. And they're bigger holes than what they need to be sometimes. It's a spooky thing, you got an eight inch sea chest, which is just kind of like what you'd imagine it to be, a pretty big box underneath the boat and then from that box there will be a setup for a pipe for a wash down pump and a pipe for a toilet or a pipe for a sink. Something to cool an engine, four or five pipes off of a sea chest, so that there's not, so that there's always enough water feeding those systems, they'll have a pretty good sized hole. They try to keep it down to just one hole, but it's usually a little bit bigger one.

MH: Huh. It surprises me that they use intake for- of seawater for cooling the engine because I would have thought that corrosion would be an issue.

JM: Some engines, not all of them, but they'll have a heat exchanger, so raw water is constantly running through an exchanger that has antifreeze inside of it.

MH: I see.

JM: Yeah, a little bit, a little bit tricky. I just know boats. *[laughter]* So you got raw water going in and out and it never touches antifreeze or oil or anything. It's just going in and out and across these little fins ---

MH: I see.

JM: ---similar to the coolers on the outside, but just an internal system.

MH: Now do you ever, do they ever have problems with a hole that feeds the sea chest?

JM: Yeah. Yeah. And I'm always- I show up sometimes I show up with my suit on, sometimes it's off, but the first thing I do if I know we need to change one of the valves out on a sea chest, the first thing I'm doing is going in the boat, finding out right where it is, how big, how much work they got, if they got all the parts and pieces, lined up, and these guys got a pretty good sized list so they're they are usually spot on with that. But they can run into- they can run into trouble like, okay, we need to weld that so it needs to be completely blocked up. You need to have a metal shield on whatever's blocking it. Because you just can't put like, let's say a plastic bag to block up a small pipe if they're going to start welding. The drips are going to ---

MH: A little melt? *[laughs]*

JM: Yeah, so you're going to mix the- make a problem there. So yeah, I'm down there and I figured the job out in my head and how it's going to go, and then I go underneath. It's like the easy part for me is to go underneath, check the different intakes, see what it might be. Sometimes there's little tiny holes, or sometimes there's a grate that can be removed, so I remove the grate, put a large balloon inside and blow it up, stop the water, and then they can work and do their thing. Tap, stand by, a little excess water spills out, they tap back, everything's okay, come up top side to the guy that's hanging overboard, and I say "Okay, is everything alright?" And he goes and checks with them, and we get another okay, and then I get out and watch them do it.

MH: Uh huh.

JM: So that I'm learning, all the time. It might be a- it might be a huge valve, or I don't know how they get them

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to match up sometimes, but there's these big old valves that are- you know are two or three or five bolts and they, they line them up just right and get that same one to go right back in there. They need them to- the Coast Guard needs them to turn on and off freely, all the time- so as soon as they get a little sticky they replace them. And that's another thing, you know people always say, throw another thousand dollars at a boat. It's easily six, seven hundred dollars for a small valve, and small I mean like six or four or five, six inches, and sometimes these valves are ten inch. They're very expensive you know the whole crew of guys that are there helping to replace it along with the diver. There's sometimes- that alone is a, is an exorbitant course, cost of just a valve change.

MH: Right, right. When- when- where- how might I ask this question? I've heard of a lazarette, and I know that that can be a problem sometimes with leaks. Is that the same thing that we're talking about, going into the sea chest?

JM: No, there's not usually a sea chest in the lazarette. A lazarette's just the back half- if it's partitioned, and if there's a couple of hatches, that's the requirements for the word lazarette. So it needs to be partitioned from the very back of the boat and usually the rudder post and it's just usually the rudder post. The rudder post comes up out of the lazarette, and all the working pieces for the rudder which you know makes the boat move, is back there and there's- it's usually kept

very clear, because you don't want anything disturbing the rudder. That's how they steer the boat- so if was in rough seas and they had stuff piled up around it, it would you know, fall and disturb it. But that's kept really clear, most of the time, when I'm dealing with rudder problems in the lazarette I'll go down inside the lazarette and they say, "All right, we need this to be on center." Because they're not sure where the rudder is. And it's a super fun easy job for me, cause I go down and I say "Okay! It's at one o'clock or it's at eleven o'clock, or it's hard over, and they just they spin it sometimes- I move it to where it's center, they mark it, and then they go from there. Rudder posts are not usually leaking. They're, they're usually pretty sealed up back there. They got that down pretty well. That's a- it's a good size hole if the rudder was to come out but there's too many failsafes for it to do such a thing. Sea chest is usually in the engine room. That way you can feed the water systems right from, right from the engine room; they keep it all, keep it all there.

MH: So have you worked on old wooden boats as well as the metal? Steel?

JM: I have, I have. I have worked on old wooden boats. Whole different thing comes into play usually with the old wooden boats. The guys looking for plank rot of any kind. Or damage that's rubbed up against-- yeah, other than just looking around for too much wear and tear, they're, they're fairly similar. Sometimes the wooden boats have a different structure, so the engine room's further back- but most of them, most of the time it's fairly similar.

MH: Hm. Okay, let's see. So, you talked about a number of things about what you like about the job. What is the hardest part?

JM: What is the hardest part. The hardest part is- having right about now when the water needs to be warmer [*laughter*] and it should be getting warm soon but it, it doesn't seem like it wants to! And I'm just back from a warm tropical place. It's- there's, there's not too many really hard parts. I dislike when it rains

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and the water clarity is very dirty. The reason for that is not because I'm scared of the dark or anything, it's- I can miss something very easily. You know when the visibility is- you got to look at a seventy or eighty foot boat, on the bottom, and it's- the visibility is two feet and I have two lights with me. I can easily swim by an intake or a cooler, and I know a lot of the boats. I always, I kind of have little rhymes that go with different boats and, and you know. The- the Frontier for instance, has a- it has a cooler that's as large as a frontier. It's huge and it's really hard to clean, and I go uh-oh. I have little rhymes like that that go in different boats but knowing all the boats is next to impossible. So when the water is very dirty, I dislike it because I can miss something. You hate to miss something, and I ask more questions when I come up, just in case, because I say, "Hey, the water's dirty. What can we do? You know, how many coolers this boat might have?" Or anything that'll clue me in which they usually know. So "five coolers" and I'll go count them all, check them all. I've done jobs before the guy says, "You know it has two propellers?" and I was like, "What!" I only looked at one! Because the visibility is so bad that I've swam right by the other propeller and it just seems absurd. But then I remember, "That's the boat with two propellers!" [*laughter*] It's Vila Nova do Corvo II so it has two propellers! So I make sure we look at both of them next time! My little rhymes!

MH: Do you ever just out of, or interest, see the bottom and like, not just the boat, but the sea floor and see what's going on there?

JM: Fairhaven's fairly shallow when it's- when it's clear. I'm always- Fairhaven I'm always touching the bottom whether it's clear or not. But when it's clear I can definitely see, take a good look at the bottom. A lot of the boats are probably in the neighborhood of ten foot draft which at the very bottom of the boat it's ten feet. And they're in twelve feet of water sometimes. So there's a little space underneath you can kind of wiggle through. And they're not bouncing up and down so that's not really dangerous. I've never put myself in a dangerous position either. It's all dangerous, but there's double checks and rechecks, and a lot of stuff to make sure I come out and do the next job. But yeah the bottom's pretty interesting. There's a lot of stuff on the bottom. If I had to- if I had to say it right off the bat I'd say it looks like a junkyard. There's plenty of fish and whatnot living around on the bottom. There's plenty of seals, cleaning up the fish. Yeah the bottom's neat. The bottom is an interesting area. Occasionally guys will have me find keys or phones [*laughter*] and those are always fun jobs because I usually show up and hold my breath and if I know the dock real well I show up and hold my breath and I'm done in fifteen seconds. And the other guy's like- you wouldn't believe how happy somebody could be that I found their keys. I always tell guys, just keep a big something on the keys. Don't do- a single key would be impossible to find ---

MH: Right!

JM: As long as it's a big clump of keys and a majority of the guys that I find keys for have more keys than I have cars, that's for sure. They have a large clump of keys!

MH: And what kinds of hours do you normally work? I know you said you try to keep each boat to about an hour, but say in a course of a day, or in the course of a week?

JM: In the course of a week, I'm happy with- I'm happy with two boats a day. That would have a nice ring. Because of weather, it doesn't work like that. Because of weather, and when they're going in and out, and when they are losing days, and sometimes

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some of the guys are really late. Like, "I just went through the dike, but I need you to come and look." Or very early like, "Hey! Next Tuesday the boat's going out so you can look at it any time in between." So I schedule, I say, oh good, I can schedule that boat. Hopefully it's on a slower day. Where- when there's good weather and everybody's fishing I'll be- I'll have a fairly busy day. Weekly, I would say, twelve hours, which doesn't seem like much, but that's just the water time, that's not the heading down. And twelve boats weekly are- they, they keep me out of trouble. But it can rain. Sometimes I don't do boats three days in a row, so I keep myself busy with my own boats. Sometimes just helping people with their boats. That's my other half.

MH: Do you ever work in the store?

JM: I used to work in the store, I tell people I'm retired from retail. I worked from when I was eleven years old to thirty-three, which was 2003 I stopped completely working in retail. It's, it's nice, I miss it a little bit, and I occasionally, I don't get paid but occasionally I'll swing through when I'm filling my scuba tanks at the store, and help my brother out. He's in the weeds, and

there's too many people around and I'll clear this guy out or clear that guy out or just watch for, watch for people going in and out for him, and especially around the busy times. But no, I try not to, I try not to work retail. My sister and I have a funny joke and, we said, nope, no more retail for us! She worked retail forever and now she's a schoolteacher and she says it's so nice not doing anything on Saturday! *[laughs]* It's so nice just going yard sailing, not having to go open up the store, you know?

MH: So how did it that your brother ended up doing the work?

JM: Um, my brother's a little bit older than me, he always had a passion for the store, and I was, I started, let's see, I started in ninety-three- I started commercial fishing for myself, and in the summers. So I kind of picked and choose when I wanted to work, so I always got that hashtag. That's fine, yeah I didn't really want to get into the retail thing, it was being around it so much, and having- putting heart and soul into it and realizing, you don't really get that much out of it, I said no, I got to do, do something else for myself. So winters were at the store, and then summers were commercial fishing for myself, and I started that in ninety-three, and just I, I kept up with that. I think the store would have been- the store would have been nice if we went into, I would have stayed if we went into different avenues. But just sticking with the skiing and the diving, he did the college and the business thing so he ended up with the store and I- I went on my way, but it was fun, it was nice to do.

MH: So you have two, a younger brother and a sister, you have any others?

JM: I have two sisters, one brother.

MH: Ah-ha! What does your other sister do?

JM: My other sister is a dance studio owner. She owns like an onstage academy of performing arts in Fall River. And occasionally I've helped her out. That's another super happy thing to do. She had a- she recently just did Peter Pan and I was kind of bummed out because I only got to make a walking stick and a bow and arrow that looked fancy onstage and it worked out well because I made it- I made it extra fancy but in years past I did Peter Pan and I was the alligator, across stage in a big costume. My sister's love is teaching kids and she's been doing it, I think thirty-five years and it's funny now some of her

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first dance kids are bringing their kids in, she's like "Oh this is really neat!" She has many girls that are doctors and lawyers and they've done really well. She's done really well with it.

MH: That's really nice.

JM: Yeah, yeah. My younger sister's a schoolteacher and, same thing, puts her heart and soul into it. Our dad taught us to put heart and soul into everything so --- you know he'll call me up and I'll be talking and I'll say "Okay, I got to talk to this owner" and before I can say bye he's already hanging up he'll say "Okay! I'll let you go!" *[slams hands]* And it- you know, he knows that he knows that an owner means business so ---

MH: Yeah.

JM: He knows the business thing and it's, it's like, go, he's telling me to go without even having to say it. "Okay I'll let you go!" And he's already hanging up. I say, "So I only saw him, he was coming, I thought he was going to approach me!" The weekly- the daily conversation with my dad gets interrupted by an owner, a boat owner.

MH: So how do you get paid? Does the owner pay you directly?

JM: No, no. I got my trusty slip book. I'll get a slip out to the settlement house ladies, and the settlement house puts me in their little file as the next trip, and once the next trip all that stuff gets paid for, or the trip before. Some of them- it's, it's hard when I first started doing it, thank God I knew the business end of things. But some people pay thirty, sixty, ninety days, and some people pay quarterly, so there's, you know, guys will scream and cry, "I'm not getting paid!" But they- they're still here, they're going to pay. Some are a little bit longer than others, that's another neat thing, there's one, two, three, four, I think five, settlement houses, and I think boats have their own in different places, that I have to email or whatever. But I'll write out my slip and they want, a lot of them want a detailed slip. That way they're reminded again, or they can look back at it- a detailed slip of what I did, what I looked at, what the zincs were. That way they can check back if something's going bad fast or what they were the last time the diver looked. They go out to the settlement house and the settlement house ladies just mail me a check.

MH: Are any of the settlement houses easier to work with than others? Or are they all about the same?

JM: Oh no, they're all super nice. And if I said that one of them was bad, I wouldn't get paid! No- *[laughter]* it's a- it's a good part of the day. You get to go and josh around with the ladies. I'm a big flirt so I flirt with the ladies and they're always super nice and helpful. If there's a boat that they might not even take care of, they know how to get the slip or the bill out to that boat, so that you know they're really, really knowledgeable as far as that stuff goes. Any question you ask them they'll help you. Just recently I needed some lawyer stuff written up and you know, I asked- I asked one of them and she had three people to write, write about and to talk to about a write up, for a will and whatnot, and I was like, wow they're anything ladies. They know their stuff, but they will help you with anything and everything they can.

MH: Yeah, I have a great interview with one of them. Very knowledgeable, very friendly.

JM: Right. Right. They're- they're go to, they're go-getters. And you think about it, they're dealing with, I can't even wrap my head around what they have. I said, "Are you guys this boat? Are you guys that boat?" And they go "No," and they know the other, they know where it's going, because I'll forget occasionally you know ---

MH: Yeah. And has the technology changed over the years, in the way it's affected you in anything?

JM: Some of the newer diesel engines I would say that would be- that would be the first, the first thing that I felt

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was- the computers on the diesel engines are very- finicky, they have to be right at a certain temperature. So, the guy driving the boat, if that's a new engine to him, he's saying "Okay, this is overheating!" When it- probably there was more tolerance in the past and now he's now- going down looking at the cooler and I hope it wasn't a thing- it might have been a silly rope that made the you know just a small piece of rope that will make the engine overheat. So yeah, technology helps. As far as my gear goes, technology helps a lot. There's much brighter lights, there's way easier video equipment. I can hook up and email an owner in Florida a picture of his propeller, in, you know, while I'm still wet. So it's- that's nice.

MH: So do you use your phone for your video? Or do you have ---

JM: No, the phone will bluetooth to the camera, and the cameras- they work very well under dark conditions nowadays. Just the --- exactly what I'm seeing. And you know you can freeze frame stuff and just send pictures. I'll go and video the whole thing and then pull out what I need to get, to get the right shot.

MH: How did you learn how to do all of that?

JM: Oh, my recreation is surfing so I've always wanted to get a good shot of surfing, and underwater photo stuff is so much fun. Just taking pictures of fishes and whatnot. When I was in grade school I would- I always won the competition that the photo thing because I was the one with the underwater shot. So nobody else had one so it didn't matter what it was I think when you were in fifth grade it didn't really matter. I- I've always just kept in tune with that kind of stuff. Luckily my brother allows me to go along with him to the dive shows, to check out new equipment. Super, super fun. Very, just different things that I know, I know I can go back and go, oh if I need that, I can get it.

MH: Yeah.

JM: Underwater grinder. Underwater drill. Metal detectors that you know, just look like a flashlight. The stuff is constantly changing at these new shows. At these shows, the new stuff is- it's readily available. Any kind of photo equipment, anything that will help you out, get the job done, cutters and knives, sometimes. *[laughs]*

MH: Do you have any go to place for getting your knives? You said you get them so frequently?

JM: If I'm in Fairhaven the Euro store over there, and if I'm New Bedford side I'm at- I go to Luzo. So and sometimes the ship store right next to us here. The one that's right out here.

MH: Ship Supply?

JM: New Bedford Ship Supply, yeah. It's wherever I'm closest to- I got to get- I walk in with a wet suit *[laughs]* and the money in the hand, so.

MH: You mentioned a couple times about people using up their days. So has that affected you? The regulations on the boats?

JM: I'd like to say yeah. There was one year I kept track of stuff and I said the following year, I said, "I got less jobs this year as far as the commercial boats go but- I got more with the

recreation.” So I'm kept okay, but then what I noticed was different times of the year, I always thought like, "Oh July would be my busy." It's not the case. Different times of the year, and now I can almost graph- you can probably graph it around when the barnacles grow, and then when they lose their days the boats have to sit longer.

MH: Right.

JM: So if the boat's always moving around, it's going to be cleaner. And then they're going to call the diver. Because he's moving around and run stuff over and they're going to check things out. If the boat's sitting, they're going to call the diver after it's sat, and I'm going to put more time on the boat, because it has that much more.

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Yeah. There's a few- there's a few tools I can do to make things quicker, there's probably some super sanding grinder thing that will make the propeller like new, that I've been looking into and power washers and whatnot, but the amount of sanding and grinding that's done it is usually by hand is much more efficient.

MH: Mmm.

JM: *[laughs]*

MH: I was at the commercial marine expo in Rhode Island this year and the booth across from ours had- I didn't look at it closely, but it had some kind of device around the propeller to cut rope that got- so that it wouldn't get tangled.

JM: Yeah.

MH: Are you familiar with that?

JM: Yep, yep, they have line cutters and they'll work nice if it's one piece of rope, usually the lobstermen will have, a smaller lobster boat will have it. Basically two little knives that go by each other, when the propeller is spinning and cut the rope. And it works perfect if it's worn rope. If it grabs a rope, and then winds it on, it's- it's usually a mess for the diver. Because now I got obviously they're not spinning, but they are two big sharp blades that I'm cutting around --- *[laughs]* So there's a love hate relationship with those. They're nice because they get the guys home safely, possibly you know to get- get the one rope out, but I think, I think the larger boats have so much horsepower and so much bigger engines that they- there's less of them. And even the guys that are dealing with line all the time, like the long line boats, there's not many of them that have the cutters on them.

MH: Now how about gender? Have you noticed more or less women on the waterfront and have you ever been- has there ever been an issue that you are aware of? Are there any divers that are women?

JM: Yeah there's a lady in Newport that takes care of Newport, and Providence, and I believe she's travelled over this way. As far as I know she's not to be messed with because she shows up and she means business and she gets the job done. So anybody, I think in my line of work, you don't have to be the big strong guy, you don't have to be macho, you don't have to be girl or boy,

it's just you got to, you got to know to get out of the water when you're scared or when it's not safe. You got to know when it's not safe. You have to be scared. As far as being a boy or a girl I don't think it would matter at all. That- I'm trying to think of her name, the lady that dives in Newport is very busy, that's all she does, and I know, I haven't bounced into her but I know my cousin owns a boatyard, my cousin's husband owns a boatyard, and he uses her, and we'll talk at weddings and whatnot, and he says she is, she's no B.S., she's the real deal. On the waterfront, there's a, the ladies that make the bags, there's the ladies that clean, there's the ladies that shop and clean, which I'm friends with all of them. Rachel Erlandson, I've known forever, back in the eighties, we'd go skiing together, she knew about the store and her boyfriend was a, was a fisherman at the time, and we used to all go skiing together. So we always see each other and talk about our dogs, and she's awesome. There's never been, not that I know of, never been any problems with any of the ladies on the waterfront,

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is there more or less? Yeah there's probably more guys to girls but there's one fisherman lady that I know of, fisherwoman. She's mate on three different boats and she holds her own against any of the guys, as far as I've been told. Cutting, that on the scallop boats you have to cut fairly fast so, she's a just as fast a cutter, and that's not any you know, you don't need to be a big burly guy or anything like that. It's not a "man's only" business, definitely not. As long as you don't mind getting a little dirty sometimes.

MH: Yeah.

JM: Let's see. How about ethnic groups? Has that changed at all over time? That you've noticed?

JM: A little bit. I've noticed, I've noticed a few of the guys that run boats that are I believe Guatemalan captains, what, what happens is, I've seen the boat come back, and then they kind of, they kind of share more. Luckily there's no Guatemalan divers, but the five or six guys that he went out with, will unload the boat or whatever, or if one or two don't want to, there's two right there to back them up, and then a whole bunch to just clean the boat. So now you know, you're sharing duties with fifteen guys instead of seven and getting it done. That's all the owner wants anyways, just to get the job done. Yeah, it's a, it's diverse down here. It's funny, I went to the Whaling Museum, and I was listening to the movie that they have and they said, "And New Bedford in this time was a very diverse community." And I'm thinking to myself, well, they're not here now then, because it's still diverse! *[laughs]* With the whaling industry it was Cape Verdean and well now there's Portuguese and Polish, and Norwegian, and yeah Guatemalan, and there's, there's several boats and that have Dominicans and guys from the Dominican Republic and whatnot and that are all sharing the diversity. I think it's more love of the ocean, because it takes a strange person to do that, yeah it's, they're sharing the love. The Whaling Museum movie is funny: "There were so many different places." Yeah, there still is! There's so many different places that are here now, still a little melting pot.

MH: How about language? Is there, if there are a lot of Guatemalans or other South American Spanish speakers, is there, do- does most everybody speak some English at least?

JM: No. There's some, there's only a handful of guys that don't know English. There's plenty of guys that know- they're all speaking English to me. And, a few of the painters that I see, I'll pop up out of the water and you know I'll give him a, "Buenos dias!" and they'll laugh, they think it's funny, they're like, "Yeah, good morning," you know? *[laughter]* And, they're all good guys. Most, mostly English, mostly English speaking, there's never --- I have to communicate with a few guys just in case they're going to start engines or whatnot. The routine when I get down there is to check around, check six boats even though I'm only looking at one.

MH: Oh. Yes.

JM: Yeah. Because engines could be starting, it's just a generator, sound travels differently under water than it does on land, it's a twenty-five times faster and it's much louder, so that you know *[knocks twice]*, a simple knock on a hull is- it's loud. It sounds like you're inside of a drum.

MH: Well you mentioned danger, so that's one of the dangers, is if engines

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start nearby?

JM: Yeah, if they start nearby, I'll know it if they start nearby, but I'll also know if they start across the river also.

MH: Because it's loud?

JM: They're very big engines and they're really loud underwater. The distinct, they usually have a compressor that turns a giant air starter, they don't have a battery starter. So it's got this air tool sound to it. Even though it's a starter. *[makes an increasing pitch sound]* and oh, here it comes, and luckily it's not the boat you're working on, just a further, further away boat. But I'm, I'm in touch with owners, shore engineers, they know my car, they come over and say hi to my dog, it's- I feel very safe a lot of the time. And then if there ever was a close incident, that particular person now, is my closest friend to check on other boats, that and now he's like over, sometimes I show up, and I have to wait, not a big deal. Sometimes I show up and it's way too busy, it's a time where they're all going fishing, and I'll say okay, I'm going to go, I'm going to go somewhere else now, and I'm going to come back here later and I'm going to keep my eye on the area. Because after four, five o'clock, everything's died down, then that boat can get done. A lot of times it's everybody waiting, and then on the boat I'll take care of that boat, and now there's five guys looking out and they're "Okay, they're not- they're not going anywhere. Nope. That's where everybody's ready." They'll park where, they'll park the boat where there's boats around it where there's boats that aren't moving. They're not going to park in a busy place and then call the diver.

MH: Right.

JM: Yeah, everybody's super safe. There's always a conversation that goes something like "Okay, don't worry, nothing is starting, check this, this, and this. Don't worry, nothing is starting. " And it's repeated that way, you know I know nothing is starting, so if I do hear something it's not that guy, it's somebody else.

MH: Right.

JM: Boats just- boats going by sometimes I'll feel a little bit of a current. But no, I'm super cautious with that, because there's no, there's no going and fixing if you're going to get caught up in something like that, you're just gone. I'm super careful with it and there's probably a fifteen point checklist to dive on one boat at a time. Making sure with a lot of people that stuff's not going to be dangerous for me.

MH: So what are, for somebody starting out, what would you tell them, or what kinds of things-

JM: Not to do it! *[laughter]* It's funny- my son, has helped me in the past, and he was, he's on vacation a similar time that I am, and I've told him a couple of years ago, "You're not diving." He would take care of my boats if I was gone. And, I'd say, Okay. I'm far away, which I'm a nervous Nellie to begin with, and I'll call and this and this and this, and okay- he's going to dive, "Yeah everything's okay, yeah everything's okay." And then they're just like, ah, your dad's nervous, so I'm like, listen, call me right when you get out, call me right before you go in, call me right when you get out."

MH: *[laughing]*

JM: One time his friend called me, he's like "He's almost out of the water." I'm like "I don't want to know almost out of the water, I want to know when he's out of the water." It's, you get- you can't rush into things. I would tell the person getting into it, you can't rush into things. Go and hang out at- go and work at the shipyard, go and know what the bottom of the boat is. Have an interest in diving. Don't be scared of cold, dark places. Know your mind. There's books that people read, that people write about this kind of stuff but there's, there's certain comfort zones, and my comfort zone might be way more than

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other people's because I am diving under a boat that's the engine's running, but not for one second am I like, all right this isn't dangerous. I- I always know that it's dangerous, that what I'm doing is dangerous. That there's not too many other people that would do it. It's not that there's too many other people that will do it and stay with it, there's not too many other people that'll do it and stay comfortable. Because they're just, it's- it's a little bit spooky, and if you're not scared there's something wrong with you. That's why I've always you know, always related to. So anybody getting into it, just know your stuff, go super slow. It's so easy to miss a cooler, if it's not good visibility, or a scratch in the hull that you know they didn't know about, sometimes the captains switch boats and the owner will just call me and go, "Okay, before the new captain goes on there, I want to know if anything was left from the last captain." Because the new captain will find it.

MH: Right.

JM: Whatever it might be. So, you know. And I'll just check it, before the new captain goes on that particular boat, and the owner's got the thumb's up, and they- they go from there. Yeah it's a- know the boats, know the- be comfortable with the water, and then there's a whole gamut of funny personalities that you have to- *[laughs]* that you have to- I'm sure you've interviewed

enough of us! We're all pretty quirky! And there's a whole gamut of personalities that you got to, you got to play. I don't say play, I'm myself, and I'm a likable guy. I think my dad instilled that in me working in the store and talking to people. It always came easy to me to start up a conversation, and just grab some cough drops later cause your throat hurts from talking too much! *[laughter]*

MH: So what is the- probably the most dangerous aspect of your job?

JM: The most dangerous. Every day is pretty dangerous. Every day. It's not- it's not easy, I say this lightheartedly, but it's- they say, "Go and check the propeller," and I'm not staying five feet away I'm not staying ten feet away, I'm not staying' two feet away, I'm basically making love to a propeller. I'm wrapping myself around it, I'm looking at it in every little aspect possible: there's four blades, and five blades, and three blades, and looking at the blade edges, and if it's- if somebody turned an engine on, it's like a- it's a blender. It's not, you know, it's a- *[laughs]* every day is dangerous, and I don't take it light hearted, I'm like, that's my --- Before, when I get the call- it's such and such a boat, I'm already reviewing in my head what the last time I was there, was there a bad thing that happened, was there maybe a bad thing? Is it, is it on a scale of one to ten being dangerous where I think, they're all seven to ten. Well this one, that one was a nine and a half, so. We'll be on guard when we head to that boat. And then you get down there and it's a new scenario. It's, rechecking and checking of the equipment, there's rechecking and checking with the owners and shore engineers. And nobody wants to be the guy that turns the engine on when the diver's down there so. Yeah, every time it's pretty dangerous. There's not, in no way is it an easy job. And nor is fishing. That's like a question to ask the captain. Like, "Oh is it nicer going?" Yeah it's nicer going in nice weather but boats don't always go down in a storm. They can get caught up and they can- you know there' so many different scenarios. The captain knows that. That's probably why we're all quirky like we are *[laughs]*, but there's no easy part. There's no easy part. The easy part of the job is when you're out and in the car, and you're

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watching them drive away, going to get some fish. It's satisfying, it's, okay, it's done, nobody's hurt, nobody's going to get hurt, nothing else can- everything, they're not going to spend another nine thousand dollars on fuel, because that what it will be. It's oh, we spent three thousand more gallons, it's not a dollar a gallon anymore.

MH: Yeah.

JM: It's two dollars and three dollars a gallon- *[laughing]* we just spent nine thousand dollars more on fuel because he had barnacles or they were dragging a rope around the whole time.

MH: Yeah. So you have a son, and did you mention a daughter?

JM: No, just a son.

MH: Okay, just a son. Okay. And what does he do?

JM: He's in a unique job. He actually builds mountain bike trails for a Canadian company, that- Gravity Logic, they go all over the world and build trails. Usually downhill trails, but

sometimes, just a trail like any trail in the woods. They go through with excavators and GPS mapping and then they ride them obviously, because he's a daredevil like me and loves to, loves to ride. Very- it's incredible actually for the first time I got to go to one of the places that they, that they redid, rebuilt all the trails, it's in Massachusetts, it's called Thunder Mountain, and you go up the mountain on a chair lift and then ride down, and it sounds spooky at first, but there's much like skiing, there's green, and blues, and blacks and yeah I stayed away from the blacks. I watched him go down one of the blacks, I couldn't even stand on the earth there. But a beginner trail with a big new mountain bike and you're on your own rollercoaster with brakes. So if you're spooked you're- you grab the brakes. But it was a- it's really neat to see him getting older and having a great job. He's off in the winter, so he goes on vacations with me now. He doesn't help out with the diving because that's too nerve wracking for me. *[laughter]*

MH: So you think that the diving is more dangerous than the biking?

JM: *[Laughter]* I don't know! It's splitting hairs! And that's just being a worried dad, he'd say no way. But I'd say no way the other way because I'm no way as good on a bike as he is. Yeah, they're splitting hairs.

MH: So are there any industry associations for divers?

JM: Probably not. I think with the bigger stuff, and I say bigger, I mean more like deeper, right away people say "Oil rigs!" Oil rigs or bridge building stuff, bridge inspection stuff, there's definitely a lot of organizations. You know a lot of times, when you're dealing with that stuff, union. So much like a contractor would go on to the next bridge there wouldn't be a you know a diver's association that would, that would help those guys out in any, way, shape, or form. A bridge contractor can't be held back by "Oh the diver can't make it today," or "He's too tired." So they get another guy right on the scene that knows what he's doing and moves, moves forward with the job.

MH: Did that ever interest you, doing any other kind of diving on bridges or rigs?

JM: No, I- probably not. It's safe for people to go over bridges that are looked at by the divers. That's kind of neat, it's a- never got into it, it was probably a travelling thing, that I couldn't at the time go after. As far as deeper stuff, I don't have any interest in- I have dove deep before but I think repetitive is going to beat you up

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a little bit on your muscles and not be, not be as safe.

MH: Right.

JM: It's a whole different other bunch of circumstances that come into play when you're diving deeper.

MH: So. I think I've asked you about everything that I had planned to ask you, but is there anything that you can think of that I haven't asked you that I should have? Since I'm fairly ignorant about diving?

JM: No, we went over the whole gamut. It's dangerous, it's fulfilling, it's a great job. It's a- it's nice to be part of a community, I josh around with some of the guys and become really good friends with a decent amount of guys that, that can help you out with things that you don't normally do. "Hey, I need a cutting torch!" And the guy just says, "Take that one off of that boat! That boat's not going anywhere! Take the whole thing!" And I'm scratching my head and I'm like, oh my God, am I, did I get in over my head? But he's just letting me take it so I'll live and learn with it and you know the group of guys that are there to help you out with something or teach you something or just to pick your brain or laugh about something for an hour in the morning before you dive. Honest to goodness genuine people. "Hey how was your vacation? How's your son doing with that stuff?" And you know reciprocal questions and I've been working with these guys for I don't know fifteen years now and I just discovered that one of them's his son. And I, I said to him I was like, "I didn't know, you guys didn't tell me." [laughter] They looked at me kind of funny there, they're all: "You couldn't tell?" And I'm like, "No I couldn't tell!" I'm like, you can tell, but my son looks identical to me and I'm like, he can tell he's my son! And if you drive around with him, like, oh, that's that guy's son. And I'm like, "I feel like I'm the only one that didn't know that that was your son, you know?" And just a big group of guys that you know you become friends with that you're you know you're helping out, you know you're making them more comfortable, and yeah, it's a job. It's just a normal job. Way different than retail!

[laughter]

MH: So- if you were going to design a little exhibit, what do you think is the most important thing that you'd like to- people who know nothing about fishing or nothing about the waterfront, what should they know?

JM: As far as the diving goes?

MH: Mm hmm!

JM: Maybe like uh, before and after picture of the barnacles. And ---

MH: That's a good idea!

JM: I have some like- I have some huge barnacles. I wish I could copy and just cover a propeller with them, and then have a before and after, like this is after the diver came through. I have a giant amount. Lot of times, if I run over, if the boat runs over the rope, and then I have to take it out, whether it be rope or monofilament from the long liners or whatever it- the boat comes home the whole way and it will burn or melt and become these big plastic crazy pieces, and I have a couple of crazy plastic pieces that are just like- they're absurd to look at but people will go, "What is that?" you know, and it's, yeah. It's a clump of rope that almost stopped the propeller, almost stopped the trip. Yeah that would be a neat exhibit. A lot of photos, if not of the real thing, people love treasure. I've always found some of the funniest things on the bottom of New Bedford harbor. I dropped a super nice light. It's still down there probably, but- I had a quick dive job to do on a Saturday morning and my girlfriend was with me and I said "The water was super clear. After I do this job, I'm going to go try to find that light." So I got down to the bottom, I can't find the light. I'm like, kicking around here and there, I came up with this hatch. It's half the size of this window and I don't know what it would be to, it's all bronze and

beautiful like not shined up but it's this big green bronze hatch. And still every part of it still works, it's just the

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glass isn't there. And I'm like, what was this even, what could it be to? It was just so big and I brought that up and my girl said "What are you doing?" I could barely pull it up, it weighs like a hundred pounds and yeah. It's always fun. Exhibit of barnacles and rope and probably the gear. The gear is a lot more- like an older suit or something like that. With a, with a dummy. I'm --- my retail is kicking in! I'll come up with the whole thing. Some old flashlights and old gloves that get worn out, that's always cool stuff. And people you know, they see the fishermen in nice new outfits, they don't see them in the old stuff. Because that just gets tossed. Yeah. That'd be fun.

MH: Well, it's been great talking to you. I think, I feel like I've learned a lot.

JM: I do every day. Every day I'm down at the waterfront. I'm like, holy mackerel! That cable needs- that cable that's on that drum needs replacing, like every two trips! And that cable on one drum is thirty thousand dollars!

MH: Yikes.

JM: And you go, oh, it's just a big rusty fishing boat. Oh, that's thirty thousand! Some people don't make that in a year. You know?

MH: Yeah.

JM: I learned that like two or three years ago, I use that for an example. People go, "Really? The cable?" And it's, it's holding a big metal dredge that's twenty thousand dollars worth of bending, and welding, and design- and research. You know, if you got a bad cable that you put that overboard with you're kind of silly cause you're going to throw out twenty thousand dollars. Yeah, it's a- it's very complicated. It's more complicated than what people think. The guys that know it- they, they might not get home and fix their water heater or whatever. Yeah they probably could fix their water heater. But they just hire a guy to do so because what they've wrapped their minds around is- it's huge. It's huge. It's a- going out to a dangerous place, to get the seafood back to New Bedford. It's pretty intense.

MH: Yeah. Yeah. And have you noticed that there are fewer, I'm sure you'd notice fewer draggers around now?

JM: Yeah, there's less draggers than the heyday of dragging. Definitely. I think- I think there's safer boats, now that are dragging. Because there are fewer of them, they are easier to keep track of and take care of. With all the requirements and the restrictions that they have, I think it's not, it's not like it's a dying breed but it needed to be minimized, to a certain amount. That way we're not running out of fish completely because then what is all this thirty thousand dollars worth of wire good for nothing. It's funny, I want to see in the future a whole boat that's- that people can go on, and can go out for, let's say a couple hours and say, "Yep, this is, can you imagine doing this now for seven days? Yeah I don't think people can wrap their heads around that. You know,

set the timer for every eight hours. All right, you're going to work for eight hours and then sleep for one. Try doing that on land.

MH: Yeah.

JM: Let alone on a boat, it's difficult. We should be all be paying more for fish. *[laughs]*

MH: Yeah.

JM: And scallops! It's pretty intense.

MH: Do you see a decent future for the industry?

JM: Yeah, I don't think they want to- nobody wants to get rid of, get rid of all the fish, and be done with the industry. That would, that would just be silly. And, there's a lot of owners

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that are educated, there's a lot of owners that, that know their business, and, they're constantly looking at the numbers so I'm sure they don't want, you know you can have a bad year but then there's a good year that's coming up. I think, I think I have a future in it. As far as the smaller guys, stuff that I used to do, that's kind of getting cut back so. I'm not sure if that's going to open back up or come back around, but in years past I could spearfish for tautog, right through the year.

MH: So when you were commercial fishing that's what you were doing?

JM: Yeah, I would spear fish tautog, I've done some monkfishing on a gillnetter, out of Westport, I've done- I've lobstered for a little while.

MH: *[laughs]* Why?

JM: I commercial quohaughed for years. But I would always say, commercial quohogging you go out, and you got your baskets and you got your rake, or you got your dive gear, and you, you come home with that. You know and all that stuff is safe even though- you know, it was commercial quohogging and an orange basket it costs like thirty dollars and it doesn't seem like a lot of money right now but that thirty dollar orange basket was important. You wrote your name on it and you kept- you put strings on it to make sure nobody else would take that silly orange basket and I see some of the scallopers have like fifty of them on deck and I'm always get reminded, yeah that's a scalloper versus a quohogger. When you go lobstering, you got all this beautiful gear, you got a hundred dollar lobster pot and twenty dollars worth of line on it, and a forty dollar buoy, and then you paint it up, you make it all nice and then you put it out in the ocean! *[laughter]* And hope that lobsters go into it! It's just, it's- and there's guys that kill it. They do so well with it, and hands down to them. But I didn't like lobstering because all your beautiful stuff would go out in the ocean, stay there and then a storm would come and it just throws everything up on the beach, and then people are driving away with it, on the beach, and you're like "Well, that's mine!" *[laughter]* "No it's not, I found it on the beach!" Yeah, it was- it's hard. Lobstering was really tough. So yeah, I lobstered for a little while, the commercial fishing I did was tautog, commercial bass fishing, rod and reel. Just out of a small boat for myself. That stuff is all getting nipped. And yeah, I know several observers and they were

saying "We're going out tautog fishing." I was like, well, what are you going out tautog fishing out now for? Now you're going to say Well there's no tautog. Well they're not here yet. Well nobody's going tautog fishing yet. You can't go until you see the dandelions. Did you see any dandelions? Why dandelions? Well, there's little quirky things- like when I see a lot of jellyfish, the water's getting warmer, then I see dandelions, and then I see the tautog. And I just saw two jellyfish. So one dandelion, the tautog ain't here. Maybe one or two are somewhere out there, but you're not going to go- when you see a whole bunch, that's when you see a whole bunch of fish. So yeah, I was laughing with them. I said, yeah, you got to wait till there's more dandelions. They're shaking their heads. *[laughter]* Some of the old timers know about the, the blueberry trees. The buds on the blueberry tree whether it's going to be a good year for fishing or not. I haven't got all those down yet. *[laughter]* I don't want to misquote anybody.

MH: Well, I've always thought that there's been a lot of local knowledge that is missed unless you're in the industry.

JM: Right, right. And I think it's pretty positive that it's everywhere. It's a- as you go down the coast, there's, because the fish show up, I know in New Jersey the fisherman go, now that there's an internet and people go back and forth with fish stories, you get that, here's a fishing guy on Instagram and he's got pictures of dandelions. "What the hell he's got pictures of dandelions for? He's a fisherman." Well it's because the fish are coming. That's a tell tale. It's a funny little tell tale. Pretty flowers or yellow weeds in the yard mean fish are coming.

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[laughs] But yeah, it's, I think there's a lot of little quirky things that are up and down the coast that somebody should put in a book somewhere because there's a lot of that stuff. Neat.

MH: Yeah. That's great. Well, Jim, thank you so much, this has been fascinating.

JM: Alright.

MH: I appreciate the time.

JM: No problem.

MH: And you need to, you need to go down and see the exhibit!

JM: Oh yeah!

[1:50:34] End of audio