

Participant: Mr. Tony Pettis
Researcher: Ms. Deanna Caracciolo
Location: Newport, OR
Date: 6/27/16
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DC: So it is June 27th, 2016, we are in Newport, this is Deanna Caracciolo, and I am here doing an interview for the Voices of the fishery project. Could you please state your name?

TP: Tony Pettis

DC: Fantastic. So what I wanted to open up with, like I said early, I'd kinda just telling me how you got into fishing, why do it, any cool stories you may have.

TP: Uh, there's not a lot to say I guess. I was pretty much born into it. My dad did it, his dad was a boat builder

[TP children playing]

TP: I mostly go fishing to get away from that [chuckles]

[kids playing]

TP: Sorry about that.

DC: No problem, I love it! [chuckles]

TP: Anyway, my dad was a fisherman, his dad was a boat builder, and I don't know, it's what my dad did and occasionally kids want to follow their dad around so that's how it started.

[kids trying to catch TP with rope]

TP: Might have to lock them up in the chicken coop or something. Their completely out of control [laughing, joking]

[TP talking to kids]

TP: I'm really sorry about that...

DC: Don't be sorry! They are fantastic!

DC: So yeah, your family has always been in it...

TP: Yeah, I've been doing it since I was about their age [gesturing to his children] really, and ever since...more like 14/15 years old that I started full time. Anytime I wasn't in school, and summers, and Christmas break, and every other break, I can remember being on the boat. Went to college for a couple of years and had some other ideas for what I'd like to do. I went their long enough that I got that idea that I really didn't want to do that other stuff that I thought that I might want to, and ended up back fishing and been here ever since. So I guess I haven't made it very far, I guess...born doing it, still doing it so...

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DC: That's fantastic. Where there any other motivations other than family?

TP: Well to be perfectly honest with you, to make money. That's the bottom line. I'd like to say I did it just because I love the ocean and all that; and I think there are those that say that, and I'm kinda envious of them, but for me honestly it's a business. I go out there every day. I'd rather be here with those guys [gesturing to his children] to be honest with you. But it's a pretty darn good way to make a living. You know? You venture into avenues and other things that a person like me likes to do, outside stuff, things like that. And you realize pretty quick that - wow this stuff is maybe more political more so than...aint going to make any money doing it, and your kinda spoiled in the industry that we are in. I don't know. It's one of those things that if you don't want to keep doing it, you shouldn't start. Because you start making money and then the next thing you know you start buying things and you have bills, and then you've gotta keep making money. And next thing you know, your old and gray and the kids are grown up and that was your life. I think that goes for most anybody. I think that's a pretty common story around here.

DC: Yeah, makes sense. So what fisheries have you been involved in?

TP: We primarily, now in days, crab in the winter time, and we long line black cod and halibut in the spring and early summer, and then the later summer/fall we are offshore tuna fishing for albacore tuna. Then back into crab again.

DC: Do you have a favorite or least favorite?

TP: Anytime we are doing well is good. You know? The tuna fishing is by far the funnest fishery we do. Just...it's...I guess maybe the closes thing toward a person that's a sport fisherman might think commercial fishing might be. We catch them 1 fish at a time, on 1 hook at a time, and when they are biting, it's exciting, it's fun. But most fisheries crabbing, longlining, things like that are pretty monotonous. You know? To be a fish net, you do that exact same thing over and over again, hundreds of times a day, and by the end of the day it adds up. Whatever you produce. The tuna is kinda different, where as your kinda at the mercy of the fish. It's what they do and when they bite you do good and when they don't, you don't. But it's fun when they are biting.

DC: Great, so least favorite?

TP: Uhm...Tuna fishing [laughing] When they're not biting [chuckles]

DC: [chuckles] that makes sense

TP: It's one of those fisheries. When it's hot it's great, and when it's not you have way too much time to think because you're not doing anything. I like all the fisheries we do fairly well. Crabbing, if I really had to pick a favorite I'd say crabbing because that's the one we make the most money at, and it's one of the last fisheries we have left where we are...there's a fair bit of opportunity and not a lot of regulations where we can...you know, it's highly competitive, and it's something that the way we approach it every year is...I don't know...it's pretty intense. It's something that you almost look forward to...you're almost looking forward to it being over with before you start because I am always afraid that something is going

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to break down, somethings going to go wrong. And it's such a big part of our year in such a short time. But at the same time it's pretty fulfilling when it does go right. Where with some of the other fisheries we do like long lining, we have a set quota, and we know we are going to catch our quota. It's just a matter of how hard are we going to have to work for it. Eventually it's going to get done. It's not that I don't like long lining, but it kinda takes a lot of the thrill out of it. What it's like when you just have a set quota you can catch. Tuna fishing, it's a lot of fun, it's not a profitable, generally. It can be, but normally the crabs are kind of our anchor for the year. Everything else follows that.

DC: So you have been fishing a while it sounds like. S since you started have you seen changes to the fishery, the fleet...people?

TP: Yeah, it changes. I mean everything changes I think. But the fishing industry has changed quite a bit regulation wise, like my early days of fishing was some of the last times, I guess, of the...anybody that wants to buy a boat and go fishing, anymore...it's so regulated and the permits are so variable and hard to come by that it's kind of a hard industry to get into. Unless you start on a boat that's already in it, and work your way up to driving or owning that boat. The permits to fish are worth more than the boats anymore. It's like...that's the biggest change I would say. It used to be the steel that was the expensive part. Now it's the paper. Boats are still expensive, and they always will be, but it's a... I guess the point is a boat without a right to fish is pretty useless to a lot of us. And that's a big change from 30 years ago. Anybody that wanted to participate would buy a boat and just go fishing. And it was kinda necessary to regulate it, although it probably didn't happen as perfectly as it could have. But it's hard to come up with perfect answers. The bottom line is we just get too good at catching. The boats all have bigger, stronger, faster, more horsepower, more crab pots, bigger nets, whatever. At some point, rather than let everybody outcompete each other, and having to restrict the seasons so much, then it ended up restricted in a way of limited entry. Which is fewer people being able to participate in the fishery, but in theory it will be better for people who are there, and anyone else that wants to has got to buy a permit from them. Some of the fisheries we do, like our black cod that we fish every summer time, that's...those are permits that are owned by somebody else that we lease the permits and pay him a share of everything we catch off the top go to the owner of the permits before...but you know it works out well for us and it's a good industry in that black cod fishery went from being a year round fishery in just a 10 year period to a month long then 2 weeks long, and then a week long, and then 5 days long, and everybody's getting so good at catching them so fast that finally it was like...so much fish coming in so fast, it's hard for the processors, it's not good for the market. Now the seasons 6 months long, all summer to catch out fish, but we have a certain quota of fish to catch, and if you weren't in on the ground floor and had some of that quota issued to you, it's really expensive to buy in. And kinda cost prohibitive for us. The permits for fishing, to go buy those permits we would be looking at a million and a half dollars, something like that. And we are fishing those permits every year with just rather than buying the permits yourself and trying to finance that, paying a portion of the proceeds off the top of your catch to the guy that owns the permit. It works out really well for them, and it works out really well for us too. It's a lot different than it ever had been prior to that. It's a lot more on permits than on the boats anymore.

DC: What about your wife? Has your wife been involved at all?

TP: Yeah, [turns to see children sneaking up to him to surprise him. They run away] she will probably come out later and talk to you too if you want to but...We've been married for about 8 years, might

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have been longer than that now. In the early years she would go out on the boat with me sometimes, a little bit and help around. Now she pretty much has a full time job right there [turns to look at his 2 children] as you can see. So she doesn't end up being on the boat as much as she used to, but it's still a huge part of it because in the fishing industry your gone a lot. And [kids try to sneak up behind him again and grumble when they are seen] there's very few people who are successful at fishing that have to worry about what's going on at home. So having my wife, that I know if she is here everything is taken care of...I've got nothing to worry about [kids try to sneak up behind him again and grumble when they are seen]. It's a big part of the success of our business that we do together, whether she is on the boat or not. But she doesn't actually spend a lot of time on the boat.

DC: I can see [chuckles]

TP: Those guys [gestures to kids] are starting to spend more and more time on the boat. Soon I will just let them go and I'll just sit here on the porch and drink coffee [chuckles and talks to children]

DC: At least they have each other to tag along with [chuckles]

TP: Yeah, somebody else to beat up on [chuckles]

[TP gets bombarded by the kids]

DC: So do you have any...we will start with the lows and end with the highs. Do you have any personal lows in fishing itself?

[TP talks with kids]

TP: They are not listening very well right now, but can't beat them with the camera on right now [clearly sarcasm, laughing]

DC: [laughing]

TP: The low times are while you are gone. You miss everything that's going on here. There's a lot of things that you feel like... Before I had kids you didn't even realize how much time you were gone and how much you were missing, but those guys right there [gestures to kids] when they are...every time you come back they are different. When they were younger they were learning new words, they're walking, they're talking. It's like they change so fast and it makes you realize that wow time is flying by and I wasn't here for it. And there's certain things that only happen once, and you either were there for it or you weren't. And that's the low, the times that you miss. The times on the boat, there's always going to be highs and lows, but if you are going to fish you can't really let it affect you a lot. When I get new crew guys come on the boat or whatever, I just tell that that this isn't always going to be fun, but that doesn't matter. You take the highs and the lows and you can't get down in the mouth about it because that just makes it worse. Attitudes are really contagious on boats. When you have a small boat with 4 guys on it and you just gotta keep your chin up, whatever is happening. We have been pretty fortunate. We haven't had any major disasters or anything thing like that. Of course you are going to have times where the weathers bad, where fishing is not good, or both, or whatever, but you just...it's a different life style where I think you appreciate the time you are home more. I think people that just go

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to work every day and they are home every evening. You don't realize how much you have until you are gone a bit. And we are definitely gone enough to realize that, so it works out, but you just have to approach it with that kind of an attitude. Like when we are home we are going to do good stuff. Even though we are gone more than most people, we probably get more time off than most people too. We take our family vacations, we do stuff, we go camping and what not. The kids look forward to it; we look forward to it. If you wanted a funny story...when I was in college, I only went for a couple of year and that was probably foolish because a scholarship was paying for everything. I didn't know how good I had it. It wasn't costing me a dime to go to college. But I just had it in my mind that I was wasting time, I don't know where I'm going, I don't want to do this stuff once I graduate anyway. I should be out on the ocean. I should be working. After 2 years I got an associate's degree when I finished my general education requirements or whatever and just decided that I was going back to work. So I went back out on the boat. And the very first trip that I went out was on a little plywood boat my dad...The Challenge. A pretty small boat. The forecast was pretty decent, but the weatherman was really wrong and we ended up just getting pumpled. We were just trying to get home and we were hammering into it coming down the hill probably into about a 50 knot southerly with waves hitting the side of the boat hard enough, coming in through the vets under the house, water dripping down through all the seams in the top of the house. It was one of those moments where you just sit there and think...I somebody trying to tell me something? chuckling while continuing to talk] Did I make a mistake here? But just another day. You end up getting home and you laugh about it later. Time goes by and you just kind of move onto the next day. It's just funny being the very first day after deciding this is what I want to do for a living. You know?

DC: [chuckles] I was just a hump...Like just get over this and everything else will be fine.

TP: Ehh, yeah, well good enough anyway.

DC: With that in mind, what would you say the most challenging aspect of being a fisherman is?

TP: The mental aspect. A lot of what we just talked about. In keeping a good attitude, being gone...

DC: Hi there [talking to Maria - Tony's wife] your more than welcome to join in.

MP: I've got 8 more minutes until my pasta is ready. chuckles]

DC: Understandable. Pasta is very important [chuckles]

TP: As far as the challenges go, the mental aspect that we just talk about. Also just...it physically beats you down kind of job. That's the thing that people need to...work a lot of hours and just stay focused. You can do really well and make a really good living fishing but if you think your going to go and work 8 hours and be done, it's like it doesn't work that way. The 20 hours' day are more normal for us while we are fishing. Where a day like today where I went in at 7:30 in the morning and got home at 5:30 in the evening, it's like people ask me if I've been working, and it's like no. They say then what have you been doing? It's like gone out on the boat all day. But that's like [shrugs shoulders]. It's part of the job, but after a while you don't even see that as your work. Your work is when you are gone. Anyway...

DC: no, that's great. So best parts about being a fisherman?

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TP: Coming home. Doing well. Having good trips, you know? There's certain things that people don't get to see, that we see on the ocean every day. That you take for granted. Whales, the sun rising over the beach from the water. Every day I enjoy that. I'm kinda a morning person. I like to watch that sun come up through the mountains. Just...sometimes it's pretty easy to take for granted, but if you stop and look around you start to realize wow your pretty fortunate. A lot of people don't get to see this stuff, and a lot of people in business don't get that opportunity to make the big hit too. As far as have a really good season. This or that. You can strike out, but you can also do really well. It's kinda uncommon and even...I know a lot of businesses there's a high margin for success, but a lot of it's the day to day that adds up, and it is for us too, but as far as the highs your talking about...sometimes pretty big days. Things go wow. Financially wise. I mean, like I said before, that's pretty much the bottom line.

DC: Yea understandable. So growing up in a fishing family, did your role change from when you were younger till now? In the industry?

TP: yeah, to start off like anyone would, you're working on the back deck. Actually long before that I was working in the shop. It used to be as a kid I was...before I was going out on the boat I was doing gear work. Working in the shop, doing whatever needed to get done. When dad was long lining, if they got...sets that came back in big tangles, rather than take the time to unravel them themselves they would come drop the tangle up in the shop and take other gear with the idea when we get back in 4 days this will be untangled and ready to go. And that was my job. Really good opportunity for me, or for any kid growing up to, you know...be able to have a job, have a purpose, have focus. Then you're working on the deck. Your being the classic deckhand role. And just being as how I started really young, and had my dad that was teaching me and pushing me along, it probably went through the ranks faster than I probably deserved, but one long 4 person driving the boat...And for quite a few years my dad would drive the boat for the first part of crab season, and some of the more important times of the year, and then turn it over to me when there wasn't much going on so I could start to get experience doing it. Which is fairly common in the industry still, for people that are learning, is that when you have got a million dollar investment that has bills coming all the time, it's pretty hard to turn it over to just anybody. Not knowing how it's going to go or whatever. So a lot of these people that have the investment are willing to start letting people run it for trips during slower times of year to start with, then once you kinda start to prove themselves...if they are doing a good job then they will get more and more time, pretty soon they are off and running. That's pretty common when people get started I guess.

DC: Would you say young adults, or the younger folks in the industry think that this is a satisfying work for them?

TP: I'd like to think so. I mean...I think it just really depends on your personality. It's definitely not for everybody. And that's not make a person better or worse, but everybody just has a different role in the world. Or different interests in life. For somebody that likes to be outside, and likes to fish, pursue things, like you were saying your father was a fishermen and is a hunter, it's all kinda that same mindset. Like if I stop and think about what I do in my life, it's like well, I pursue fish, and then I go pursue elk, you know? It's just an extension of myself after a while. And for anybody else that has that same kind of interests then yeah it's pretty satisfying way to make a living I guess.

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DC: What are the key skills that you would need to enter the industry?

TP: There's really not a lot. Pretty much have to be really willing to learn and to work hard. To pay attention. There's the basic things like tying knots that I could talk about, but there's nothing that you need to know to be a fisherman that you couldn't learn in an hour. That way it's really a huge opportunity for anybody that wants to and has the right attitude, focus. The hardest thing for me as an employer hiring people is not finding people that know how to be a fisherman, but just people that are just solid. They are going to show up to work every day and you can count on them. Not going to do anything crazy, you know? And I think you end up with a little bit more of that in our industry than some, just because it's that same mind set. You get a little bit more of the adrenaline junkies that want to go. They think they are going to have an adventure or whatever. When you find somebody in the right frame of mind, who's fairly smart and focused...the biggest thing that I tell my guys it you just gotta want to do it. It sounds simple but you really do. You find out if you really do or not pretty soon; once you enter the industry I think. If you don't that's fine, but the guys that really want to do it generally do really well. There's really not that much to learn.

DC: Do you see yourself staying in fishing? Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?

TP: OH yeah, I don't think I'm going anywhere [chuckles] I don't think I could if I wanted to. Not that I would want to. I'm pretty happy with where I'm and where I'm going. I'll probably be doing the same thing I'm doing now I suppose.

DC: That's a good thing!

TP: It is a good thing! It is, yeah. And obviously I have goals. You hope to get a little further down the line. Start to pay some things off. A little less at the mercy of the bankers and whatever. It feels good to start to get there. You know? To be able to pay your bills. To just go through life and make it add up I guess. And eventually you hope to get to a point where you wake up one day and realize that you payed for a lot of that important stuff and maybe you don't have to work so hard anymore. But you've got to work pretty hard for a while if you want to make it work.

DC: So a bit of a grimmer question, but what would it be like if the business was sold? For you, your family, and even Newport in general.

TP: If the business is sold? What business? My personal boat?

DC: Yeah

TP: I don't know...I don't know if it...well it would obviously change what I do every day, but I've always been...believed I guess that if I didn't want to fish that I could do whatever I want. I guess. I think your kind of have to have that attitude a little bit. But it...I don't know. It wouldn't break my heart I guess. I don't really identify myself as a fisherman. Like I said it's my business and it's what I do to make a living, but my life is here. So [shrugs shoulders] I guess if I didn't have my business I'd still be here.

DC: Good [chuckles]

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TP: [chuckles] I hope so anyway [chuckles]

DC: What about Newport in general? So do you think there is a threat to the fishing culture in Newport?

TP: I don't think so. I mean, it's changed like you say, there's...as the fleet has gotten more fishing, it's gotten smaller. There's fewer boats doing it, to catch the same product probably that was caught in the past. Maybe because of that less opportunity, but maybe the boats that are still doing it are a better opportunity than the boats that were here before. I think that most anybody that, like I said, is a solid individual, that works hard and wants to be a fisherman could be a fisherman. I don't really see it going anywhere just because every year that goes by, there's more and more people in the world and people gotta eat. Especially now in days, people want to eat healthier and the oceans perfect. It's a tremendous resource. The amount of fish, crab, shrimp, all the stuff that comes out of that ocean every year. It's really amazing. I mean you're talking about thousands and thousands of tons, maybe millions of tons of product coming out of that ocean every year, and it's just a super healthy ecosystem. And the way it's being managed right now is very conservative. At least compared to 20 years ago or something like that. Not only in how much fish is being harvested, but how it's being harvested. For the actual habitat that is the bottom of the ocean, and the whole ocean. I see it getting nothing but better compared to how it was even 25 years ago when I first started in it. I don't think it's going anywhere. There will be changes for sure. There always is in any industry.

DC: Interesting. SO it sounded like you haven't noticed it as much, but have you seen any changes in the ages of fishermen? Owners or deck hands?

TP: Yeah, a little bit. Like I said, the ownership especially is getting older. Partly because of regulatory changes in the generation previous to mine got the ownership of a lot of the permits and stuff like that. And that stayed with them whereas before that when you got older and you said you didn't want to fish anymore, it was the next guys turn, you're out of it, you have nothing to do with it anymore. But now, your older, you don't want to do it anymore, but you're still going to own the resource and lease it to the next guy for a while. So that is a pretty substantial change in the industry. It's hard to say how that will end up in the long term. A lot of the way those laws were drawn up is the people that originally got a lot of the quota were grandfathered in, as it's called. To where they can own that as an investment and not be a fisherman, but Joe off the street from Wall street, or even me as a fisherman can't buy that quota and lease it to somebody else. I buy the quota I have to be on the boat fishing myself. So as the last generation passes into the great beyond or whatever, then theoretically that ownership should fall back into the hands of the guy wearing the rain gear; which I always thought was how it should be. It's a funny system. A lot of the people...even the people that own a lot of the quota didn't want it to be that way. It's one of those things that if you are involved in it, you either play the game or you don't. A lot of people like my dad and the guy that we are leasing our Black Cod quota from, they fought it down to the last day of the thing. And it ended up [shrugs] that's the side that they ended up on and it turned out really good for them. It will be interesting to see how that will change into the future with ownership and stuff, but it just takes a little bit longer. Where it used to be, a person that wanted to fish would buy a salmon trawler and make enough money to buy a small crab boat, and make enough money to buy their next boat, and maybe go dragging or whatever they wanted to do. And now it's more the guy that's starting out...in order to make the kind of money they need to make and learn the skills that they need to know, as a deck hand on the boat that's going to be their

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final goal, and try to work their way up. That goes from working on the deck, to driving the boat, to owning the boat eventually. It's a little bit different processes because there's not the ownership [hand quotation] your speaking of until later on, but still guys are making really good money through the whole thing. It's not necessarily a bad thing, it's just different.

DC: Very interesting. Well my last question for you...are you going to encourage those little tots [gestures to his children] to go into the industry?

TP: If they want to. You can't, like I said, people are either going to want to do it or they're not. I don't, I guess I wouldn't say I would encourage them unless they take the lead. It's way too much time to spend out there if you don't like it, if you don't want to be out there. I wouldn't want to shove it on the especially, or anybody else. If it end up being the case that they want...that it's what they want and that's what they think they want to do then I think it would be a great opportunity for them. It will just be up to them I guess.

DC: Fantastic. Well I don't want to miss anything. So that was the last of my formal questions. But did I miss anything?

[chatting about the project 0:36:25.2 - 0:36:49.1]

TP: Well there's probably not as many of the straight out of high school kids coming into the industry as there used to be. And I'm not sure exactly why that is, but it is kind of...getting to the point where a lot of guys even that are working on deck have been around a long time. And there is a lot of opportunity there for somebody that wants to do it. I don't know if it's just change in society in general. Maybe there's not as many people that want to do that. One thing that I see, just our school system in general, is really promoting people...everyone on the same path. Like go to college, get a degree, get a good job, and it's kind of an out dated theory to be honest with you. It's an industrial age idea that you go get a job and this company is going to take care of you, and they're going to pay you a pension when you retire and all that. It's not really reality anymore. Whereas I believe people would be better served to get that little bit of dose reality earlier when they are trying to decide what they are going to do with their life, then realize that there's nothing wrong with being an electrician, or a refrigeration guy, or a fishermen, or any of the trades, and there's a lot of opportunity there, not only an opportunity to get a college degree and work for somebody else, and answer to somebody else your whole life, but to go and do something for yourself. I think that's the biggest thing that's changed from a generation ago to now, it seems like a generation ago people were aggressive. People didn't expect anyone else to take care of them. They went out to do it for themselves, and make it for themselves and run their own business. Like I said, whether they're going to go into construction and build houses, or be a fisherman, or any of the trades. The way the school system pushes everybody into the same mold, it might be part of the reason there's not as much of that going on, and a lot of those things. Cause I know just in our industry and the subcontractors we work with I see it a lot too. It's like wow, there's not a lot of people coming into refrigeration, things like that that we need to work on our boats. I think all the time, if some young guy that went and got his education and wanted to be a refrigeration guy, he could do really well in this community, or a fisherman. I don't think it's just fishing, but just in general. It's just the way people are going these days I guess.

[end 0:39:43.1]